E13-TH
Networked Ecologies: increasing urban resiliencies

Socrates Stratis is architect and teacher in the Faculty of Cyprus Nicosia CY
he is member of the Scientific Committee of Europan

In an epoch of perpetual crisis the theme of the 13th session of Europan should focus explicitly on an optimistic role of architecture, in its broader sense, to affect change to networked ecologies that shape the contemporary urban environment. In other words, to develop resistance to the actual networked codependent ecosystems of environmental mitigation which are produced by associations between technology, law, political pressures, disciplinary desires and environmental constraints. This is the thesis of the book with a similar title: The infrastructural city: networked ecologies in Los Angeles: edited by Kazys Varnelis, 2009.

Increasing urban resiliencies within such context should be the aim of architecture, using strategies of re-appropriation of rules and systems that make up the contemporary city. New urban interventions could be the manipulation of such rules and systems yielding to innovative programmatic and spatial organisations. Urban interventions are therefore, expanding to address the interrelationships between the process of making and the final outcome. In other words, the theme of Europan 13 should address explicitly the potentials of a "Moving Project" rather than only those of a "Static object", (references to the article of Albena Yaneva and Bruno Latour: "Give me a gun and I would make all buildings move: an ANT's view of architecture.", (2008) In Explorations in architecture, edited by R. Geiser, pp. 80-99 (Basel: Birkhauser). Consequently, any urban intervention should recognize the permanent and potential positive aspect of conflictual priorities of the actors involved in a "Moving Project".

Therefore, there should be a focus on how the Europan Project could re-assemble actors around an urban intervention and how propositions with innovative programmes and spatial organisations could mobilise such assembly. The means for achieving so, should start from disciplinary desires (architecture, urban planning, landscape architecture) and create associations with legal documents (regulations), political priorities and environmental constraints.

Networked Ecologies could become the means for exchanging know-how and expertise across divides of all sorts which tend to increase among the citizens of the European community. The perpetual crisis in Europe is being contaminating efforts to build common imaginaries for co-habitation and co-existence within a European community, by increasing uncertainties and insecurities among rapidly uneven national

economies, by decreasing the role of local authorities for shaping the future of their cities, by over trusting the capacities of the private market which tends to profit from such issues. Vienna vs Istanbul could be an eloquent comparison of how in the former case the urban interventions are inclusive and embracing where in the latter they are exclusive and hostile (gated communities). Most of the European cities are somewhere between the two.

Networked ecologies show that all potential project sites are already connected in one way or another, diminishing any local way of thinking, or getting refuge into local answers. The important question to ask through a Europan Project is how an urban intervention could intensify a connectivity, disconnect or reconnect in order to increase urban resiliencies for encouraging co-habitation and pluralism? The Europan Project could become an active agent for encouraging specific connectivities over other ones. For example, to sustain a programmatic and physical connectivity to the public domain even in the most super-private developments.

Resisting to the environmental mitigation caused by networked ecologies might mean to introduce new programs that respond to the increasing unemployed youth and the increasing number of retiring citizens. It could also be to introduce new strategies of addressing shrinking and obsoleteness of an unprecedented size of building stock in suffering economies such as Spain, Ireland, even in the Netherlands.

How the choice of project sites and programs in E13 should be influenced?

Environmental mitigation of any kind could be the actual characteristic of a Europan 13 site.

One possibility which may be an initial thought to discuss is to encourage the teaming-up of cities into joint projects. This could take place by profiting from the twinning processes that already take place across Europe with the former Europan cities.

Another one is to focus on sites and programs that encourage Europan Projects to redefine and re-spatialise collective life. What practices of complicity could be introduced by a Europan Project among the project actors in order to increase urban resiliencies?