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Co-creation Processes to Rethink Architectural Design

Guest Editors' Note

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The central theme of *JOELHO 15* is urban architecture of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, with a special focus on the way in which a project is revealed as a space for collective engagement. The processes of producing architecture and urban environments have always arisen from transformations brought about by the collective, i.e. by society. The city, moreover, is the space in which these changes are engraved in our collective memory, their origins embedded in cultural, social, economic-financial, and political phenomena, among others.

The intense social and artistic movements that emerged from the political struggles of the 1960s spurred many architects to seek new ways to conceive of the public as the ultimate consumers of architecture. Answers were sought to the challenges engendered by the urgent need to house urban populations who were living in precarious conditions; new paradigms for architectural education were being advanced, and the uses of public space in the city became a prominent concern. In response, architects were motivated to explore design practices that involved members of the public in the decision-making process, especially during certain of its stages. Architecture became more deeply embedded in human concerns with the contributions of Giancarlo De Carlo's pilot projects for Siena and Terni, the housing programmes developed by the Portuguese Service of Local

- 1 Sherry R. Arnstein, “A Ladder of Citizen Participation,” *JAIPI*, vol. 35, no. 4 (July 1969): 216–224.
- 2 The University of Coimbra and the editors are involved in *URBINAT*, coordinated by the Centre for Social Studies, with seven European cities – Porto, Nantes, Sofia, Hoje-Taastrup, Brussels, Siena and Nova Gorica. The *URBINAT* project has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 776783.

Ambulatory Support (Serviço de Apoio Ambulatório Local – SAAL), or the theoretical framework “A Ladder of Citizen Participation,” proposed by Sherry R. Arnstein in 1969.¹ Nevertheless, this legacy was abandoned in the later 1980s and 1990s mainly due to an emerging neoliberal political model, the emergence of the star system in architecture, and the limitations of such participatory processes.

Today, political, sociocultural, economic, financial and, in particular, climate crises pervade the five continents to varying degrees. This has reawakened a need to foster greater dialogue between those responsible for spatial planning—architects, urban planners, and landscape architects—and the public, whether those who live, study, and work in a particular environment or are visitors to it. In this context, the promotion of urban regeneration processes is taking place both in the cities’ central areas, in which tourists and a new generation of citizens are welcomed, and in their outskirts, with the aspiration of offering better conditions for the local communities. In many of these processes, citizens are being invited to participate along with design technicians to develop solutions. International institutions are playing an active role in challenging municipalities, academia, the third sector, companies and citizens to organize transsectorial and transdisciplinary partnerships in order to co-create processes and solutions to transform urban as well as rural contexts, by addressing climate and social challenges. The New European Bauhaus, Horizon Europe, the H2020 programmes and “Bairros Saudáveis” have funded projects, such as *URBINAT*, that aim to activate an inclusive urban regeneration process in several European cities through the engagement of the local communities in the co-creation of their public space with nature, the social economy, education, sports, culture, among other dimensions.²

This openness of the citizenry to participative processes of urban regeneration has brought about a growth in public awareness of the issues associated with social inclusion and climate change, in the frame of the seventeen sustainable development objectives established by the UN (see <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>). Broadly speaking, participatory processes operate on the principle of combating inequalities and guaranteeing an inclusive life for all, as in the case of feminist, intersectional perspectives. The present-day practice of architecture is inherently linked to these global debates. As always, the city constitutes a privileged space where society’s intentions for the future are expressed.

JOELHO 15 explores whether citizen participation in the different stages of the design process has, or may have, tangible consequences for the way the city is projected and experienced. In this sense, the seven papers selected address three main approaches related to theoretical positioning, critical review of historical cases and contemporary research and professional practices, complemented in some cases by interdisciplinary dialogue with knowledge areas that are relevant to the co-creation process.

The theoretical approaches are rooted in two meaningful, trans-European debates that rethink established concepts. On one side, the political approach of the right to the city anchored in the work of several authors, from the urban sociologists Henri Lefebvre and David Harvey to Michel de Certeau's views on walking and Reyner Banham's concept of the responsive environment. This debate is explored in "Doors, Floors, Street: Searching for Meaning in an Uneven Urban World" by Márcio Valença, where the co-creation concept is "seen as the ultimate form of participation, as a tool in public policy and regarding all its phases or cycles." On the other side is the architecture of participation debate explored by Hugo Moline through "Giancarlo De Carlo's Realistic Utopia: Critical Counter-Images within an Architecture of Participation," supported by De Carlo's texts, drawings, and projects.

The critical review of processes, projects, and works of architectural and urban design that are the result of participatory processes is highlighted with two contributions. "Jane Drew and Minnette De Silva pioneering participatory architecture in mid-century India and Sri Lanka," by Inês Leonor Nunes, as research that puts two modern female architects that were based in the Asia in dialogue, introducing not only the modern principles but also an innovative participatory design process. Also innovative was the SAAL process in Portugal, as mentioned above, due to the architects' political engagement with the democratization process in Portugal after the 1974 revolution and their will to create participatory design actions in more than 100 operations across the country. "Architecture from an alternative power: Participation and design in the Catujal Workers Estate SAAL Operation," by Rui del Pino Fernandes, João Cunha Borges, and Teresa Marat-Mendes, puts one of the less-known operations on the map.

Finally, contemporary and research practices are framed by two complementary dimensions. First are contemporary co-creative practices that include new models and tools for participation that affect action upon the city, developed in two opposite urban contexts. In the Danish public space, Nabil Zacharias Ben Chaabane, Nicolas Rodemann Lehmann, Nanna Maj Østergaard, Cecilie Jessen Hansen contribute with "Practice What You Preach! An Account of Urban Design from the Perspective of the Practitioner," based on the SLA projects that integrate participatory design to co-create nature-based solutions. In the Brazilian city of Recife, Bruno Ferreira and Fernando Diniz Moreira write about "The Emergence of Collectives of Architects and the Incorporation of their Practices in Institutional Projects in Recife post #OcupeEstelita," taking this case study as an anchor for the research. Secondly, pedagogical and research experiments that apply models and tools of participatory architecture were developed in Guimarães, a city in the north of Portugal, funded by the national programme *Bairros Saudáveis*. "Palace of Imagination: a Way of Co-creating with Children in Emboladoura Neighbourhood, Guimarães" reports and reflects on an action research project coordinated by the

3 Peter Blundell Jones, Doina Petrescu and Jeremy Till, "Introduction," in *Architecture and Participation* (Routledge, 2013), xvi.

authors, Cidália Ferreira da Silva, Gabriela Trevisan, Mariana Carvalho and Diana Gouveia, where children are engaged to co-create solutions for their "palaces."

The artistic, social and technical dimensions of architects' work, which left a mark on twentieth-century practices, have evolved accordingly to engage different forms of thought and knowledge, leading many architects to rethink their position regarding the architectural project. On the one hand, revision of the architect's role is now more necessary than ever to reflect on new epistemological and evolutionary aims, with attention to the ontological crisis of the city, as the low density of urban sprawl entails challenges to the city as an eminently political entity. On the other hand, the rethinking of architectural design practices is making the fragilities of the architect's education more visible, still based as it is in most cases on the artistic and technical dimensions, placing the social in a secondary role. There is still a fear of architects losing their autonomy and scientific knowledge due to the need for interaction with citizens and stakeholders. In fact, participation implies negotiation and conflict, but also an opportunity to clarify design methods and make the design process more transparent. In this sense, co-creation challenges architects to research, teach, think and practise other ways of doing architecture, because "participation is not just a catalyst for the transformation of the role (and eventual lives) of users, but also for the transformation of architectural practice."³