

Participatory architecture and urban design: between practice and theory. The Portuguese case

José Crespo

Assistant Professor, GEU, CIAUD, Faculdade de Arquitectura, Universidade de Lisboa
jrcrespo@fa.ulisboa.pt

Participated projects have been shaping architecture and urban design over time. In some contexts, and particular periods, people's participation and involvement has been pointed out, but in others it has been disregarded and forgotten. In spite of this ambivalence there is a vast referral to participation as a fundamental part of urban management and protect. Blundell-Jones et. al., (2005) report that the involvement of people at some point in the development of a project is a common denominator to all the participated architecture forms. For Garcia (2008) participation is important in maintaining social ties and the relationship of individuals with the power of decision and citizenship. We emphasize public involvement in the planning process as an asset and the participation of citizens as an appreciation of the individual in the social context.

In the 60's, new ideas and theories on participation were tested in developing countries. There, the needs in terms of housing and living conditions were outstanding having served as a laboratory of ideas advocated in the United States and Europe. Public participation only gained popularity from the 70's. In this period, the discrepancy between the political agreement and the interests of ordinary citizens left the population dissatisfied with the system and powerless over decisions that affected. Thus, the demand for more effective processes of participation of the population has become a manifesto in several Western countries. The 80's focused mainly on big urban plans of high profitability and accelerated urbanization processes, marginalizing the participation of the population. In the 90s and in the early years of the century. XXI new problems are equated: the financial crisis of the state and local authorities; the decline of state capacity; globalization; the complexity of social phenomena; and accountability and political representation. In urban systems are interdependent actors, institutions, functional activities and spatial organizations. Nonetheless, in this context there are new participatory initiatives which emerge new actors

In Portugal these theories have their integration with the SAAL process in 1974-75, particularly with the self-construction method. This was an experience and a practice of community participation in the production of space to inhabit. Resident's associations have been given more power of legislative system, as the bottom-up model, made this a unique approach in reference projects of interest in Portugal.

In addition to the legal instruments, there are other participatory tools, non-formal, with implications for the planning of activity. This is the case of participatory budget (PB) seen and applied as a draft of a model of public administration participated. In 2010, Lisbon implemented the BIP / ZIP program (Neighborhoods Priority Intervention / Priority Intervention Zones). This program is part of the Local Housing Program (PLH) it is intended to foster local partnerships and small interventions and is an initiative by the authorities to create opportunities for the participation of the inhabitants. The program results from the existence of slums, poor living conditions, urban decline and lack of social partners. It aims to improve the areas covered by supporting local projects that contribute to the quality of life of residents and the municipality. To achieve this, the municipal administration became involved with the locals, the parish councils,

architects, lawyers, start-ups and other professionals to boost local development and bottom-up urban planning.

This article analyzes the issue of participation in architecture and urban design and its importance in defining the practical and political mechanisms and urban management, as a way to respond to urban problems, the administration and the social needs of the inhabitants. It frames and analyzes the origin of ideas and theoretical perspectives of participation in the 60's and sets up a comparison between the realities and practices that shaped the theories, participatory models, techniques and debates led in Europe and the United States. We intend to evaluate the debate and practices in the Portuguese context, where the SAAL is incorporated as a case in point, and the new participatory initiatives which emerge new actors such as the case of participatory budget and the BIP / ZIP Program, in context of the Lisbon municipality.

We argue, and empirical analysis have confirmed it, that the practices and participatory mechanisms have implemented a framework to prevailing theories, being a way to respond to urban problems, the administration and the social needs of the inhabitants. Therefore, the participated architecture and urban design both result in projects designed for the people and not only a response to technical issues. The growing interest and projection of participation can be seen as a manifestation of the value that population can take in nowadays cities. In this sense, architecture and urbanism can integrate in the space those who inhabit it, by listening to different perspectives that emerge in today's society.

Keywords: Participation, architecture, urban design, urban management, SAAL, Lisbon