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# **PARTICIPATORY ARCHITECTURE**

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# INTRODUCTION

## CLAIMING THE SOCIAL AND PEDAGOGICAL DIMENSION OF THE PROFESSION

Author: Nere Guarrotxena

*Publishers comment: The author of this article did not work with quote notes. The last pages provide the reader with a list of sources on which this article refers.*

It seems like the obsolete figure of the “star-architect” begins to falter in order to give presence to an emergent call coming from a social part that is not represented in conventional practices. As far as the social gap towards a more unequal society grows, similarly, a parallel need to reconnect with all the social sectors appears. Particularity to the more vulnerable habitats, those ones that the politics don’t look at and consequently don’t have access to proper spaces. So, the work towards social inclusion and urban integrity recognizes that people living with very little equally as the

well-off people have a right to good architecture. And as architects/ urban designers we pursuit the will to improve people’s lives, understanding architecture as a service to others. Thus, pretend to reach the most needed people means to rethink the role of architecture in society and implies an exit from the comfort zone of conventional practices. This revindication gives up egos and personal goals of wealth, fame, and power, focusing on a more democratized process of design. To do so, alternative modes need to be generated through participatory processes. And this premise inevitably brings about a variety of tendencies, new experiments, and several perspectives in the field, that are not easy to implement.



**Fig. 2** Houses in the rural coast, Ecuador, 2020 / by Alena Jacobs

The phenomenon of participation in architecture is as old as the profession itself, however, a historical review of these processes allows us to state that official recognition of participatory architecture in the professional environment coincides with the crisis of the Modern Movement between the sixties and seventies. It emerged out of a radical critique of the development project stream of a series of social projects that were intended as progress. And yet they failed because of their lack of participation and needed to be demolished subsequently. A lack of consultation made the planning system seem paternalistic and without proper consideration of how this built environments affected its users and their needs.

Contemporary architecture creates sometimes a gap between professional practice and everyday reality. Especially since the transition in recent

years towards semi-functional sculptures characterized by an autistic language, with no vocabulary to connect them with the reality of their users. It is an architecture that at times forgets the reason for its existence.

In consequence of that dichotomy, the concepts of autonomy, collaboration, and participation have gained relevance in architecture and urbanism through collaborative actions. The lack of infrastructures in the increasing “informal” settlements of the growing urban sectors, as well as the significant number of climate disasters of the last decades, connected to the more critical approaches of the new generations. In this case, having an impact on the demand for the rebuilding of houses and infrastructure in affected areas. In fact, this has called for a major collaborative effort in architectural and urban reconstruction.



**Fig. 3** Pruitt-Igoe, Implosion of Building 1976, Missouri USA / Creative Commons

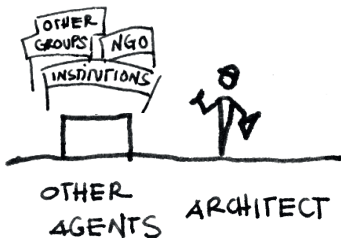


Definition:

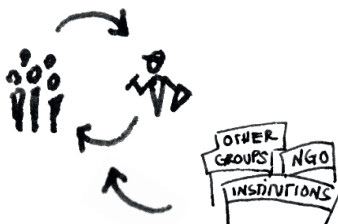
**"Participatory design (originally co-operative design, now often co-design) is an approach to design attempting to actively involve all stakeholders (e.g. employees, partners, customers, citizens, end users) in the design process to help ensure the result meets their needs and is usable."** (wikipedia)



1. Protagonist-Architect: the architect as the main figure unilaterally decides all aspects of the procedure. He/she may or may not present them to the community for its consideration. The information of the community is produced in a suppository, indirect and limited way. So, the design proposal opens an enormous margin of uncertainty if the project will succeed or fail.



2. Subordinate-Architect: decisions are taken mainly by a specific client or community and the architect is a pawn acting for external interests; in this case, the architect is only a builder of other wishes, supported by references or particular ideals.



3. Interpreter-Architect: a dynamic where architect and community dialogue and search for agreements on all aspects of architectural design. In this case, the architect uses his skills to understand the users through their reality and shape their perspectives into architecture. He works as a facilitator and does not work "for" but "with" the community.

## 2.0 CONCEPT

### WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE PARTICIPATORY?

Author: Nere Guarrotxena

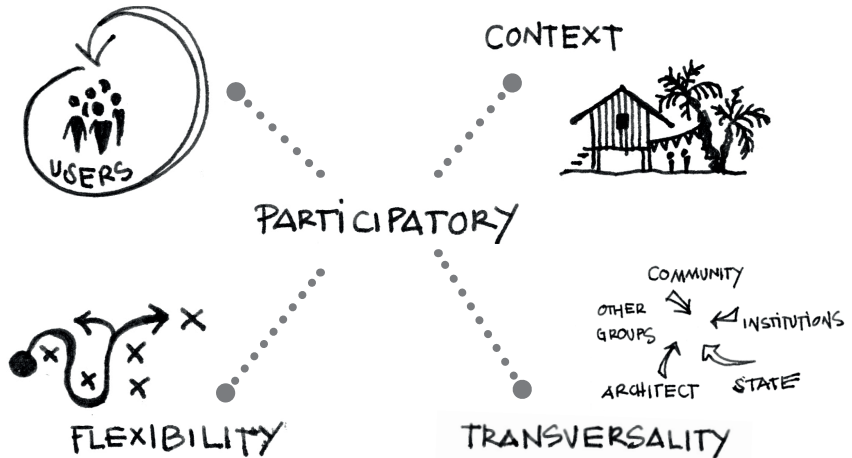


Fig. 5 Characteristics of Participatory Processes / Own Drawing

### Users in the Center

The goal is not simply to have a final functional project, but rather to empower communities during the process. Therefore the basement of the design is grounded through non-standardized approaches.

In that sense, the statements of the design are not focused on what an architect can devise in an office, instead, on his/her ability to listen to the community and translate it into the construct. In reality, the users guide the professionals to the final result since they provide the inside, which the design professionals don't have. Because as an external agent, you don't live in the environment, so you will never have the expertise of people, who use the space every day and will also afterward habit it.

Indeed, in the course of time, the architect's sensitivity gradually expands, by moving away from his conventional procedure. And to the inhabitants themselves, already taking decisions in aspects of their life, like how their houses will look like, already creates a sense to determine and take power over decisions.

In addition, creating social and local dynamics from the local community, makes citizens feel linked to the process and not alienated from it. And the strengthening of the community ties facilitates the implementation of development projects, resulting finally in environments that are more responsive and appropriate to their user's cultural, emotional, spiritual, and practical needs.

## Contextualization

There is no recognition of a single way of making participatory architecture because it is not possible to generate a model of universal participation that can be replicated everywhere. The “story” of each community is unique, hence each participatory process is singular and needs to be adapted to the context. Users will only take care of the good if feeling the ownership towards it, as part of an identity expression.

This involves recognizing a series of socio-cultural values in the community:

1. Revalue the constructive and material traditions of the community.
2. Consider the potential of the culture, its rites, and customs. Likewise, the habitability patterns, practices, social dynamics, habits, ways of life...
3. Highlight the passions, needs, and dreams of the inhabitants in order to integrate them as a reality into the project.

Due to that, the institutionalization of participatory processes is doubtful, and introduce bureaucratic procedures are controversial to foster real community empowerment.



**Fig. 6** Discussions with the Community, 2020, Ecuador/ by Nere Guarrotxena

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE PARTICIPATORY?

### Transversality

One of the aims of the participatory procedures is to have a result from a collaborative creation. When talking about participation, it not only considers the community but also involves institutional entities and other stakeholders. The cooperation of designers, developers, institutions, and users creates a holistic approach where everything is interrelated and creates synergies. Through this interdisciplinarity everybody gets to learn from each other, understanding the same reality from other perspectives and enriching the tasks with new possible solutions. Besides, the embracement of value pluralism expands knowledge and build bridges between different actors, where all of them can profit.

### Flexibility

The strategy is characterized as a process-oriented design rather than result-focused. Indeed, this is a way to accept that the trajectory of the design is open and in constant transformations and readaptation, while new variables emerge. Above all, this affords a capacity to accommodate to uncertainty and stay flexible for change. Sometimes, even though in the first moment of the encounter agreements were set, frequently during the process users discover new needs and desires. And this is not only referring to the creation phase, but also a posteriori once the building is standing. Through time priorities change, so it requests a possibility of organic transformation. Building habitability is an iterative process, full of successes and failures.

Furthermore, another relevant aspect is learning how to work with what is available, considering that sometimes resources and conditions are limited. This requires high creative skills because we continue improvising while living, and being able to make the best of it is a virtue of resilience and a lesson for life.



**Fig. 7** Assembly with stakeholders, 2017, Villagarzón Colombia / by Alejandro Orduz





**Fig. 8** Sitewalk with locals, 2017,Villagarzón, Colombia / by Alejandro ordúz



**Fig. 9** Collaborative Construction, 2020, Ecuador/ by Nere Guarrotxena



## Phases

Ideally, the community is included within all the stages: from analysis to conception, timeframes, design evaluations, inversions, and construction, and later on continues to be the ones giving continuity in its use and maintenance.

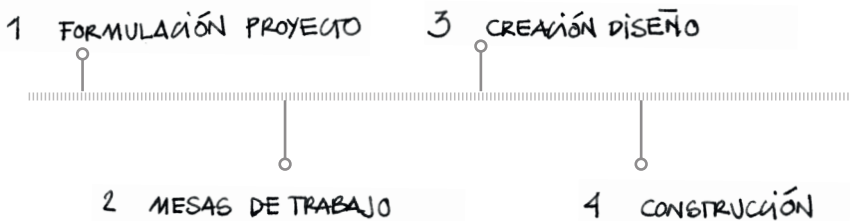
Depending on the degree of linkage with each process the level of acceptance and appropriation of the object will be greater. Commonly, in the beginning, during initial exploration and problem definition, the workflow is slower and requires much patience, since getting consensus from a large group is more demanding. However, this broadening of the spectrum of analysis will afterward help to achieve better output.

Additionally, it will also provide a higher degree of acceptance during the conceptualization and design process.

## Role of the architect

The posture of the architect transcends from being the sole author based on his ideals to a collaborating architect, working collectively and decentralized, to mediate and work together. In that sense, the architect thinks more in a network, with collaborative links connecting the community, the technicians, and institutions, in order to establish horizontal working relationships. Through this, he seeks to respect the cultural identity of the communities. Then, his/her priority is to strengthen community skills, so that in the future they can lead their own battles, finding their own solutions to the problems of their territory and rights.

Nevertheless, even though the architect takes a more mediator and neutral attitude, he/ she still is the one filtering the information, guiding processes, and subsequently designing the product.



**Fig. 10** Stages of Process/ Own Drawing

## Methods

Finding the most appropriate way to integrate the community into the different stages of the architectural design is a big challenge. As mentioned before, the same methodology that worked in a community may not have the same outreach in the adjacent neighbourhood. The right method is the one where people find themselves comfortable and can easily express their opinion and enter in the same dialogue level without constraining. Because many methods we learned and common use in professional life, are not applicable in other contexts, cultures, or external sectors.

Some of the most used:

Assembly: the people involved sit down to dialogue around the same table.

Mapping: as a way of situating relevant elements, places, routes to understand the surrounding.

Modeling: Abstracting the building on a smaller scale. We get a notion of the building technique and understand the assemblage.

Scenarios: The participants act out and narrate how they interact with X objects.

Site construction: As active actors. That's why the importance of modular, local techniques, which everyone can put into practice on-site, not just qualified hands.

Sketches/ Graphics: Main ideas are easier to understand. Translate information into drawings or symbols makes the language universal.

Surveys: In a more individual and unexposed way. Ask all houses to fill out questions.

Storytelling: Through indirect activities, distill valuable information that they would not explicitly tell. In many ancient cultures, they passed on their knowledge through generations via stories and mimesis.

Walkings: The locals guide others through the site and surroundings, explaining the particularities of the community. It helps to gather data about people's daily activities.

Workshops/Games: Brainstorming information, finding solutions in a more dynamic way. Also, get stimulated through others.

As the participation happens continuously, ideally we would use a variety of them, so that each personality inside the community can be listened to.



In the following, some of the aspects that sophisticate the processes of participatory design and break principles of it are collected here based on research, interviews and personal experience.

All the points mentioned are related and implicit in others, however for a better understanding, they are set into concepts. The issue goes back to the tension between power, author and knowledge, which raises important questions such as who is leading the participatory process, whose is the final product, and who is acting as an expert in this process.

Finally, everything is reduced to a relation of power, where a dominant position hegemonizes another nucleus, for instance, new forms of colonialism.

### **Paternalism**

It is not uncommon for projects with social background, which seek to help vulnerable groups with scarce economic resources, to turn into "victim-saver" rapports. We refer to policies and actions based on an assistencialism, believing that giving away goods would improve quality of life. In the end, this only leads to a process of dependency with harmful repercussions. Actually, it is an act of vanity where nothing sustainable takes place since this entails being constantly dependent on external factors and in any way makes the receivers be self-sufficient. An example of

this happens in projects, where imported materials are used. The habitats will in the future not have any access to those materials at all, neither to repair the damages of the structure nor use it for coming buildings. That's why it is always preferable first to make available the existing resources in the community. In the same way, if no capacitation of locals is given and professionals from abroad are sent, we will not have passed any knowledge. Thus, the construction should be replicable and serve as a reference for later on the inhabitants build their homes in a better quality through tools and resources that they learned and possess. If we bring in materials from abroad, as well as specialized labor, and make sculptural buildings, we are not reaching the goal. It is useless to give a school if you don't teach how to build it and if you don't know how to maintain it.



**Fig. 11** Paternalism / Own Drawing

## Eurocentrism

Related to the relation of power, universal design methods with their universally applicable forms of knowledge are translated and exported to other countries. If projects come from European background comprehend that everything is designed through Eurocentric ways of thinking. The limitations of toolkits and methods designed with Eurocentric lens and applied across various cultures is a way of thinking that suppresses and marginalizes local knowledge, thought and expertise.

In projects applied in Global South countries, a Western way of thinking tends to dominate design practices. Mostly, in an unconscious way, they do not recognize with the same validity other forms of knowledge and other ways of thinking, which are less rational and more oriented to empiric or sensitive learning approaches.

Furthermore, there still tends to be a postcolonial character of showing "third-world" culture the correct way to do things. While Westerners inflate themselves with a narcissistic condescension to help the poor and fill their portfolio with exotic and emotional works, they use other people's fields to explore their achievements. As a consequence of this negligence, sometimes existing active networks and micro-economies with local dynamics that were functioning get destroyed, as unsustainable elements that affect that ecological equilibrium are introduced. This narrow lens thinking that all turns around the Global North

restrain developing frameworks of thinking that understand the local culture, politics and socio-economic context.



Fig. 12 Eurocentrism / Own Drawing

## "Participative" Label

Common participatory design and community consultation practices often tokenize input, using the stamp of participatory in the appearance. All this terminology is used in the narrative but the reality is far away from that, finally, it still remains a mask of the protagonist architect.

Maybe the processes start with an encounter with the community but proceed to develop the studies outside from the community, leading to an incomplete decontextualized research. This will create results full of gaps, with problematic implementations and small levels of community contribution. The limited information signifies a disconnected understanding of the site, and will in one way or another perpetuate hierarchical structures between designers, planners and the communities they seek to serve.

## FACTORS THAT LEAD TO FAILURES

It happens also in a form of marketing used by the professionals, where projects easily get disguised and intentionally used as “greenwashing” taking profit of the acknowledgment, while the practice criticized by the participatory processes is still behind. Participation has become a buzzword inside many practices. Even in academia turned to a mainstream, which teachers use in their publications to polish their name.



Fig. 13 „Participative“ Label / Own Drawing

### Unappropriate Methods

The communicative codes differ in each society, culture, entity, and collective processes are based on the quality of communication between members. We should tend towards inclusion, finding ways to reach all different profiles without trying to impose a unique method. Linguistic and socio-cultural barriers such as power imbalances at a societal level between gender, class, age and caste are constantly happening on all social levels.

Develop new frameworks and methodologies of design that uncover its complex social problems is the issue. Then one must first understand the dominant way of learning, forms of knowledge and ways of thinking, that occur in structures that exhibited evident patriarchy and hierarchy. On the one side happening from community externals with the locals, and on the other hand inside the same community. In the worst case, it will keep having as target a homogenous group, perpetuating the exclusion of some (often minorities or discriminated members), thus potentially reproducing mechanism of oppression.

The people coordinating such projects should be aware of that and search for equal distribution of task, degree and type of participation of the members, as well as the spaces, formats of decision-making and trajectory of the organization implementing the project. Depending on how assertive the exchange is and how they tailor methods to suit the local environment, it will have an impact on the engagement and ownership of the project.



Fig. 14 Unappropriate Methods/ Own Drawing



## Material and Immaterial

Inevitably these projects often merely concentrate on architecture as infrastructure, worrying about the finished figure, its aesthetic value at an architectural level and yet focusing less on inclusion and all the other intangible dynamics, which are in reality the determining factors. This leads to a culture of 'accountability for results' and of little attention to 'managing for results'.

Visually and in the discourse the object seems to solve a problem, however, little was invested in seeking the appropriation of the building and the participation of the inhabitants. What determines the long-term success is how the product was made, all the cycles activated during the process and the decisions made behind the curtain. The lack of integrated planning leaves gaps in the processes, which in the long term will be visible because their maintenance depends on the self-management of the community.

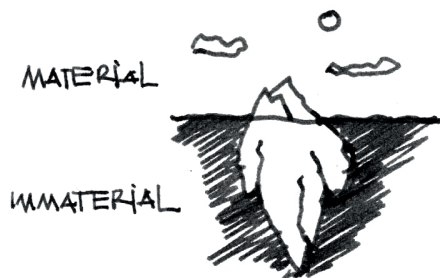


Fig. 15 Iceberg Metaphor / Own Drawing

## Follow up

This is one of the key factors within social projects. In the follow-up, will be truly discovered whether the object created is as useful as in theory, whether it's suitable to the community profile. Then participation does not end when the building is finished, everything continues in its use and simultaneously transforms over time. Thinking that fulfilling the indicators is enough, and after that, the process ends is a big mistake. Mostly if there is no follow-up, the projects go astray. If people within the community do not involve themselves sufficiently, once the external agents leave, the project will be left in limbo.

Part of the immaterial work is to analyze the feasibility of the continuity of the project, ensure that the management has a consistent plan. It is therefore advisable to make previously clear who the participants are, the beneficiaries and their roles because being participatory does not necessarily mean that it is for everyone.

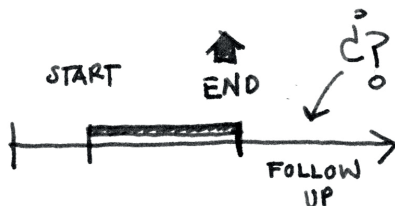


Fig. 16 Timeline Follow-up / Own Drawing

## Conflict of interest

The communication channels between the expert and the non-expert are not transparent when personal interests are circulating.

At the institutional level, it happens, when projects do not go hand in hand with the interests of the governor, bureaucratic barriers will always inhibit them. Then, it is not in the interest of some people for some social groups to improve their conditions, because they would no longer be able to take out profit from them or their territories.

And this does not only apply to institutions but also many social development projects from foundations or NGOs also make use of a charitable facade, which keeps behind individual purposes detached from the cause. They simply comply with the guidelines, because they need to show how funds from donors have been spent. Whereas they don't look at the long term social impact. In addition, many times false promises are made aiming to gain the trust of the inhabitants and commit themselves to offer something, which then never comes. Consequently, we find in the communities a lack of trust in Institutions and professionals, because these figures are not seen as entities that protect the welfare, rights and justice of society, but as people to distrust. So they closed off in their desire to collaborate with external agents.

Furthermore, not all communities function in a unitary way and even less in peri-urban areas, where the profile of each inhabitant has a different background. When there are confrontations within the community, the inhabitants are divided into sides. Without a strong community in place, participation-in-design projects will fail to ignite the kind of collective responses needed to upgrade the habitat as a whole.



**Fig. 17** Domination of Interest/ Own Drawing

## 4.0 PARTICIPATION IN CUBA

Author: Santiago Sánchez

### Participatory Architecture in Cuba

Architecture in Cuba has undergone several changes since the mid-20th century. The construction of public buildings reached its peak during the first years of the Revolution, which gave way to a modular and prefabricated architecture, both for institutional buildings and housing, followed by a significant decrease in the number of projects developed and built. That became critical after the economic and social crisis that the island experienced in the 1990s with the end of the Soviet Union, its greatest former economic ally<sup>1</sup>. This challenge experienced by the island gave way to implementing a participatory design method that sought to face the housing problem in Cuba, and professional architects and still use students. Additionally, this experience opens an excellent opportunity to implement the participative design in the recent awakening of Cuban architecture.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Cuba lost its most significant ally and its biggest foreign investor. Meanwhile, the demand for housing was growing, which plunged the island into a housing crisis. In response to this situation, a participatory design program was implemented in 1994, on an experimental basis, by few architects and the NGO Habitat Cuba. Its original objective was to help residents improve their homes' conditions, and over time it led to the design and construc-

tion of housing to overcome the crisis.<sup>2</sup>

One of the Community Architects Program (CAP) particularities is the implementation of the Argentinian architect Rodolfo Livingston's method, which proposes the family's participation in the design of the house that will later be inhabited. To do so, the architect becomes a facilitator who, through a series of interviews, role-playing, and games, makes a detailed analysis of the family. As a result, the family members have a broad panorama of their wishes and needs to translate them, together with the architect, into a unique design for each house.<sup>3</sup> This method has been popular not only in Cuba but also in several Latin American countries. Moreover, it is still being implemented on the island and taught in some of its architecture schools.<sup>4</sup>

Despite being an internationally recognized program for its innovative way of addressing the housing crisis and perhaps the world's most extensive participatory architecture program with countless success stories, Architects of the Community is not exempt from criticism. Besides being a discontinuous program and being considered responsible for the lack of harmony in some residential sectors<sup>5</sup>, its most significant criticism lies in some of its users' experience. The program has been considered negatively by some low-income sectors of the Cuban population, who, after their

experience, found it quite bureaucratized and difficult to access. Others also considered architects unreliable during the process and complained about the lack of building materials.<sup>6</sup>

The problem perhaps lies in CAP's individualistic nature, which intends to address a country's structural problems, seeks to solve them through personalized attention, reducing its scope and making access more difficult. Additionally, the housing program responds exclusively to a very specific lapse for the family's lifetime, which is variable over time, both in the number of inhabitants and their customs.

In any case, it is possible to assure that the CAP program is a success since it has been in charge of providing housing on the island since the first years of the crisis and attending to the families' spatial needs. However, its contribution goes beyond dealing with the housing crisis of the 1990s. After so many years of inactivity in construction (except for the hotel industry), with a deteriorated urban infrastructure, and amid economic opening, the Cuban government has the opportunity to implement a participatory design strategy that is already popular in Cuba in the domestic sphere. This time to improve its public facilities system, which can meet the community's real needs on a broader scale, and where the community can play an active role in its creation.

There is already some progress in urban planning with the Masterplan for the Historical Centers of the island's main cities. Inhabitants have been invited to several events to be heard, consider their ideas, and respond to their needs<sup>7</sup>. Besides, there are programs to address the potential risks of climate change, such as the one proposed in Havana's Playa Guanabo area. It proposes to relocate the population of a sector of the beach due to its proximity to the coast. Although this is again a housing project, it is essential to note that in the participation process, work has been done with the community as a cohesive group of diverse families with specific practices and relationships with the place, and not as families that are totally independent of each other.<sup>8</sup>

In any case, most of the government's construction projects are still adaptations and remodeling of existing infrastructure that sometimes does not respond in scale or program to the needs of the communities. For this reason, this recent tradition of participatory architecture in housing can be taken as a vital example for communities and non-governmental organizations working in Cuba, as an excellent opportunity to develop self-managed projects that address the lack of government response, as has happened extensively in several Latin American cities.<sup>9</sup>

## 5.0 REFERENCE

### THE COLOMBIAN CASE

Author: Santiago Sánchez

#### References: The Colombian Case

The experience of participatory architecture in Colombia is complex and extensive. It has been developed mostly in popular neighborhoods, many of them self-built, informal, or rural settlements far from urban centers. In both cases, these communities have generated support networks, both internal and external, which have been the seed for developing infrastructure that meets their needs and promotes activities that seek to strengthen the community. We decided to approach the Colombian case from two recent projects of participatory architecture, which share similar problems in terms of their economic, social, cultural and geographical context, but which have been approached from different actors such as grassroots organizations, and

government institutions, all in partnership with the community, allowing us to contrast different methodological approaches and results as a response to a problem in similar contexts.

#### POTOCINE

**Self-managed movie theater (Ciudad Bolívar, Bogotá)**

**Arquitectura Expandida**

**Participatory architecture from the grassroots organizations.**

Arquitectura Expandida (AXP) is a collective based in Bogotá, which considers itself a „citizen laboratory of physical, social and cultural- self-construction of the territory“<sup>10</sup>. For the last ten years, it has been interacting with other groups, and grassroots organizations focused on promoting culture in peripheral neighborhoods of the city.



Fig. 1 - Potocine, Exterior view. URL <http://arquitecturaexpandida.org/potocine/>





Fig. 2 - Potocine, The Participation Process. URL <http://arquitecturaexpandida.org/potocine/>

They support them technically with the development of cultural, self-managed, and self-built infrastructure, which involves in all stages of the process part of the neighborhood community interested in taking over the management of their territory.

One of their most notable projects is Potocine, a non-commercial collectively managed movie theater in the Potosí neighborhood of Ciudad Bolívar in Bogotá, an informal neighborhood with severe drug consumption and trafficking problems, violence, and problematic access to health and education culture, accompanied by a shortage of public facilities. However, various organizations and community initiatives seek an alternative to the marginalization and violence in the neighborhood. Among them are the „Cerros del Sur“ Institute and the

„Ojo al Sancocho“ Community Film School. The first functions as a neighborhood council, and the second as a social, cultural, and economic empowerment platform in the neighborhood through film and audiovisual tools. Both were in 2016 the partners of Arquitectura Expandida for the development of the Potocine project.

According to Felipe González<sup>11</sup>, one of AXP's founding members, the bond they maintained throughout the process with these allies, from the community and grassroots organizations, is the key to the successful development and long life of this type of projects. On the one hand, they guarantee smooth contact and safe interaction during the design process with the community they have worked with for over 30 years. On the other hand, they are the guarantors that the spa-



Fig. 3 - Potocine, Construction. URL <http://arquitecturaexpandida.org/potocine/>

ce created will last thanks to a cultural activity rooted in local customs. In the case of Potocine has been fundamental thanks to the visibility that the community film festival has.

The final architectural object turns out to be an excuse to promote local dynamics rather than the end in itself, as is usually the case in more traditional design. It turns out to be an opportunity to provide tools to populations neglected by the State, who have their own organizational processes and to whom nothing needs to be imposed. In any case, its contribution is more than valuable because it provides the neighborhood with an infrastructure that did not exist until then, with technical qualities that require architectural knowledge. Therefore, it is essential within the participatory process to understand that although the voice of all counts, horizontality is a utopia and defined roles are required for specific tasks. Indeed the process often requires high responsibility and technical expertise as in the area of architecture

and the legal, social and economical, with high responsibilities within the construction process. In this sense, it is a matter of concern that the civil population itself should take the lead and responsibility for processes and even rights whose attention and guarantee should fall to the State.

After the process of management and construction of Potocine, this small building has become one of the most important references of DIY and communitarian cultural dynamics. It has workshop spaces, audiovisual production rooms, and a projection room for more than 100 people, made of bamboo, zinc sheet, concrete, and polycarbonate. It houses a film school, is the headquarters of a community film festival, and the space for small hip hop collectives. And although the project generated resistance from some sectors of the neighborhood, it is maintained today thanks to the community and local organizations' work, rather than because of its aesthetic or formal characteristics.

**UVA El Paraiso**  
**(San Antonio del Prado, Medellín)**  
**EDU Medellín (Empresa de Desarrollo Urbano de Medellín)**

Participatory Architecture from government institutions

The Urban Development Company of Medellín (EDU) is a Colombian state-owned company, with administrative and financial autonomy, whose main objective is the management and operation of urban projects in the city of Medellín. It has been recognized for being behind the entire process of urban renewal that Medellín has had since the beginning of the

century, working hand in hand with communities in high-risk areas that had been abandoned by the State. ten years, it has been interacting with other groups, and grassroots organizations focused on promoting culture in peripheral neighborhoods of the city.

The Articulated Life Units (UVA) is one of the most recent programs of the EDU. These are urban interventions in peripheral neighborhoods to gather the community through sport, recreation, culture, and participation. Typologically they are mixed projects whose characteristics are adjusted to the context and vocations of each territory.



Fig. 4 - UVA El Paraiso / EDU - Empresa de Desarrollo Urbano de Medellín, Aerial view. URL <https://www.archdaily.com/782851/uva-el-paraiso-edu-empresa-de-desarrollo-urbano-de-medellinpotocine/>





Fig. 5 - UVA El Paraiso / EDU - Empresa de Desarrollo Urbano de Medellín, Exterior view. URL <https://www.archdaily.com/782851/>

To this end, in the stage before the architectural design, various workshops are held with the community in which the citizens make a collective contribution of ideas and imaginaries about their neighborhood and its needs. It then helps define an architectural program that responds to the dynamics of the neighborhood where it is implemented.

While UVA has a basic program of recreation, culture, commerce, sports and complementary services, the process of participation with the community of San Antonio del Prado for „UVA El Paraiso“ helped to define a program mostly focused on addressing the shortcomings of one of the most peripheral areas of the city. Therefore,

sports and culture, with specific activities such as extreme sports, music and dance, are the central elements of this building located in a still rural area, but of the very high urban development in recent years, with a lack of services other than commerce.

Unlike more local participatory projects such as those developed through grassroots organizations and even through academia, cases like UVA El Paraiso manage to have a much higher impact, not only because of the scale of the building but also because of the number of resources invested in both both infrastructure and future programs that accompany the space, which go hand in hand with state institutions.





## 6.0 CONCLUSION

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Participatory architecture starts from the basic premise that the habitat is shaped beyond the physical space, calling for a holistic framework where the transformation of the physical space and the social processes go hand in hand.

The mere fact of participating is a direct stance towards understanding architecture as a political fact with a democratic sense, since participatory architecture is also a way of building citizenship and transmitting those values. If the importance of collaboration and community teamwork is promoted, it serves as an instrument to reconnect the social fabric

In the practice of collectivity, values that emancipate the individual are developed and synergically create cohesion with the group. It starts listening

to each other, reducing inequalities and working towards a common goal.

Making people participate and demonstrating that with their achievements their lives can improve, leads to the recognition that change happens from within. On the one hand, the process is achieved through personal enrichment, releasing dormant creativity and empowering capabilities, and on the other hand by taking responsibility for social practices. The commitment that one acquires by participating is linked to taking charge of one's own decisions. Thus participation emancipates people by making them active contributors of their own reality. It is therefore a form of design humanism aimed at reducing domination. If applied correctly, it is a sustainable practice of social change.

Camilo Boano: *"Participation cannot be taught, it is discovered..."*.



**Fig. 18** Building the Center with the community, 2020, Ecuador / by Nere Guarrotxena

# SOURCES

## FOR TOPICS 1, 2, 3, 6

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**Figure 2.** Houses in the rural coast, Ecuador, 2020 by Alena Jacobs

**Figure 3.** "Pruitt-Igoe, Implosion of Building C-15" by Michael R. Allen is licensed with CC BY-NC-ND 2.0. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://search.creativecommons.org/photos/0a036e54-0d8b-4375-a1e1-bab48fa4271d>

**Figure 4.** Relations between Agents, hand drawing / own drawing

**Figure 5.** Characteristics of Participatory Processes / Own Drawing

**Figure 6.** Discussions with the Community, 2020, Ecuador/ by Nere Guarrotxena

**Figure 7.** Assembly with stakeholders, 2017, Villagarzón Colombia / by Alejandro Orduz

**Figure 8.** Sitewalk with locals, 2017, Villagarzón, Colombia / by Alejandro orduz

**Figure 9.** Collaborative Construction, 2020, Ecuador/ by Nere Guarrotxena

**Figure 10.** Stages of Process/ Own Drawing

**Figure 11.** Paternalism / Own Drawing

**Figure 12.** Eurocentrism / Own Drawing

**Figure 13.** „Participative” Label / Own Drawing

**Figure 14.** Unappropriate Methods/ Own Drawing

**Figure 15.** Iceberg Metaphor / Own Drawing

**Figure 16.** Timeline Follow-up / Own Drawing

**Figure 17.** Domination of Interest/ Own Drawing

**Figure 18.** Building the Center with the community, 2020, Ecuador / by Nere Guarrotxena

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