

Participatory methods in architecture

9th May 2007 - Sheffield University, School of Architecture
linesofflight.wordpress.com

PhD seminar: Nishat Awan, Mariana Leguía and George Lovett, Doina Petrescu, Kim Trogal, Supreeya Wungpatcharapon.

The university as a driver in community projects

Mariana Leguía, Peruvian Catholic University

The Peruvian Catholic University assisted the community to apply for the funding from SNIP, the national system of public investment, for the community centre project. The participatory methods were employed during making proposal for the design, such as doing some activities with kids and families, conducting questionnaires, group discussions etc. The university and community also signed an agreement at the beginning of the project in order to confirm that the community would run and maintain the centre for its own benefit.

Art as a participative tool

George Lovett, interCambiArquitectura (iCA)

Architect plays the role as a collaborator to initiate a cultural output, by involving participants into the process of transforming an office space to be a small theatre.

Discussion

The community

- Who is the 'community' of the project? And who are people who get involved in the process? Is there the community before or just the community of the project?
- Family and kids are a catalyst of the project. They could play a role to encourage the others to participate in the process.
- People don't have experience to initiate any projects by themselves because they are always provided services and facilities. They always have passive responsibility and are lack of awareness to participate. It's difficult to change this attitude and takes a long time to manage and organise. In participatory project, it needs to consider this aspect and also tries to encourage people to get involved, not only at the beginning but also in the long term of project. It is important to leave space for community to continue the project as the main actor.

Building capacity to community

- How does the university deal with the demands, in the case that there are many communities who also want to participate in this kind of funding and project? Or how does the university select the community to give support?
- It might require some strategies in order to support or to access to more communities who need help. For example, the university might establish the criteria for selecting the community to get involved or try to build capacity to the communities to initiate their own proposals, by providing the information of how to make a proposal, creating a guide book for funding, an exhibition to present the works done with previous communities, a documentary of the methods used in other projects, or even building the network of communities to exchange and transfer the information or knowledge amongst them.
- It's crucial to concentrate on one project and make it tangible so that it will become a reference for the others to learn and share. Lessons learned could be transferred to other projects. This might also enable people to start doing it by themselves for the next time.

The role of architects

- When would the initiator fade away from the process and how much is the space left for the others to continue?
- As the architects act as one actor, what are our roles? How do we design our involvement in the process?
- In the participatory process, the architects' role might differ from that in traditional way. We might design the process of intervention in order to engage community, or to design the usage of space rather than to create space or building itself.
- Architects might need to be far more open than our own field to other disciplines and also should be trained in order to respond to different circumstances of each project, since we are involving in the living processes, not just only designing the buildings.
- There are unpredictable outcomes for the project, so the process needs to continue testing and redesigning. The concept of collaboration is not compulsory but necessary for the successful project.
- As architects are one participant in the process, we also have to consider how much responsibility we would like to take and in which stage we are engaging; initiate, design, implement or maintain. It's important to be aware that we do not impose ourselves on the participatory project and the community is not left aside; how we can exercise our knowledge and skills while the community is still empowered as well.

The power relations of the project

- The participatory project takes a long time to process. During that time, people become change and also the social condition would be changed according to the project. We can't count on the continual engagement. So, it needs to create the condition of working together and the desire needs to be embodied and take action.
- There could be many conflicts of all types happening in the project. For example, first, there is the conflict of individual and collective interests as everyone has different expectations. So, the rules have to be created and negotiated together in order to keep the project running. Second, another type of conflict could be the conflict of responsibility since some people lose trust in the project or become unreliable. Therefore, it's better to have two persons for the same responsibility. And every member in the group might need the roles to play, even though they are small roles and less responsibility, in order to create the sense of involvement and sense of belonging to the project. However, the roles could be changed depending on people.
- Because of the long-term process, the new power structure could be formed on the way. So, it is better to have an agreement amongst participants when it's still possible and to have explicit rules for everyone. The rule of using space also needs to be considered since it is the way the space will be conceived and it could make the differences.
- It's also important to map the power structure of the project, in terms of, what kind of partnership is, how the project will be used in the future, how the budget is managed or how the project is organised, and then make these structures to become visible for the others, such as community or even the professional context.
- Architect, as a participant, who interacts in the power relationship should have a critical position to question the role of ourselves and what we could do to make any changes of that structure.

Art, Architecture and participation

- Public arts are recently used in the regeneration project as a part of wider process of participation. Arts, as the creative tools, might be used as the method to interact with people or to create the social activities at the early stage, but it has to be aware of the real purpose which could be lost in the search of creativity. It's not enough for only the interesting forms, because for architects, what will happen next is more important.
- The art outcomes are different from those of architecture since artists design in their own world while architect works in the given context. However, it could be argued that some art works can extend the outcomes to architectural works, such as public space for the community. The two disciplines might be overlapped as the art practices are shifted to concern more on society and connect to city more than the past, as seen from urban arts or public arts. Art and architecture practices start to blend together. The boundary becomes not clear. Therefore, it is important to discuss the difference, to redefine the role of each

practice. Architects also need to question our role in order to be aware of the position in which we are.

References:

- Self-organisation/Counter-economic strategies - NIFCA
- Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art - Grant H. Kester
- Participation - Claire Bishop