



#07

Sharing and public spaces

Condivisione e spazi pubblici

a cura di L. Baima, J. Hetman, L. Martini, B. Pelusio & V. Stefanini

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- Orizzontale |
- Collectif ETC |
- Topotek 1 |

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Sharing and public spaces

Condivisione e spazi pubblici



La piattaforma per eventi e gli eventi come piattaforma

The platform for events and events as a platform

Interviste a:
@ Collectif ETC |
@ TOPOTEK 1 |
@ PKMN |
@ Urban Nomads |

Spazio pubblico |
Strategia architettonica |
Piattaforma ed eventi |

Public space
Architectural strategy |
Platform and events |

L'articolo raccoglie un'intervista rivolta a quattro studi professionali che lavorano diversamente sullo spazio pubblico. I gruppi sono stati scelti per la peculiarità dei loro lavori con cui esprimono, nel progetto, una chiara intenzione di voler andare oltre, di valicare, la sola configurazione spaziale. Ciascuno di loro, con i diversi interventi, ha conferito allo spazio urbano intensità variabili, riconoscibili attraverso le reazioni e le relazioni che il progetto è capace di attivare. Tali interventi sono in grado di tradurre la complessità di questi spazi, centrali o periferici di una città, in una molteplicità di interazioni che coinvolgono luoghi, attività e persone.

Gli studi selezionati sono i Collectif ETC, TOPOTEK 1, PKMN e Urban Nomads con sede rispettivamente a: Parigi, Berlino, Madrid, Londra - Lisbona; la eterogenea provenienza geografica, circoscritta all'Europa, consente di restituire un quadro abbastanza vario sul ruolo che ha oggi l'architettura nel ri-definire il ruolo dello spazio pubblico nelle città contemporanee.

Dall'intervista si rivela una nuova gerarchia di valori immateriali che richiede una definizione di strumenti tecnici adatti a rispondere alle necessità manifestate in questi spazi.

Dalla definizione dello spazio pubblico, del pubblico di questi spazi e degli attori coinvolti, le domande sollecitano gli studi ad esprimere delle riflessioni su quale sia l'azione con cui il progettista debba agire per esaltare lo spazio pubblico, che sta tornando ad essere un forte protagonista della sfera urbana. Le riflessioni espresse dagli studi hanno l'obiettivo di costruire una matrice in cui disporre i diversi approcci, gli strumenti e i metodi che il progettista deve forse rinnovare per poter rispondere correttamente alle nuove esigenze legate allo spazio pubblico urbano.

1 - What is design for public space today? Give a definition through your work experience.

Collectif ETC: We work on the issue of civil society's autonomy, in the transformation of its living environment. However, building and occupying space is a political matter and deals with power that some groups in society don't have or don't know they have. Thus, physical space transformation is a tool Collectif Etc uses and shares to experiment and accompany self-managed urban situations.

TOPOTEK 1: Shedding singular use spaces and formality for public spaces is important in order to generate valuable interactions. Public spaces have to seduce and play with their users, to open them up and give them the feeling that they can achieve things that they might not attempt elsewhere.

PKMN: We seek to open protocols for public space design and construction so that information can become knowledge and every citizen can have the same chances in becoming an active and conscious agent on the process of taking the decisions concerning physical spaces of his/her city.

Urban Nomads: Design for public space should be 'user-minded', rather than merely 'form-minded'.

Some of today's architecture/urban practices are slowly becoming more sensitive to those who will use the spaces, therefore create design schemes that reflect a less formalistic approach to the place, taking into account the social layer subjacent to the design of such spaces.

Today, when social interaction is mostly virtual, when people are more individualistic than ever before, public space should play a crucial role when it comes to the re-invention of social connections, of learning and sharing through Making, with a capital M. Beyond being designed as places of passage, as spaces where people briefly 'hang-out', they could function as learning and sharing spaces that challenge virtual interaction. The projects we have done, so far, allow us to understand that the 'public space' is a concept that very few truly understand. It is ambiguous in the sense that barely anyone knows who 'public space' belongs to, therefore it is perceived as no-man's land, where no responsibility can be claimed, where no obligations are implied. The projects we work on intend to start from the very basic understanding of the importance of sharing as a catalyst for the creation of new spaces for all. That is what our process-based projects are about, about creating routes that will ensure a long-lasting life-cycle for the projects once 'completed', i.e. once we hand them over. That's how public space should be perceived, as places to understand and embrace the roots of negotiation, dialogue, appropriation. (fig.1)



2 - What issues, conflicts, innovations and opportunities arises the design of such a space?

C: In the last 10 years, our society seems to have become more and more turned into a capitalist organisation, globalised and impersonal. It seems that it is getting harder for anyone to say where we are all going, what are the effects of the simple decision I take on my environment and my fellow citizens. But there are more and more groups of people interested in the way we could all make things change by becoming close to our food producers again, closer to our elected representatives, our baker, our senior citizens, etc. The matter is not only about architecture and urbanism but about the way we organize together the way we want to live, create and share our lives, whatever the field. And we can expect that more and more people are getting involved by this objective, pooling their energies and knowledges to suggest and offer other ways than the one our society is writing for us.

T: It is pertinent that cities offer a healthy framework for coexistence, civic engagement and social interaction. Public space is very significant in generating such cohesion and a dynamic urbanism. Urban public space offers ample opportunity for landscape architects to creatively and impactful shape these new epicenters, develop ideas and identities in updated form, with great social change and innovation.

P: There's a great challenge in how to take back public spaces on the city as relational spaces. We bet on generating a common knowledge around public space design, so that a more efficient and transparent management of cities can be carried out starting with the development of citizenship creativity.

Fig.1 *Babette's Feast, [a linha] Project, Atelier Urban Nomads, 2012. Largo das Alcaçarias, Alfama District, Lisbon, Portugal. © atelier urban nomads*

UN: In a broader perspective, public space continues to be designed mostly following pragmatic, formalistic rules that lead to the making of spaces which are aseptic, easy to maintain, sleek to look at, character-less or 'fit-for-all', recognisable as public space, but ultimately they don't belong to anyone. They tend to be mere places of passage (even if used regularly) with no connection to the sites in which they are constructed. They lack site and users specificity/contextualization as there is often no time to develop a gradual connection between place-use-users. Therefore, the tendency is for the design of spaces that avoid negotiation or appropriation.

The opportunities arise when a project can be thought and created with active voices from those who will effectively use public space in the long run, as part of their everyday lives. The negotiation between users, local authorities, local organisations and us, designers-architects-artists, is not always smooth, but it is a route for design interventions that are collectively thought and put into practice, whose authorship is shared, and so is the looking-after of those same spaces.

3 - Whose public space?

C: We think that everyone is able to be active in the making of the city.

T: Migrant communities are vivid reflections of exotic culture while simultaneously dynamic generators of new localism. In the light of this massive migratory landscape, new considerations for the design of public space emerge. As the meeting ground of this modern kaleidoscopic culture, public spaces offer opportunities to reflect, give identity and voice to migrant communities. (Strategies for integrating migrant identities into public space are evident in the work of TOPOTEK 1. In the ethnically diverse and migrant rich community of Nørrebro in Copenhagen, Denmark, the project Superkilen bases upon this approach.) (fig2)

P: A shared public space, that one in which there is a collective and communitarian awareness about the use of shared resources disposable on our cities.

UN: Public space should belong to all of those who want to use a shared (opened) space, in inventive, diverse, *ad hoc ways*, without constraints, without frameworks. Public space should allow for people to express themselves freely, be inhabitable and inhabited for shared activities. As for *public spaces*, though for all, they should reflect the qualities of the surrounding place and of the existing residents/users. Public space should re-invent itself with time, use, users and social changes.



Fig.2 Superkilen, BIG, TOPOTEK 1 e SUPERFLEX, 2012. Nørrebro, Copenhagen, Denmark. © Hanns Joosten

4 - How does Architecture, in particular public space design, satisfy the needs and give answer to the growing complexity of use and management of these places?

C: We believe that architecture is an act that happens when people are getting conscious of practicing, describing or transforming a specific space. Therefore, the architect can be the author of a building as an artist would be of a piece of art, but he is only one actor among others of the architectural act. In other words, we are interested in the political matter of architecture.

In that way we think that France has a strong architectural culture of dealing with urban public spaces, linked with social and political changes through history. We have in mind the latin way of living in the street and on the squares, but also the culture of demonstrating in the streets and more specifically the several attempts of setting up autonomous democratic models through history. This feature is completely inherent in our project that are nothing more but public calls to get people conscious of their living environment and their political weight.

T: Artificiality in landscape architecture is long founded, dominated by the idea of replicating naturescapes, epitomized by the English Landscape Garden. The 19th century garden practice deliberately blurred the lines between reality, nature and artificiality. Through mimicry, recontextualisation, translocation and the abstraction of objects and cultures unique realities and narratives were created generating new spacial identities. The old romantic dream is reiterated through a contemporary pastiche landscape.

(Our Railway cover project is a good example of how to deal with the tradition of landscape in the sense of using, reproducing or interpreting natural

landscapes. Even if today's interpretation is a different one as has been done in the 18th century, the motivation's source is the same. Through the recontextualisation of objects and cultural experiences, TOPO-TEK 1 utilizes these traditional age old tools to enhance contemporary realities and bridge physical, cultural and metaphorical distances. By conjoining seemingly disparate features of contemporary urban aesthetics, cultural insignia and landscape elements, TOPOTEK 1 seeks to create new narratives and realities.)

P: By exploring the design of public spaces of the city from a more human centered perspective, an emotional point of view that can be able to push through alternative ways of looking at urban issues. So that we all can be part of the creation of a proactive urban culture.

UN: It often doesn't. It could, but time, budget constraints and political agendas subagent to most projects for public space dictate the way in which Architecture can intervene. Not only that, but often architects themselves are not able (because they are not used to) to see beyond the normal design route which is mostly architect-centered, rather than user-centered as it should be when it comes to the design of these spaces.

In order to respond to the complexity of use and management of these spaces I believe that the key is to design them as living organisms which can evolve in a more fluid way, without the need of constant control by any of the involved parties, but which demand a constant care by those who will use them. For that to happen I believe that the architect can take on the role of a mediator, and educator, who raises a sense of awareness and care for those shared spaces using playful methods of proximity to get all users involved, as well as the local authorities. Setting up a good foundation for maintenance and programming is fundamental for those spaces to remain alive and to become more and more autonomous, though part of a unifying system. It relates to the importance of being an individual within society and not merely another individual that helps forming society.

5 - How have methodologies, actors and tools, changed?

C: At a time where urban planning and architectural practices seems to be in crisis and ruled by the economic market, we are struggling for a new way of making architecture and the first step is to reconsider the role of the nowadays so called "city's experts". Architects must be at the service of the common good, supporting the inhabitants and the public authorities from the generation of ideas to their achievements (fig. 3).

T: Our work is really an array of expressive extremes – and our design approach is unapologetic, frank and decisive.. Our work may appear as a typological mix that varies in material execution, but if one looks closer consistency resides in the constant faith in the beautiful, in hyperbolic statements, in the desire to sharpen, skew and question given realities and finally in an approach that is decisive tailor-made.



(The desire to expose and appropriate tensions, to be the “anti-neutralizers” is evident in our strategies of calculated collisions and inventive hybridisation.)

Fig.3 Place au Changement
Public Plaza, Collectif ETC,
2011. Saint-Étienne, France. ©
Collectif ETC

P: We propose to transfer teamwork strategies and collective thinking approaches to the field of citizenship. One of our aims is that anyone can learn how to build, maintain, repair and assess public spaces from a direct, personal and collective experimentation of them.

UN: The direct contact, and work, with the end users is crucial. That implies a change of methods and tools, as the dialogue stopped being solely with the local authorities (the ‘client-representatives’). Methods of representation had to change to a language that is accessible to all, and not only to be read by architecturally minded people and planning departments. In our work, we try to use simple techniques that involve children as part of the design team. Their drawings, models, photographs are as valuable as ours as they can be read by all, and explained by themselves. This allows us to get other people to start thinking about design and the process it involves, every step required. We use video, interviews, storytelling, animation, mapping, puppetry... all fairly standard techniques, but made in a much more approachable way.

6 - Which architectonic devices, strategies and practices can the designer use or rethink to densify or re-densify these places?

C: We think architect will be more available, trying to count on everybody's capabilities that are already there, sharing ideas and reflexions for a better way of living. Therefore, the way we know architects today will gradually disappear, change role, becoming simple militant working for better habitat and public spaces based on collective knowledge.

T: In general we are often suspect of pure rationality and aspects such as the mismatched and the unforeseen are openly welcomed. Rather than offering simplified harmonies and conspicuous solutions we often choose to cultivate conflicts as a springboard for design. If to normalize means to pacify, I believe that the avoidance of conflicting circumstances is a missed opportunity for design innovation.

P: We may learn alternative paths to conventional ways of building cities by which needs and demands are expressed by supposedly representative institutions, a highly bureaucatised process that starts with a document that "we" as designers must interpret to produce a slice of city that citizenship receives as a final product.

UN: More than density of use, I believe that diversity, sharing and appropriation are what matters most for the success of a space. That implies designing spaces that are no longer for one-use-only, but which can accommodate different programmes simultaneously, as often found in buildings in Asian cities where space is scarce and programme overlaps within the same space. This can also happen at a horizontal level and this diversity can effectively lead to changes of density. I wouldn't say that there are 'devices' to do so, but the strategy would be to listen and include as many different people as possible in the dialogue during the design process and to allow them to claim their own part of the project, of the place.

7 - In which way the architectural project can support the coexistence of different users, uses, people flows, in public space?

C: There are periods in history when the architect's job encompassed much more wider challenges than the building design. We are against the role that is given to architects in our society today. Caught up in economic issues, in the boredom of administrative burdens, in a selfish pride, blindly fascinated by the beauty of objects, the architect lost the connection with real people. We think that architects, as any citizen, should use the power they have taken or the power that is given to them, to share it with all stakeholders to plan together the thinking and the construction of our society.

T: Drawing from the garden tradition, contemporary public spaces can forge and express communities of evolving identity. Expanding on the paradisaical garden culture, spaces that cultivate distinctions and celebrate jumbled societies have the power to manifest contemporary migrant identities and celebrate a foreignness that is at once exotic and local.

P: Through the collective construction of meaningful public spaces by means of developing tools and resources for the acquisition of tactical urbanism skills. We promote actions that use public spaces of the city as a working and intervention platform as a way to experience those spaces from a playful point of view.

UN: Through diversity of smaller spaces that form a whole, i.e. which are connected and thought of as a collection of spaces rather than a patchwork. Though non-prescriptive design that allows for change over time and, finally, through the involvement of local actors (i.e. residents, children, elderly, local NGOs, etc) that will warranty a regular use of these spaces.

8 - Thus in which way does the process and the approach to design change?

C: We settled down in Marseille 6 months ago to change a little bit the way we work. This is a big step for us, as nomadicworkers. We were used to do short term projects, almost as events, way too short according to the time-scale of the cities. You spend few weeks somewhere to build a public space and then you move again. But we noticed that there is also other ways of acting, for the transformation of a space.

We are convinced that if you want to have a right and good impact on a territory you need to spend some time there, you need to be there, you have to come back. You need to have the possibility to discuss with inhabitants and to modify what was done with them.

We hope strongly that we will be more and more integrated into the building process of our cities, a direct link between politics and inhabitants.

T: Very important to TOPOTEK 1 is that our tactics are never a one size fits all approach, but instead a continually evolving set of design devices related to the specific cultural, social, historical and physical context of each site. It may seem that our work is a typological mix which varies in its material execution, but if one looks closer, our consistency resides in the constant faith in the beautiful, in hyperbolic statements, in the desire to sharpen, skew and question given realities with an approach that is decisive tailor-made.

P: There is a great opportunity in shifting the logics according to which dialogues are established with citizens' demands and interests when working on city construction processes; it means for us to go from understanding cities as objects for passive consumption by citizens to a logic of cities as places for social and spatial innovation.

UN: The process and the approach have to change drastically though at the eyes of the majority there might not be a major difference at the first instance. The differences lie on the way in which people/users appropriate the



Fig.4_ Campo de Cebada
Trasformer-Bench, PKMN 2012.
Campo de la Cebada. Madrid,
Spain. © PKMN

project and identify their own input within the design proposal. For this to happen, time is key, so not all projects can follow that route. The slow process of captivating people to become interested in public space and collective design is not always valued and that means there is scarcely any funding for it. That has implications on how the process unravels, but what is most important is to be patient and remain positive and determined that though people might not see it at first, the process is worth pursuing.

9 - In one word, what do your projects trigger or what would like to trigger within a public space?

C: Event.

T: Interaction.

P: Empathy. (fig. 4)

UN: Appropriation/autonomy.

Per il video dell'intervista: <https://vimeo.com/142285205>

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È stato bello fare la tua conoscenza!
cercaci, trovaci, leggici, seguici, taggaci, contattaci, ..

It was nice to meet you!

search us, find us, read us, follow us, tag us, contact us, ..

