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Marginal Architecture [How will we live together?] - a process under construction...

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Abstract

The organization of territory and cities is a structuring element for the management of epidemic crises. The existence of basic sanitary structures is, nowadays, an acquired and determined factor for the healthiness of territories, as well as for the structural contribution to the well-being of the populations. Since the 19th century epidemic crises established health parameters for Architecture and Urbanism, which are still a reference today. Almost after one hundred years, where the questions of salubrity were supposed to be consolidated, we find that, suddenly, without advice, new alarm bells rings: we found that the world was not prepared to be closed in its "housing units". Assuming Portimão as an urban laboratory and as a waterfront city, we will present the process developed for studies, searching for proposals witch solutions look for a contemporary assignment, which imposes to Architecture a principle settled on options of sustainability, impermanence, reuse and recycling.

Keywords: Waterfront City; Architectonic Mentality; Urban Laboratory.

1. Introduction

Considering the relevance of this subject and, as an Architecture Schoolⁱ, it was a prominent opportunity to evolve our students and teachers in this work, promoting two workshops dedicated to this problematic.

Assuming Portimão as an urban laboratory and as a waterfront city, these workshops pretend, more than finding final solutions, to promote the discussion about such a complex problem. The proposals should be flexible, regarding to the pretended goals: the organization of the territory as a structure element for management of epidemic crises. The proposals aimed for a contemporary attitude, which imposes to Architecture a principle founded on options of sustainability, impermanence, reuse and recycling of the new built structures.

In the first workshop, the working groups tried to answer to a current issue: the need for housing as a consequence of the international crisis, generated by the influx of migrants to the European Continent. The purpose was to help people who have crossed the Mediterranean Sea, to get a place where they can live and call home. As community and as Architects (students and teachers) we need to be able to develop urban and architectural conditions in order to welcome and integrate these people in a territory.

Portimão is also a city where we, as an Architectural School, are still trying to understand the specific processes of growing, as well as its space organizing mechanisms, which turns the objective still more appealing. If in the first workshop we had a double challenge, in the second the challenge was completely unexpected: a world pandemic crisis.

2. Material and Methods

A process under construction...

As mentioned before, the second workshop took place during an absolutely unique and unprecedented period, when suddenly society was learning to deal with the reality of a global pandemic. Thus, a new premise was taken: [IF THE WORLD STOPS?]. These new and unexpected circumstances led to the need of promoting the change of the model that usually is applied to workshops, implying that this meeting should take place from distance, by the imposed lockdown conditions.

In terms of scientific contents, it announced the emergence of questions about the influence of what the new socialization distance had, and how it will influence architecture, in all its scales, from the territory to the living space. It became evident the need (as creators of the built territory: where people live) of asking ourselves about the immediate role we can play in general, but also in any crisis scenario - immediate aid role in a temporary wider universe for a reinvention of inhabited places.

3. Results

How can architects help society in situations like these ones we live today?

The organization of the territories and cities is a structuring element for the management of any pandemic crisis. The existence of basic sanitary structures is, nowadays, an acquired and determined factor for the healthiness of the territories, as well as for the well-being of the populations.

Since the 19th Century, and later with the Athens Letter (1933)ⁱⁱ, architects and city planners established health parameters for housing and planning, which are still a reference today. Almost after one hundred years, when the questions of salubrity were supposed to be consolidated, we find that, suddenly, without advice, new alarm bells rings: we found that the world was not prepared to be enclosed in its “housing units”ⁱⁱⁱ.

The proposals were based in the developing of concepts in order to create new prototypes for a living area, that should be rethought, and implemented in an empty urban space, in the city of Portimão, where it would be possible to settle around 200 or to 300 migrants, with urgent needs of accommodation.

The develop of the projects could be based on “object-city model”, a complex multifunctional architectural piece, capable of evolving - growing or decreasing alternating skills - without revealing a temporary settlement concept and, also, to be considered a universal prototype proposal. Simultaneously, it should also allow the use of empty urban spaces, as an immediate answer to situations of emerging needs or sanitary isolation (in pandemic crises).

4. Discussions

The program was developed by four working groups (with students from all levels of studies and two teachers per group)^{iv} that resulted in different proposals, with common starting points: (i) the relation of the new space with the pre-existent ones (pedestrian areas, streets, living spaces, commerce, services and laser areas); (ii) integration of the new residents with the existing ones; (iii) creation of green spaces; (iv) implementation of a simple living system, structured in an evolutive model; (v) to reconcile housing with new and existing uses (commerce, services, leisure spaces, prayer spaces, among others); (vi) to consider the intervention as a motive to connect the two areas of the city (consolidated expansion area with the historic center).

The objectives of the program generated questions of expression and design, which followed the based premises: (?) What print are we going to leave in the territory. (?) Must we have a temporary or permanent attitude.

From the experience of what is happening in other cities in the Mediterranean south coast, we know that places of temporary reception generate, almost inevitably, long (very) permanence, where migrants wait indefinitely for an entire integration. Thus, in a consensual way, the working groups came up with proposals for an “active urbanism”, building a new urbanity, between who arrives and those who lives in the city, with a concern for a true social integration. Unfortunately, what happens, in many similar cases, is that it is easy to fall in the opposite situation, creating peripheral city areas, often considered inhospitable, completely “marginal” of the local society.

In order to avoid segregation and the appearance of ghettos and “marginalities”, it was interesting to note that the four groups proposed solutions that allow the space to be adapted to the users' needs, either through evolutionary modular structures, based on an orthogonal geometry, where it is possible to implement a “pattern” of empty and non-empty spaces (with defined pre-vertical accesses), either through the implementation of evolutive modules, which interconnect themselves and create spaces of passage and permanence, like a living garden.

These evolution structures (regardless their shape and structure) are characterized by their adaptability and can be understood as a creation of a model (prototype or object-city) that, later, can be repeated in an almost “mechanical” and “automatic way”, at another location. It can also be understood as a unique and singular project to solve a specific situation that presents different possible forms of association of “modules”, “patterns” and / or “morphologies”, which may vary according to specific conditions of each project, location and user, as well as the concept that is inherent to it.

The groups presented as an advantage, in the use of evolutive process, the fact that, initially, it is possible to guarantee the minimum areas for living needs. First, the four projects ensured the adaptability of space, inside the living areas, as well as in its relations with the city. For the implementation of this type of houses, the groups implemented a system based on simple rules, which ensure the first phase of installation, in order to promote a qualitative and evolutive houses, as well as complementary spaces, according to the needs of residents, where the “time factor” proves to be fundamental for urban renewal, allowing a constant and adjustable connection between buildings and the mobility of social structures.

As mentioned before, the objective of the intervention was the promotion of temporary housing, so it became important that this empty urban space did not turned into a “ghetto”, through times. In this perspective, the groups identified the need for the interrelation between migrants and the local population, where the proposals presented the possibility of integrating, for instance, ateliers for artists, residences for students and / or housing for young people. Another identified issue was the need to integrate living areas with their own outdoor spaces and, in some

of the proposals, these spaces were integrated into green areas, that could expand out the limits of the intervention area, with the objective of promoting residents' comfort and quality of life.

5. Conclusion

The final results, obtained by all students and teachers, contributed for the research that our school has been developing, considering the city of Portimão a laboratory, mainly by its waterfront characteristics, based at the analysis and proposals of the concepts that touch the utopia, yet plausible, over a complex urban territory, land, river and sea.

If the theme of the first workshop - the welcoming city, fluctuating urbanity – took us, through a series of experiences and development of prototypes, to build elements and urban spaces, capable of receiving and integrating another universe of people, in the second theme the proposal aims to occupy an empty space in the city of Portimão, a common and transversal situation in different urban environments. The ability to understand the place, its context and its individuality, allowed to create solutions to be implemented in different situations, with different needs.

This theme, by its social awareness and contemporaneity, justifies the need for the continuity of this research project. These concepts corresponded to complex premises, such as the ability to maintain and reinforce the characteristics of the place, accounting simultaneously for the assumption of contemporary design, the imposition of a sustainable ethics, revealing different solution and new architectural approaches.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Notes

ⁱ ISMAT – Instituto Superior Manuel Teixeira Gomes, in Portimão (Portugal)

ⁱⁱ IV CIAM (Modern Architectural International Congress)

ⁱⁱⁱ Le Corbuiser – Marseille' housing unit

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