

Homabout

Stimulating architectural knowledge via an online platform



Master in Architecture dissertation

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Professor Doctor Armando Rabaça

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This thesis materializes the overcoming of a challenging path strengthened by many people whose names I will keep forever. Even so, I owe special thanks to my:

tutors,

Bruno Gil and Armando Rabaça, not only for their institutional support, but also for believing I was capable of accomplishing my ambitions;

employers,

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although far away and fighting unfair battles, showed me the way to perseverance;

better-half,

Mónica, for uncovering the secrets of life;

Lastly, I dedicate the essay to my **siblings**.

“Failure is an option. If things are not failing, you are not innovating enough.”

Elon Musk

Abstract

Key-words: Architectural Culture, Society, Communication, Internet

The quality of the built environment depends on society's architectural culture. An engaged public leads to a rise in the quality criteria, benefiting both professional practice and customers. However, such cultural development, besides being a reflex of an historic past, depends on a mediation of present architectural solutions with the use of a clear and enduring language by those who disseminate architecture.

From exhibitions to documentaries, different communication formats have been used throughout history, contributing to strengthening ties between architecture and society. As a complement to drawing, the main architectural conception and mediation tool, architectural communication has evolved in parallel with technological advances, such as the photographic industry, establishing a less abstract dialogue with an increasingly heterogeneous public, made up of individuals of diverse interests and culture backgrounds.

The Internet has come to assume a central role in information facilitation, and access to it has become more democratic. Thus, it is essential to study who delivers it

and what methods are used to communicate architecture online at the present. The current dissertation distinguishes four profiles: the press-release, online magazines, professional associations and architecture studio webpages. The business models rely mainly on advertisements, which in turn dependent on online traffic. Online communication is the reflex of the demand for immediate answers to different stimulus. As a result, the online environment privileges the image over other forms of discourse and leads to an easy and consumable but often superficial and ephemeral one instead. However, some individuals resist this process and seek a reduction of the architectural deficit using innovative yet still underdeveloped tools.

In order to facilitate this, the writer ultimately envisages creating a prototype of an online platform. Entitled Homabout, it aims to contribute to the stimulation of architectural knowledge in a culturally significant manner. The conclusions drawn from a state-of-the-art analysis of similar platforms supports an alternative editorial strategy whose discourse displays a non-abstract and untechnical language that ultimately seeks to disseminate architecture in a pedagogic manner.

Resumo

Palavras-chave: Cultura Arquitectónica, Sociedade, Comunicação, Internet

A qualidade do ambiente construído depende da cultura arquitectónica de toda a comunidade. Uma sociedade mais conexas e sensível à disciplina dará lugar à elevação dos critérios qualitativos da procura e por sua vez beneficiará tanto a classe profissional da arquitectura como os seus clientes. Contudo, este desenvolvimento cultural, além de reflexo de um passado histórico, depende de uma mediação consequente das soluções arquitectónicas pelos profissionais no presente, a par de uma linguagem clara e cativante por parte de quem publica e difunde arquitectura.

Ao longo da história foram usados diversos meios de comunicação, desde exposições a documentários, que contribuíram de forma basilar para a aproximação da arquitectura à sociedade. Enquanto complemento ao desenho como principal instrumento de concepção e mediação de projecto, o desenvolvimento da comunicação evoluiu a par com progressos tecnológicos, como é exemplo a fotografia, permitindo assim estabelecer um diálogo menos abstracto com um público cada vez mais heterogéneo, de indivíduos de diferentes culturas e interesses.

A Internet tem vindo a assumir um papel predominante na facilitação de informação e o seu acesso tem-se tornado cada vez mais democrático. É portanto fundamental estudar quais os agentes e os métodos correntemente usados para comunicar online a arquitectura. Na presente análise são distinguidos quatro perfis de agentes: plataformas de difusão de publicações, revistas online, instituições profissionais oficiais e ateliers de arquitectura. Apesar das diferentes estratégias editoriais, todos procuram agregar tráfego de modo a validarem o modelo de negócio em curso. A urgência imposta pela expectativa do 'imediato' privilegia a imagem e o discurso superficial e efémero sobre a arquitectura. Contudo, há excepções que procuram contrariar esta prática, que por via de diferentes meios, apesar ainda pouco desenvolvidos, procuram reduzir o deficit de cultura arquitectónica.

Finalmente, a presente dissertação propõe uma plataforma online – *Homabout* – que tem como principal objectivo contribuir para o estímulo do conhecimento arquitectónico de forma culturalmente significativa. Com base na análise do estado de arte deste tipo de plataformas, é proposta uma estratégia editorial alternativa que preveja uma linguagem menos abstracta e técnica e mais direccionada para uma veiculação pedagógica da arquitectura.

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Introduction

From professional associations to cultural institutions, different agents promote ethical professional practices and the enhancement of architectural culture. On the one hand, professionals claim a better comprehension and recognition of their professional practice,¹ and on the other, society depreciates architects because the proposition of value they offer remains ambiguous. According to Pedro Brandão (1996, p. 44), this is because “*the big masses have difficulties in accessing the erudite architectural culture*”.² He continues, “*The deficient use of mass media and the crystallization of a hermetic discourse between professionals have not been beneficial for the dialogue between professionals and citizens*”. Hence communication is the trigger for a more inclusive practice and architects must assume an active attitude.

In parallel, according to the Royal Institute of British Architects [RIBA] (2012, p.5)

¹The Portuguese Association of Architects (*Ordem dos Arquitectos* [OA]) promoted an inquiry entitled ‘*Relatório Profissão: Arquitecto/a*’ among professionals in 2006, the findings of which revealed critical tensions in the definition of their identity. 79.5% of respondents agreed that ‘the citizens do not know what architects do’; 73.7% agreed that ‘society sees architecture as a luxury’; 76.8% believed that ‘customers do not value them’; 70% said that ‘engineers are more important than architects’; and finally the idea that ‘the wage received does not justify the expense’ was given by 51% of respondents.

² The translation of this and other Portuguese authors’ quotes is the dissertation author’s responsibility.

“today’s home buyers are dissatisfied with the new homes available to them”. Considering the English context, the study *The Way We Live Now* (Ipsos MORI & RIBA, 2012, p. 40) showed citizens preferred homes from the Victorian and Georgian eras because they believed these offered more space, light and flexibility and the current spaces available were not “tailored to contemporary lifestyles and developing trends”. In fact, *The Case for Space* (RIBA, 2014, p. 5) argues that just twenty-five per cent of people would choose a home built in the last ten years. The reasons given are related to the negligible involvement of clients in the design of homes and the lack of transparency in the marketing of the housing industry. Paradoxically, people have more information about cars than homes, even if housing is one of the most relevant financial decisions one makes in life.

In order to improve architectural knowledge among people, it is vital to understand how to communicate clearer in a culturally significant manner. Both cultural enhancers and disseminators must be identified and its practises clarified to perceive how society has been sensitized to architecture. Architectural culture has evolved from an intense exchange across three poles: creation, dissemination and reception. For the sake of comprehension, the reader should consider that architects are located at the creative pole; institutions like schools, museums, and professional associations are responsible for dissemination; and the population in general receives the generated culture. In truth, these boundaries are not so clear cut, since reality demands multifaceted practises in different areas of action. Architects have also assumed the dissemination and consumption role, institutions have embraced research into new knowledge that enriches the cultural domain, and some individuals, initially confined to the reception pole, participate actively in the development of the culture by reporting publically their findings, experience and opinion. Nonetheless, both creation and dissemination poles are dependent on being part of an integrated society in order to legitimate their practices.

The integration of a society³ depends on a number of independent processes and factors. The most relevant to consider in this essay is language because without it there is no cultural exchange. A language consists of diverse codes for concepts passed through civilizations and taught since the first day of a human beings' life. Nonetheless, it is not just a method to name objects and actions, it is a cultural communion of a collective of individuals. Concerning architecture, the most effective form of learning is still to experience physically a planned space, but in the absence of such a possibility, it is necessary to use communication tools. Along with history, architecture assets, nature and objectives have been promoted, mainly through the use of spatial abstract drawings, and more recently by photographs and visualizations.⁴ However, storytelling can enhance the development of a broader architectural culture. Whether reality or fiction, a story has the ability to engage the reader, deliver a message and establish a connection, even when the tale has already ended.

“Perhaps the best way to conjure up buildings for clients and builders in our architectural era is still through a story telling that will arrange, amend, change and animate reality only because embraces multiple viewpoints and extends perception. However, to achieve this of storytelling in the facture of architecture is to exclude in its entirety the empty fast-talking used by to many architects to unfold building proposals presented with the new media.” (Sharr, 2012, p. 226)

³ The sociologist Edward Shils researched the close relation between society and culture. Taking society as the basic unit of analysis, he defined its hierarchy and the development of cultures. The validation of these social dynamics depends, among other factors, on the exchange and communion of ideologies, and consequently results in integration.

“Integration is thus not an indefinitely extensible condition of society. Human beings have limited capacities for integration, and collectivises formed likewise have limited capacities. The increase in the integration of society occurs at the expense of the internal integration of parts of society and some of the most important limits to the integration of society are thrown up by the exertions of communities.... It is impossible for any society to be fully integrated.” (Shils, 1982, p. 37)

⁴ Architectural visualizations are a technique for simulating photography or video animations of a built environment under planning. Such visual imagery has been an effective way to communicate both abstract and concrete ideas over the ages. However, these technical representations that technology projects tend to simplify the picture.

The current thesis aims to profile an online platform – *Homabout*, for the purpose of stimulating architectural knowledge in a culturally significant manner. The Internet is the information channel adopted for this purpose, since it has become the main information platform and tends to be accessible every day to more and more people in a cost-free way. Furthermore, *Homabout* aims to be rooted in a historical analysis of architectural communication to deliver a value proposition in contrast to the current offer. As the Internet has established different language codes and dynamics to previous media, the thesis study is divided into two periods: before and after the online era.

During the last two centuries different communication formats were used in order to stimulate architectural culture. World Fairs were vital to showcase world's architectural diversity in the nineteenth century. Revolutionary buildings like the Crystal Palace provided exciting glimpses of the future and had the ability to communicate technological construction advances to a larger spectrum of the population, while, at same time, they featured cultures from around the world. Later, key exhibitions organized by the modernist movement like '*Weißenhofsiedlung*' and the modern architecture exhibition at MoMA introduced new ideologies regarding the habitat concept and the use of technology in benefit of the human quotidian. In addition, publications have also been fundamental to disseminating disciplinary knowledge in both theoretical and practical terms, alongside architectural history. Magazines such as *California Arts & Architecture*, *Life* and *Time* have used architecture to mark the shifting point of economic, social and cultural supremacy to the US, to the detriment of Europe, during the post-war period. Nevertheless, the French director, Jacques Tati, satirized the emergent influence of American culture in '*Mon Oncle*', and later in *Playtime*, where the director insinuates that France has overcome the US through its own capitalist strategy. Documentaries are another format that have been used to enhance the dissemination of architectural knowledge. *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces* directed by William H. Whyte (1980) features an analysis of

the open spaces created during the post-war period. The simple narrative offers a clear visual exposition of argument that ultimately introduces a new methodology for observing and analysing urban architecture to viewers. Lastly, *Sketches of Frank Gehry*, directed by Sydney Pollack in 2006, is a marketing piece that misleads the viewer into celebrating the artist-architect, whose goal is to plan beautiful objects of worship. Nonetheless, the *Guggenheim* in Bilbao illustrates the potential benefits that architecture can generate beyond the designed object.

The second part of the thesis centres on the current economy of attention dominated by the media, which supplies information in order to gather devotion in return. Moreover, the Internet has established immediate access to information, whether relevant or not, leading the online media to focus on fulfilling the frantic desire to find answers to direct questions instantaneously. The instant demand to consume privileges the image at the detriment of other, non-visual communication means, resulting in an unbridled scrolling, that in turn benefits quantity over quality. Regarding online architectural website profiles, it is possible to distinguish four main categories whose activity focus is to deliver architectural knowledge to society with diverse goals: press releases, online magazines, professional architecture organizations and architecture studios' webpages. Although the communication strategies for approaching the public are different, the practice converges at a single point: creating exposure by providing information in order to have more traffic and consequently profit. Apart from some good examples, such as the *RIBA* and *Gehl Architects*, the Internet lacks discourses that stimulate curiosity and further research and contribute explanations involving intellectual reasoning beyond iconographic images.

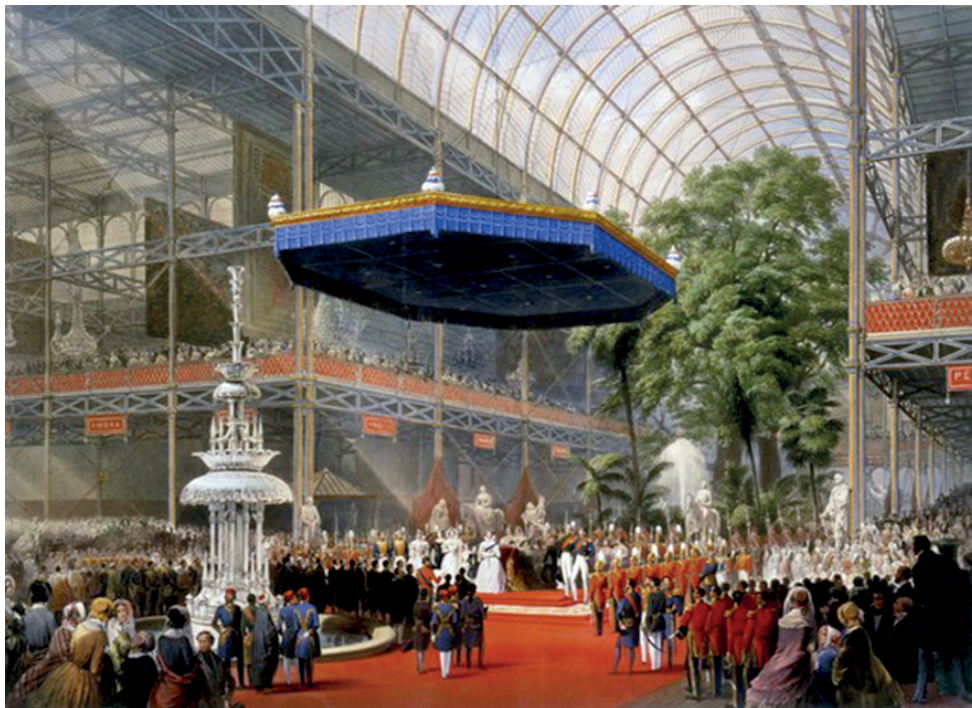
Lastly, the dissertation profiles *Homabout*, an online platform that stimulates architectural knowledge in a culturally significant manner. The website reflects on the opportunities and weaknesses discussed in the previous chapters; hence, the new

platform seeks to offer a value proposition alternative to superficial online press-releases by applying an editorial strategy that privileges a clear explanation of spatiality values and architectural solutions. As a storytelling platform, *Homabout* aims to trigger interest about architecture on a case study basis. By inviting different curators, the editorial strategy seeks different angles and perspectives that communicate more clearly with the ultimate architecture receiver – society. During the trial period, housing will be the core program since since the shelter concept has been central to human society throughout its evolution and involves a significant amount of both financial investment and personal fulfilment.

1 Architectural dissemination before Internet

People cannot demand high quality architecture if they have not been made aware of architecture's purpose. The perception of a service is the first requisite to stimulating curiosity about it and consequently the desire to enjoy its benefits. Throughout history, architects, particularly professional associations, have developed different strategies to promote architectural knowledge and raise awareness of the spatial quality impact on private and public environments. In 1906, twenty-six delegates from around the world met in London for the VII International Congress of Architects in order to plan policies "*to educate public taste in architecture as we educate it, for instance, in music or in painting*" (RIBA, 1906, p. 290). Nine concrete solutions¹ were suggested "*for the benefit of the public, whose education will increase; of architects, whose status will improve ...; of art, by means of which it will ensure the respect of*

¹The discussion (RIBA, 1906, pp. 290-291) covered the education of the public in architecture among other issues inherent to the professional practise. In order to enhance architectural knowledge it was recommended to introduce "*photographs or drawings showing the specimens of classical works of architecture*", as well as "*teaching of aesthetics and of the history and theory of the fine arts*". In addition, the present entities agreed to "*promote permanent exhibitions of architectonic works, conveniently classified, represented by drawings, photographs, or models, and illustrated with short descriptive explanations*", and that, "*Free chairs should be endowed for the divulgation of the history and theory of architecture.*" Lastly, "*it would also be expedient to arrange cheap excursions to the most renowned buildings of all countries, the parties to be presided over by an architect who would lecture on the monuments visited.*"



Crystal Palace, Sir Joseph Paxton
Louis Haghe

everybody". Architectural communication has taken place through diverse formats, such as exhibitions, publications, motion pictures and documentaries. Although some events occurred in parallel, they had different impacts on the public sphere. As a matter of efficiency, this study does not carry out an exhaustive analysis of an extensive list of events; instead, two examples of each relevant format were selected to illustrate the potential media repercussions they created at a certain moment of recent history.

At the end of the nineteenth century, the World Fairs greatly increased the awareness of global cultural richness in a world revolutionized by technologic, economic, social and cultural developments. By displaying architecture, the exhibitions were an entertainment showcase which, besides exhibiting the best of the present, also featured highlights from the past and provided tantalizing glimpses of the future. According to Wesemael (2001, p. 17) "*they played a role as an intermediary between high and low culture, between upper, middle and lower class, and between trade, industry, technology, science, and art on the other hand, and the layperson's more direct world of experience on the other.*" In 1851, the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations in London showed the architectural potential of iron and glass among other new industrial building materials and methods. The impact on visitors was tremendous, especially their experience of the Crystal Palace, designed by John Paxton. After all the polemic and chaos that industry had brought, the technological construction displayed "*a gentle side, it aroused feelings that seemed to belong only to the world of dreams*" (Giedion, 1967, p. 249). The Crystal Palace marked a convergence between architecture and the public. In 1889, the world's tallest tower was built in Paris, also for a World Fair. Although nearly two million people visited the Eiffel Tower during the exhibition, a committee of three hundred intellectuals sent a petition to the Minister of Works and Commissioner for the Exposition protest-

ing against its construction.² The criticism generated an intense exchange of arguments - while the supporters saw in the three hundred meter high Eiffel Tower all the purpose, meaning and potential of an emerging modern society empowered by industry, the opponents, as Guy de Maupassant stated, saw it as a “*useless monster*”. He said he had to eat dinner there every night of the week “*because it’s the only place in Paris from where you can’t see the Eiffel Tower*” (BBC, “A Point of View: Staring at the Shard”, 2013). The controversy generated a public discussion in the media that contributed in a positive way to debates about architecture, as well as stimulating historical investigation by journalists and society.

The beginning of the twentieth century was marked by exhibitions designed strategically to disseminate the modernist movement. The propaganda was sold not only as an architectural style; it was rather promoted as a full enhancement of daily life experience and as an example as the standard ‘Frankfurt kitchen’ designed by the Austrian architect Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky. The same modern prefabrication approach was also seen in 1927, when the ‘*Deutscher Werkbund*’ organized the exposition ‘*Weissenhofsiedlung*’ in Stuttgart, Germany. The theme was the modern home, represented by a colony of pure volumetric white houses, highly prefabricated in order to make architecture accessible to everyone.³ Mies van der Rohe, as artistic

² An extract from the protest against the Eiffel Tower: “We come, we writers, painters, sculptors, architects, lovers of the beauty of Paris which was until now intact, to protest with all our strength and all our indignation, in the name of the underestimated taste of the French, in the name of French art and history under threat, against the erection in the very heart of our capital, of the useless and monstrous Eiffel Tower which popular ill-feeling, so often an arbiter of good sense and justice, has already christened the Tower of Babel.... Is the City of Paris any longer to associate itself with the baroque and mercantile fancies of a builder of machines, thereby making itself irreparably ugly and bringing dishonour?” (Venturi, 1996, p. 213)

³ A year before Mies appointment to direct Weissenhof he proclaimed in the journal *G* the civilizational need for pursuing the discovery of new materials and techniques. Thus, the exhibition emerged as the perfect vehicle to try new developments in the construction industry.

“I consider the industrialization of building methods the key problem of the day for architects and builders ... All the parts will be made in the factory and the work at the site will consist only of assemblage, requiring extremely few man hours. This will greatly reduce building costs. Then the new architecture will come into its own. I am convinced that traditional methods of building will disappear. In case anyone regrets that the house of the future can no longer be made by hand workers, it should be borne in mind that the automobile is no longer manufactured by carriage makers.” (Mies as cited in Schulze, 1985, p. 132)



Postcard Weissenhofsiedlung, Araberdorf
Nazi Propaganda

director, designed the master plan and invited sixteen European architects “*of such talent, scope, and record that the buildings they designed for a hill overlooking the city certified, as nothing before, the triumph of the modernist program.*” (Schulze & Windhorst, 2012, p. 94). The construction was completed within just five months, in spite of severely over-running the estimated budget. Nonetheless, it drew large crowds during the summer, forcing an extension of three weeks, partly due to the fact that it was indicted for endorsing communism.⁴ Another relevant exhibition took place in 1932 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, USA. Philip Johnson and Hitchcock “*wanted to write off modernism as a model for living or housing*” (Geert Bekaert, 2012, p. 109) by showcasing the advances of modernist architecture in Europe. For the announcement, Philip Johnson (1932, p. 1) wrote a magnificent marketing document describing the featured architecture as the “*International Style*” and “*probably the first fundamentally original and widely distributed style since the Gothic*”. The language suggests an extraordinary exhibition of “*some of the most prominent architects of the world*” who “*have chosen the highest achievement in twentieth century architecture*”. He continued to tempt a target audience beyond the professional: “*their models will demonstrate that modern architecture can achieve practical expression in every line of building*”. Besides models, photographs, perspectives and plans, the visitors had access to two official publications in order to keep in touch with the new volumetric architecture, where there was no place for ornaments. The showcase was a success and, according to Flowers (2009, p. 75) “*the exhibit and book assumed a central place in most narratives of twentieth-century American modern architecture*”.

⁴The fact that both traditionalists and pro-Nazis accused Weissenhof of showcasing communism motivated a heated debate that once again brought architecture to the centre of the public sphere. In line with their progressive philosophy, the Nazis considered the functionalist modern attitude decadent by displaying a language of the past whose support constituted unpatriotic behaviour. In 1939, the photomontage entitled ‘*Araberdorf*’, Arab Village, published in the journal *Focus*, illustrated the manipulation of communication channels in the service of an ideology. It featured a juxtaposition of a residential complex photograph with Arabian cultural elements in order to ridicule the architectural work that the Nazis suggested should be demolished.

A silver-screen will be located on the wall above the piano (high enough to avoid the head of a piano player and at a slanting angle allowing spectators to relax on settee at the north wall and couches). This location is directly opposite a built-in television and home movie projector. When not in use, the screen disappears into a pocket behind the piano.

Fresh air fireplace units in both fireplaces are engineered to draw fresh air from outside directly into rear of the firebox. This will avoid the dissipation of oxygen, and will circulate warmed air in addition to the radiation of heat from the open fire. All sliding room and wardrobe doors will be equipped with space saving and quiet gliding hardware. Automatic garage doors which open and close both upon arrival and departure by pressing a button either in the car or in the house. An exhaust fan will be used in kitchen and bothrooms to eliminate steam and doors. All wardrobes will have airvents to air clothing. Foam glass blocks will be used as insulation under floor slab and radiant heating pipes which will eliminate heat loss through the ground and give protection against moisture and cold. All lavatories and sinks to have foot or knee control in accordance with the conditions around the fixture in question.

A soundtrack connecting future home talkies to loud-speaker of radio by separate switch will be installed. The lighting system will be shown in detail later. In general, diffused indirect lighting with additional ample light concentration for reading and working areas is planned. In areas requiring protection against insects, rust-proof plastic screens, which eliminate stains on surrounding finishes, will be used. At this point, no consideration can be given to those radical changes and innovations, which despite understandable enthusiasm, are still in the talking stage. If and when they are made available to the commercial market, serious consideration will be given them in the necessary re-planning of details when the time to build is at hand.

LIVING ROOM: wood of gray oak. Wall over fireplace very soft gray-blue. Ceiling and light cove, light warm gray.

ENTRANCE HALL: gray-blue, matching living-room, on both walls and ceiling, and continued on soffit of light cove.

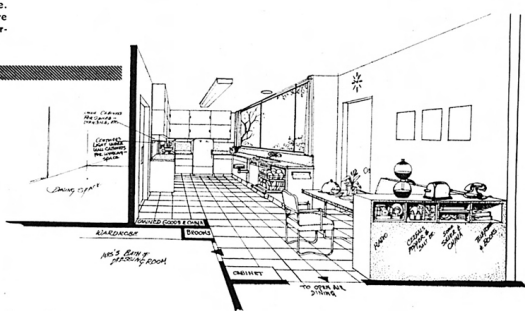
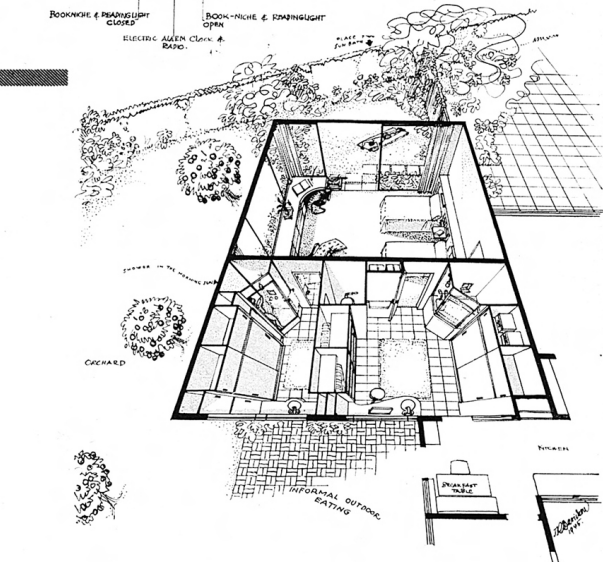
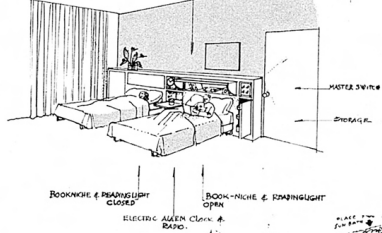
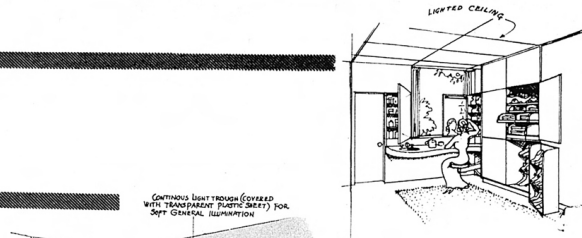
PARENTS' BEDROOM: furniture in bleached birch. Walls and ceiling pale lemon yellow. Carpeting of rough uncut weave in darker gray and beige-two-tone.

MR.'S BATH-DRESSING ROOM: same pale yellow in one of the aforementioned bathroom wall materials, including wardrobe doors and built-in dressing tables.

Asphalt tile of floor in a darker warm-gray, mottled.

MRS.'S BATH-DRESSING ROOM: very soft grayish pink on walls and wardrobes. Asphalt tile in plum color.

KITCHEN: lower part of cabinets of steel will be finished in white porcelain enamel to match built-in range and sink. All working surfaces and splashback reaching to bottom line of upper cabinets are to be of stainless steel with pebbled, glareless, and scratch-proof finish. Upper cabinets in pale dove blue. Ceiling in darker blue. Walls and built-in furniture of breakfast area in pale lemon yellow for cheerfulness.



Historically, the central role that publications played in disseminating disciplinary knowledge in both theoretical and practical scopes is well known. In the mid-twentieth century a massive burgeoning of architectural magazines occurred, which pursued the inclusion of the masses as consumers of architecture, mainly in the United States. Magazines like *Arts & Architecture* and *Life* took advantage of the emerging low-cost printing technologies and photographic developments, in order to approach a large spectrum of society who had not been the communication target until then. *The Case Study House Program* sponsored by *Arts & Architecture* was envisioned as answering the high demand for housing caused by the return of millions of soldiers from the Second World War. The highly publicized program encouraged the commissioned American architects to use donated materials from industry and manufacturers in order to offer low-cost modern housing models.⁵ The result was an understanding of the public by participant professionals and an evolving interest on the part of society for good design. According to McCoy (1962, p. 204): “*The name and work of each individual architect were known by laymen*”. The magazine published thirty-six entries, each one displayed an extensive description illustrated with perspectives, model, photographs and diagrams. The articles were thought of as sensitive marketing pieces of good design made for people in general. The work of Julius Shulman, the same photographer of *Stahl House*, also known as *Case Study House #22* was also a key piece of another article that marks the zenith of modernist architectural communication. Published in *Life* magazine in 1949, *Glamourized Houses* featured the *Kaufmann House*, designed by Richard Neutra, which projected

⁵ Entenza (as cited McCoy, 1962, p. 204), the director of *Arts & Architecture* magazine, expected that the program would be “*accepted as a sincere attempt not merely to preview, but to assist in giving some direction to the creative thinking on housing being done by architects and good manufactures whose joint objective is good housing*.” The program ran from 1945 until 1966 and went far beyond expectations. The initial program (Entenza, 1945, p. 38-40) stated that “*each house must be capable of duplication and in no sense be an individual performance*” and that “*the overall program will be general enough to be of practical assistance to the average American in search of a home in which he can afford to live (...). Perhaps we will cling longest to the symbol of ‘house’ as we have known it, or perhaps we will realize that in accommodating ourselves to a new world the important step in avoiding retrogression into the old, is a willingness to understand and to accept contemporary ideas in the creation of environment that is responsible for shaping the largest part of our living and thinking.*”



Kaufmann House, Richard Neutra
Julius Shulman

an ‘imagined way of life’ atmosphere. The perfect balance of the geometrical spatiality, in contrast to the organic curves of the mountains and the mysterious fog, created “one of the most famous architectural photographs ever taken” (Mahall & Serbest, 2009, p. 120). Neutra immediately understood the potential of publication in magazines and from that moment his photographic productions became themselves a complex plan.⁶ According to Dione Neutra (1983, p. 271), manipulation during the shoot sessions was taken to the limit: “We would plan the shrubbery, we would hold branches in order to complete his conception... We would also bring furniture along and photograph the house as long as it was empty and not defiled by old furniture”. Paradoxically, photographs have shown the potential to create a perfect sales environment, as well as being a medium to involve society in architectural discussion.

The cinema industry has recurred to built environments in order to enhance the message since its inception. ‘*Mon Oncle*’, directed by Jacques Tati in 1958, is a good example, where the architectural scenario assumes a fundamental role in the storytelling. The movie reflected on dramatic social changes imposed by modern developments, where the architecture symbolized failure. In fact, Tati was distinguished among French filmmakers of the ‘50s for his criticism of modernism, mechanization, and emergent mass consumerism. In order to compose the satire, he presented a family amazed with the ‘fashionable’ architecture, allegorized in Arpel’s new modern villa, equipped with futurist gadgetry that latterly did not fit with their needs. ‘*Mon Oncle*’ worshipped the former glamorized France that had progressively been seized by the radical architectural renovations in French urban areas throughout the 1950s

⁶ Neutra’s biographer Thomas Hines (as cited as Niedenthal, 1993, p. 106) noted the architect’s early skills of self-promotion: “He was willing and able, via skillful publicity, to maximize and give meaning to what would otherwise have been minor commissions”. Neutra understood that the published photographs brought him commissions. Dione Neutra (as cited Niedenthal, 1993, p. 106) stated “all the clients came through publications”, and quoted a client who was asked to justify why they had chosen Neutra: “Well, we saw this book of houses, and we looked through it, and every time we came to a house we liked and we’d look at the end, it was a Neutra house.” According to Niedenthal (1993, p. 106) Neutra learned how to benefit from the media coverage, “It was clearly in Neutra’s character to embrace an effectively placed photograph whether or not it did justice to his expressed design intentions.”



Playtime
Jacques Tati

and brought to the heart of the debate the clash of cultures between old and new France. Nine years later, in 1967, Tati directed *Playtime*. Although the theme and humorous angle remained, the director confined his criticism to the new capitalist world. Between the two movies, post-war Paris had become a neo-bourgeois city. The picture motion displayed the new orthogonal order that organizes the city, architecture and social behaviours. The rational organization contrasted to the main character, Hulot, and its American fellows, who looked lost in the new French development. In these scenes, the director “*insinuates the French have even surpassed the Americans at their own game, exhibiting their advance level of civilization in not just their mastery of technology but their penchant for culture*” (Lamster, 2000, p. 182). In addition, Tati established a voyeuristic perspective, so the viewer had the impression of surreptitiously entering the movie through a virtual window. Along with his work, Jacques Tati used architecture as a framework for the evolving detractor dialogue that inevitably concerned the relationship between the social culture and the surrounding built environment.

On the other hand, the documentary format allows the director to report exclusively on one topic. Architectural documentaries offer a unique opportunity for viewers to learn about the past and spark the spectator to further research. *The Social Life of Small Urban Space* directed by William H. Whyte (1980) introduced a new aesthetic and urban quantitative data to society in general. The documentary originated from the *Street Life Project*, about urban planning, social behaviour, and human flows in New York, which resulted in different books, including the one with the same title as the documentary. Through observation, Whyte tried to identify which elements of open spaces made them liveable in or otherwise lifeless. The idea of evidence being expressed visually and with a straightforward narrative made it available to everyone. For instance, the opening shot is a time lapse of six hours that presents how people congregate according to the position of the sun at the plaza in front of the Seagram Building. In addition, different elements were analysed separately, like seating areas,

proximity to the street, proximity to food, the presence of water, and the presence of trees, in order to understand what made the Seagram plaza pleasant to repose in. As a result, the showcased methodology qualified the viewer of the documentary to perceive the urban environment from a new perspective. Alternatively, the dissemination of the architecture can be carried out through documentaries on professionals, which additionally contribute to celebrating their careers. *Sketches of Frank Gehry*, directed in 2006 by Sydney Pollack, features footage of several buildings designed by the ‘star architect’. Although the film happened after he had garnered both critical acclaim and popular recognition, it went beyond what Bradshaw (“Sketches of Frank Gehry”, 2007), from *The Guardian*, saw as “an intelligent piece of partisan adoration”. In the documentary, his design appears to blur the difference between art and architecture and the models referred to are dynamic structures. The motion could rather present his architectural strategies for solving geographical and social issues in order to contribute to a clearer perception of professional practice by society. The Guggenheim in Bilbao assumes a central role in the narrative. Rosenthal referred to it as “a vision of paradise”; and the director, who is expected to have an impartial point of view, stated: “I haven’t seen a building like Bilbao. It has got more sensual, musical. Where all that came from?” Despite the lack of opposing perspectives, the viewer has the opportunity to understand the tremendous benefits that architecture can bring, beyond the building itself, when a local journalist and the director of the museum explain the highly theorized ‘Bilbao Effect’, the impressive increment in local tourism and city centre occupation rates. Besides this, the documentary is an effective marketing campaign, illustrative of manipulation by the media.

Even though some formats share the same communication techniques and language, they serve different purposes. World Fairs, modern exhibitions, referred press publications and the documentary about Frank Gehry are part of a promoting process of architectural ideologies. On the other hand, Jacques Tati’s movies and *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces* are critical works that reflect on the impact of these set-



The Last Glimpse, Wall Stalker
Nathalie Frankowsk, Cruz Garcia

tled ideologies. Both standpoints build operative discourses, be they written, visual or cinematographic, that shape public opinion about architecture.

Currently, the world is living in an economy of attention, dominated by the media, which supply information in order to gather devotion in return. Authentic social life has been replaced by fictional representations that create “*an illusionary unity onto a more heterogeneous field of culture... For Debord, the spectacle is an instrument of pacification and de-politicization*” (Mahall & Serbest, 2009, p. 183). Through the established mass media, whether real or fictional, narratives are broadcast worldwide, entailing the dissemination of images of protagonists and fashions of the moment. Since the modernist movement, architectural communication is distributed and popularized, mainly through images,⁷ whether illustrations, photographs or even videos, all of which distort the reality, shaping it according to the required narrative. Besides this, the imposed fashion entails a technical reproduction whose importance competes with the content itself.⁸ By the turn of the twenty-first century, the digital revolution had produced major changes in technology and communication, which has led the traditional media, such as the physical press, television and radio, to lose market share to the Internet.⁹ Thus, the following chapter analyses how architecture is communicated in this media and identifies the weaknesses and qualities of the different platforms.

⁷ “*The magic of images actually lies in their efficacy, which functions for all disciplines, be it sciences or arts. Images, whether techno-scientific displays or children’s drawings, affect human eyes, as dense, iconic signs. Within the field of architecture there has been a broad discourse on the digital image and its influence on architectural form finding.*” (Mahall & Serbest, 2009, p. 129).

⁸ The French philosopher Régis Debray researched and wrote on the evolution of subjects of communication and modern technologic progresses. He proved that the efficacy of the communication is not only dependent on content and meaning, but increasingly on the technical media used to disseminate it. See Mahall & Serbest, 2009, p. 132.

⁹ In fact, each person around the world spends an average of 4,1 hours on computers and 1,6 hours on mobile devices per day, according to the Global Web Index (2014, p. 4). In addition, Google stated in ‘The Consumer Barometer Survey 2014’ that 53% of the European population does online research before buying any relevant product, 51% compare prices and features and 29% look for opinions/reviews/advice.

2 Architectural communication in the Internet era

Internet massification has reformed the *status quo* of human interaction and consumption of information. Society has altered behaviours, relations and expectations. Even though Internet globalization happened in the 1990s, its origins date back to the 1960s. The invention of newspaper, radio and television had already transformed past concepts of communication, and society slowly learned how to adapt and answer to new challenges. However, the Internet is too recent to evaluate its impact fully, and conclusions are imminently outdated, as it keeps evolving every day. If yesterday it was accessible on a slow, shared desktop at home, today it can be accessed individually every moment via smart gadgets. Accepting the lack of social control of the consequences of this change is unavoidable. Nevertheless, it does not mean that the information providers should passively accept a superficial editorial policy, based on an exposure equation that ultimately serves the motives of the business model. The current chapter aims to identify the online architecture disseminators, analyse the best practices and identify what could be done better. Only in this way can *Homabout* offer a culturally significant proposal that will not solve all the issues, but has the ambition to go a step further by providing clear information, accessible to more people and capable of stimulating the development of architectural culture.



No Turning Back, Wall Stalker

Nathalie Frankowsk, Cruz Garcia

Searching and Learning by Trial and Error

During the interwar period, the philosopher Walter Benjamin¹ reported major changes in the physical and cultural heritage in Germany. Mieke Bal (2004, p. 26) refers to that historical moment as “*a collapse of narration - a critical and theoretical appraisal of a general historical state of affairs.*” Benjamin explained the cultural loss as being the result of the growth of capitalism, the investment in industrialization instead of craftsmanship, the power of the press and, the most important point, the silence of those who returned from the battlefields mute, to a ruined civilization where just the sky remained the same.

“Every morning brings us news of the globe, and yet we are poor in noteworthy stories. This is because no event comes to us without being already shot through with explanation. In other words, by now almost nothing that happens benefits storytelling; almost everything benefits information. Actually, it is half the art of storytelling to keep a story free from explanation as one reproduces it... The most extraordinary things, marvellous things, are related with the greatest accuracy, but the psychological connection of the event is not forced on the reader. It is left up to him to interpret things the way he understands them, and thus the narrative achieves an amplitude that information lacks.” (Benjamin, 2005, p. 730)

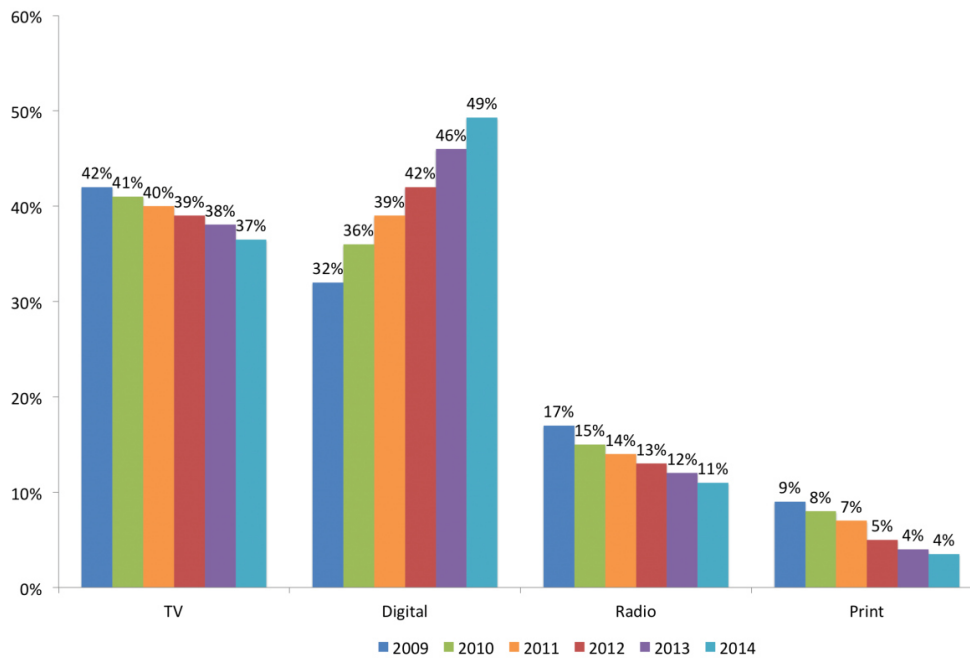
¹ Extract from *Illuminations* by Walter Benjamin (2007, p. 84): “*With the [First] World War a process began to become apparent which has not halted since then. Was it not noticeable at the end of the war that men returned from the battlefield gowned silent – not richer, but poorer in communicable experience? What ten years later was poured out in the flood of war books was anything but experience that goes from mouth to mouth. And there was nothing remarkable about that. For never has experience been contradicted more thoroughly than strategic experience by tactical warfare, economic experience by inflation, bodily experience by mechanical warfare, moral experience by those in power. A generation that had gone to school on a horse-drawn streetcar now stood under the open sky in a countryside in which nothing remained unchanged but the clouds, and beneath these clouds, in a field of force of destructive torrents and explosions, was the tiny, fragile human body.*”

The critical moment described by Walter Benjamin serves as a metaphor for the present. The digital revolution has created a new *status quo* that raises new paradoxes: information vs. knowledge; quantity vs. quality; singularity vs. plurality. Thinking of storytelling in a broader sense, the decline of architectural discourse is even more evident now. Currently a building is presented on the Internet through a selection of sterile pictures detached from the story and concept that sustain those photos. The result is an imminent destruction of the cultural heritage.

“What is the value of all our culture if it is divorced from experience? Where it all leads when that experience is simulated or obtained by underhanded means is something that has become clear to us from the horrific mishmash of styles and ideologies produced during the last century – too clear for us not to think it a matter of honesty to declare our bankruptcy. Indeed (let’s admit), our poverty of experience is not merely poverty on the personal level, but a poverty of human experience in general. Hence, a new kind of barbarism.” (Benjamin, 2005, p. 732)

In order to progress, Benjamin (2005, p. 732) introduced a new concept of positive barbarism: *“It forces him to start from scratch; to make a new start; to make a little go a long way; to begin with a little and build up further”*. The same principle should be applied now. Accepting the dominance of the Internet as the architectural communication media is inevitable. Besides, the challenges of the present should be solved with contemporary solutions, breaking with past communication concepts. The internet has contributed actively to turning architecture into a global discipline, hence it requires an intentional and specific knowhow to position culture and economy on the same axis of the architectural success equation.

“Three major evolutionary changes are deeply modifying today’s business environment: the globalization of the world, the development of Internet tech-



US Consumer Media Share

BI Intelligence

nology and the emergence of new values promoting a market economy model aimed at sustainable development. These trends open new markets, change the competitive landscape, stimulate the development of more responsible management models, affect the way companies interact with costumers and alter the balance of power among market players. The analysis of the world market as an interconnected global economy has the merit of evidencing the shortcomings of the traditional marketing management concept as a normative framework that provides an inadequate and an incomplete view of today's business complexity.” (Lambin, 2008, p. 12)

Although architecture is common on the Internet, buildings are often documented and analysed from the object point of view. As in *The Fountainhead*, a novel written in 1943 by Ayn Rand, the online publications seek the celebration of the building instead of clarifying the means that serve human life and comfort. In the book, a young architect discovers that his project had been changed against his will, so he plans to blow up the building to stop the subversion of his idea. In parallel, the architectural photographs featured online are deeply transformed by digital processes, so the architectural object remains pure, ignoring the setbacks common in the building process. These practises promote a distortion of reality by extending the disparity between glossy online articles and real architecture.

The success of online platforms does not depend exclusively on content relevance. In fact, the achievement of online exposure lies in both mathematic algorithms and content construction.² The quality of the data is unappreciated at the detriment of

² It would be expected as the Internet becomes more credible and people become more dependent on it, that increasingly culturally relevant content would benefit, to the detriment of superficial articles. However, the content depends directly on online exposure. For instance, the three first links showing on a google search get 61% of the traffic. Then how is it measured?

“Exposure number and nature of online users reached: Principal system-generated exposure data include the number of page views (for web pages, e-mail, wiki, blogs), impressions (for online ads), keyword volume (for organic search engine searches) and downloads (for podcast, vodcast, and audio/video files that permit downloading).” (Bidgoli, 2010, p. 514)

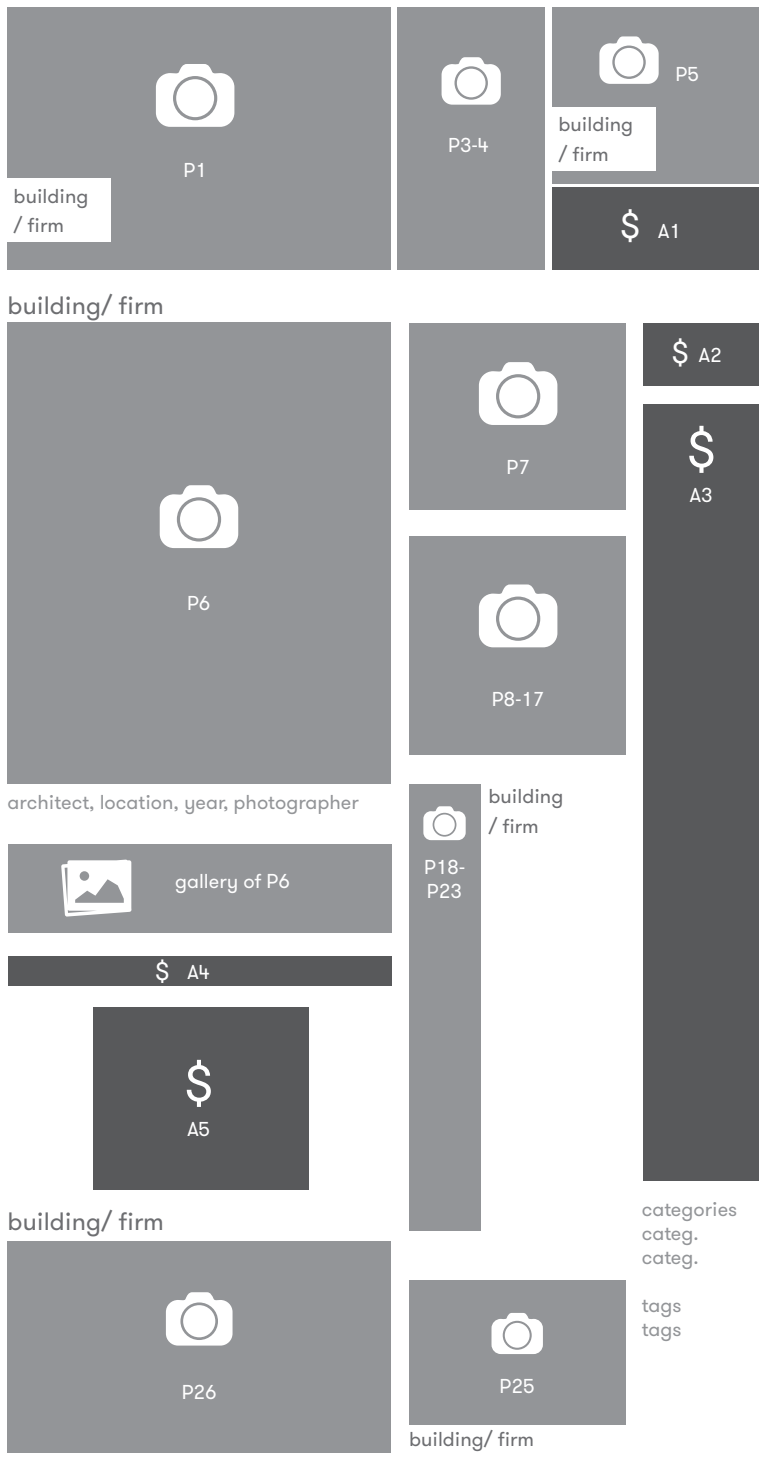
multiple repetitions of keywords, counts of websites that referred it, and how soon it was published, compared to the competition. The result is often pointless replication of articles on different websites so they generate more traffic. For instance, the work '*cabanas no rio*' by Aires Mateus was featured on sixty-one websites from the ninth to twenty-second of September 2013, with exactly the same editorial text. The result is an entirely fake market based on bogus validity, only there to take market segmentation to elevated levels for the benefit of advertisers.

Are users satisfied with architectural websites? In order to get some answers, an inquiry was conducted for the present dissertation involving forty-five architecture students and twenty-five professional architects working in Portugal, aged between twenty and forty-five.³ Although the survey sample is small, it is crucial to take into consideration different users' insights in order to draw some conclusions about the weaknesses of the existing offer. While 60% of the respondents spend more than five hours weekly searching for architecture on the Internet, 53% classified the online experience as neutral or negative and no one admitted to be completely satisfied. In addition, 61% justified this investment as part of the process of seeking inspiration. Another interesting conclusion involves criticism of existing websites, as 37% referred to poor organization, 33% to poor content in both text and drawings, and 31% to poor selection as the main criticism. To sum up, daily architecture online researchers want improvements and it is evident that there is an urgent need for proper worldwide research to be carried out by major players so the offer can be better adjusted to demand expectations.

As already mentioned in the current dissertation, four main categories are distinguished among architectural websites that approach society: press releases – platforms that directly post published documents prepared by the authors; online magazines – editorial entities whose practise aims to disseminate and reflect on

³ See annexe, p. 101.

architecture; professional architectural organizations – institutions whose mission is also to disseminate architecture, besides protecting professional practice; and architectural studios' webpages – the most direct online communication between architectural firms and society. The remaining subchapters analyse these profiles in order to identify their strengths and weaknesses. By doing so, the final part of the dissertation will then focus on editorial strategies that aim to add value to the existing contemporary offer, through the online prototype platform *Homabout*.



Press-release websites

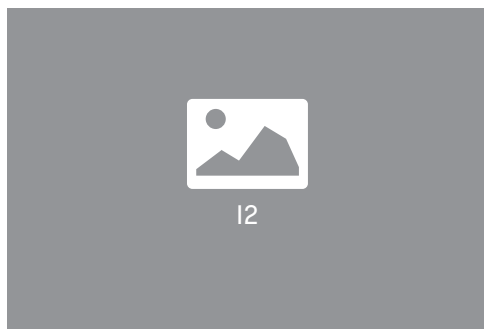
Press-release platforms stand out from other profiles by delivering as much content as possible with minimal editorial interference. Besides the lack of transparency in their practice, the online press-release communication is a non-stop advertising campaign which escapes the eyes of the absentminded. Nevertheless, the numbers are impressive. *ArchDaily* stands out as the most successful one, reached by three million unique visitors every month, mostly graduates (Alexa, “Competitive Intelligence Archdaily.com”, 2015), and it is estimated to be worth four hundred and forty two million dollars (Worth of Web, “How much is archdaily.com worth?”, 2015). How can a website achieve such impressive numbers? The key point is the simple and effective *modus operandi* of press-release websites. It consists of publishing images, drawings and texts prepared by the architecture studios, with minimal editorial interference. It is a ‘win-win’ process. While online platforms save time, firms see their works disseminated worldwide, which can lead to an increment of recognition and clients. For instance, John Beckmann (“What people say?”, 2015), architect at *Axis Mundi Design LLC*, admitted that his presence on *Architizer* guaranteed “*the redesign of 2,200sf of private skyboxes and galleries.*” He classified the platform as “*a one-stop shop for the profession.*”

Communication through traditional networking and architectural publications previously worked mainly in one direction, and confined society to the reception pole. However, the *status quo* has changed dramatically and people are now capable of not just give their input but also making a project viral and consequently affecting the financial performance of an architectural studio. Press-release websites act as social-networking websites where news and work portfolios are spread so architects, clients and readers can interact and shape new opportunities. In addition, press-release websites are recognized as providing valuable information, such as architectural drawings, and, occasionally, details. Steven Holl (“About”, 2015) stated that this

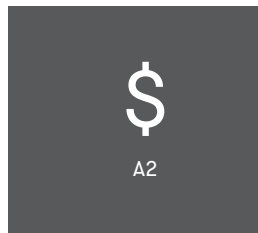
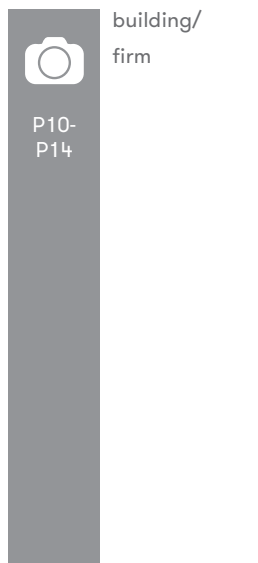
building/ firm



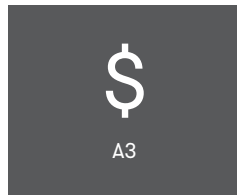
firm
location
year
photographer



Description of the project



citation



comments

ArchDaily project page layout analysis by the author

14 Photos, 250 words article, plans and sections,
9 Projects links and 3 Adverts on average

“is how you go into depth with plans and sections and one can really go deeply into a project.” Nonetheless, the quality of the written content and selected projects is controversial. Daniel Caparra, author of the blog *‘a barriga de um arquiteto’* has been one of the most vehement critics:

“Archdaily is not about architecture criticism and the editorial policy is not entirely innocent. It competes with other blogs to deliver all the content in “first hand”. Moreover, it is a press-release platform featuring sensational images of a project, sent to dozens or hundreds of blogs. Novelty and speed are the triggers to hits that therefore generate revenue.” (Caparra, “Crítica de arquitectura: disparar sobre o mensageiro”, 2013)

The official editorial mission is also paradoxical - “*Our editorial team works with thousands of practices in the five continents to deliver the best architecture around the world, as soon as possible.*” (ArchDaily, “Contact”, 2015). Publishing sixty projects a day and ensuring that the selection showcases culturally relevant architecture is an unintelligible balance whose results are articles like the Zonghwei Cultural Complex⁴ that corrode the meaning of concepts like ‘sustainability’, ‘public space’ and ‘locally referenced’. Furthermore, uncritical selection of projects misleads the non-architecturally educated public, who cannot differentiate culturally irrelevant buildings and renowned architecture. The result is perverse: while traffic numbers show that society relies on the curatorship authority of major press-release websites, these players disseminate nonsense and mainstream architecture, contributing to the misunderstanding of architectural criticism.

⁴ On 1st April, 2013, ArchDaily published the following article about Zhongwei Cultural Complex by Ho & Partners Architects:

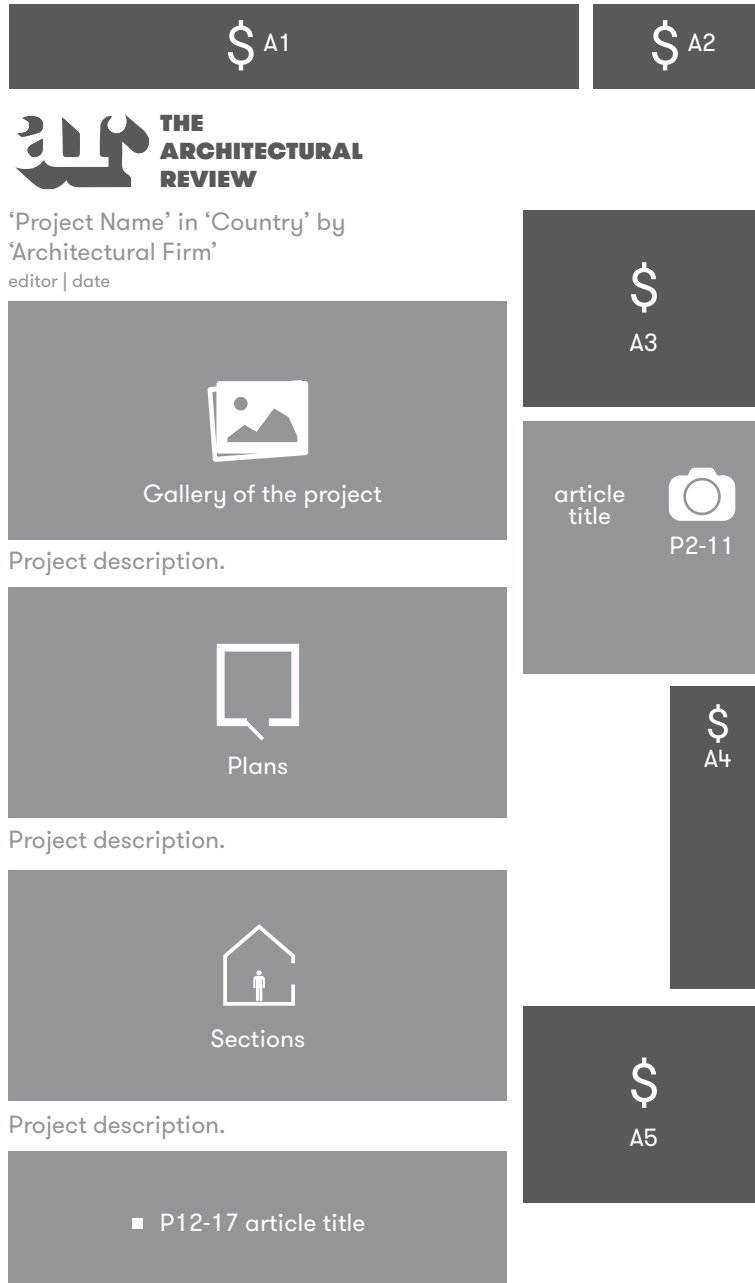
“The contemporary design of the main centre aims to characterize the city’s modernization, whilst capturing local cultural references. The building facades pay homage to local stone paintings and weaving patterns of sand-barriers found in regional deserts. Building materials further associate with local surroundings through different textures and colour palettes.” (ArchDaily, “Zonghwei Cultural Complex /hpa”, 2013)



Zhongwei Cultural Complex

Ho & Partners Architects

Press-release websites also contribute with additional content parallel to broadcasting projects. *ArchDaily* and *Architizer* share news; promote awards voted on by hundreds of thousands of online users; have libraries of different housing products transversal to all brands; and organize conferences and interview remarkable architects about their philosophy and work. Beyond this, *ArchDaily* has an online section dedicated to promoting documentaries about architecture and the *AD Classics* category that covers a tremendous number of buildings that compose key elements of human history.



The Architectural Review project page layout analysis by the author

10 Photos, 700 words article, 1 plan, 1 section,
16 Projects links and 5 Adverts on average

Online Magazines

As more people use the Internet as main information platform, newspaper and magazine organizations face the dilemma of reallocating resources to attract new online readers, while still trying to hold on to their existing audiences in the physical press. However, not all players felt the pressure to communicate in this new market at the same time. Whereas *Architectural Digest* and *Domus* initiated their online activity at the turn of the twenty-first century, renowned magazines like *The Architectural Review* and ‘*El croquis*’ took one more decade to publish online. Meanwhile, almost all physical magazines started to communicate on the Internet, competing with a new ecosystem of magazines, born with digital DNA, like *Uncube* and *P3*.

The business model of online press has been barely profitable, thus different editorial strategies have been tried out. Initially, the demand pressure was minimal and information was guaranteed for free, but the exponential growth of online consumption required substantial transformations. Besides the demand for extra content on the website, online magazines were forced to publish across different platforms, like *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *Pinterest*, *Tumblr*, among others, in order to generate more traffic. To establish new financial resources, in addition to advertising, some platforms set premium packages that allow access to extra content that is limited in the ‘free mode’. It is difficult to evaluate the impact of different strategies externally; however it is a fact that *The Architectural Review* is the one that offers, in parallel, the most expensive membership offer and the most diverse and complete articles.

The online reader’s profile is a middle aged graduate whose income exceeds 50 000€ annually.⁵ In spite of architects having the largest share as consumers, some maga-

⁵ Among others, *Architectural Digest*, *Wallpaper* and *The Architectural Review* share ‘media kits’, so advertisers can decide accurately whether or not it is the right platform to invest. The online reader’s profile is one of the featured categories.

Architectural Digest (condé nast, “Architectural Digest Web Media Kit”, 2015): A few statistics about

\$ A1

Wallpaper*

\$ A2

'Project Name' in 'Country' by
'Architectural Firm'
editor | date



Gallery of Project

Project description.

\$

A3

article
title



P2-11



Plans



selected
position

Project description.



P +100

Wallpaper project page layout analysis by the author

15 Photos, 350 words article, 2 plan, 1 section,

+100 Projects links and 3 Adverts on average

zines target their content more on society in general. *Wallpaper* and *Architectural Digest* are read by 50% non-architects, while in *The Architectural Review* the percentage does not go further than 14%. The editorial scope of the first group diverges also into decoration, design and lifestyle, and the communication is done mainly through non-technical texts and pictures. On the other hand, *The Architectural Review* aims to analyse architecture in all its aspects, from buildings to disciplinary issues. The editorial insight is critical and reading requires architectural culture. In addition, publications are featured in different media, such as texts, drawings, photographs, and audio and video, but access is almost entirely restricted to premium packages.

Uncube and *P3* were born with digital DNA. Both aim to reflect contemporary architectural problematics, but use different strategies. *P3* is a spin-off of the Portuguese national newspaper ‘*Público*’ and establishes public debates through opinion articles and image galleries. It targets society in general, particularly young people, and covers subjects from architecture to cinema. Moreover, the language is accessible to everyone, articles are short enough to be easily read, about 450 words on average, and text is privileged at the detriment of pictures. In order to contribute to further cultural development, the articles also sometimes include external links to relevant and more specialized platforms. On the other hand, *Uncube* is a cooperative project between the German magazine ‘*BauNetz*’ and the architectural studio ‘*Henkelhiedl*’. Text and pictures compose the communication whose interface simulates a truly online magazine, and the result is impressive. The target public is mainly the profes-

online readers: 53% Male and 47% Female; 53% are between 35 and 54 years old; 85 341€ is the average Household Income; 56% have a university degree; 48% are architects.

The Architectural Review (Media Pack, 2013, pp. 2-5): A few statistics about online readers: 73% Architects, 13% Architecture students, 14% Clients and other architecture-related Professionals; 51% are over 40 years old; 599 910€ is the average annual specified budget of architects who subscribe to premium packages; and from the 65 000 unique visitors per month, 53% are returning visitors and 47% new visitors.

Wallpaper (Digital Media Pack, 2015, p. 8): A few statistics about online readers: 52% male, 48% female; 34 is Median age; 111 806€ is the average personal income; 86% have a university degree; 33% have a postgraduate degree; 50% subscribe to the premium package, for professional reasons.

sional, since the comprehension of articles requires architectural culture and the domain of technician language. Both editorial practises are complementary and not competitive.

The architectural online magazine sector is an interesting and diverse ecosystem of culture enhancers vital for the dissemination of the discipline. In contrast with press-release platforms, these provide different points of view, critical texts, and build historical connections beyond the subject under study. As with reading a physical issue, online magazines require time and mental availability to learn and criticise the author's point of view.

On the other hand, the editorial gap may be the transition area from generic magazines to professional ones. To add, pictures and text remain still almost exclusively the dominant communication tools, even though *Wallpaper* features a simple tool that has a tremendous impact on overall spatial comprehension. Here, the photographs can be browsed from an interactive plan that displays their shoot position. Thereby, the photos become part of a continuous spatial experience, opposing the common detached atmosphere often showcased. Improving online press does not necessary entail a technological revolution; it might embrace simple solutions like this. It is necessary to try new dynamics in order to disseminate the values of architecture more effectively.

ARCHITECTURE.COM

BY

RIBA 

EXPLORE
ARCHITECTURE

FIND AN
ARCHITECT

WHAT'S
ON

JOIN &
SUPPORT

RIBA



E1



E2



C1



E3



E4



C2



E5



E6



E7



E8

RIBA homepage layout analysis by the author

Targeting Menu, 26 Exhibitions links, 2 Collections links

Webpages of architects' professional organizations










Analogous to other professional classes, architects are represented institutionally in different countries in order to regulate their practices, as well as to promote the profession. The RIBA was one of the pioneers when founded in 1834. Since then, analogous institutions have been actively engaged in education, history and built heritage preservation, and the regulation of professional practice and dissemination of architecture by traditional means as press releases, conferences and exhibitions. However, the world has changed so rapidly that the past tools are now less efficient and new solutions are being employed. In addition to adjusting to new communication channels, the professional associations aim to continue to validate the welfare inherent in architecture.

“Our vision is that by 2017 the RIBA will be recognised internationally as the leading authority on architecture and the built environment. In particular we will be known for excellence in the promotion of architecture, setting standards, stimulating innovation, sharing knowledge and demonstrating the economic, social and environmental benefits of good architecture.” (RIBA, 2011, p. 3)

In order to achieve such ambitious goals, the professional associations now use the Internet as a key media for communication. The RIBA was again a pioneer and from the early 2000s to the present their page *architecture.com* has been radically redesigned four times, so that architects and people in general can find the tools to build a common language and understand the expectations of both parts. The ‘Find Architect’ section stands out among other tools because it allows society to discover architects and choose the one that best fits their expectations.⁶ A biography and portfolio

⁶ The RIBA publishes publically at the end of every year a Trustees’ Report and Financial Statements. In 2013 a significant part of the document focused on the recently renewed website. In addition to the achievements, some weaknesses were pointed out which needed to be fixed in 2014.

“Central to our customer-led approach is the modernization of our online directories, which will undergo

Housing experience	architecture firm name 1 distance address phone number website read more	 P1			
Commercial experi.					
Overseas experi.					
Services					
Practice Size					
<hr/>					
	architecture firm name 2 distance address phone number website read more	 P2			
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	architecture firm name 3 distance address phone number website read more	 P3			
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	Architect address, phone, website, e-mail				
<hr/>					
 G1	 G2	 G3	 G4	 G5	 G6
<hr/>					
About the practice description specializations					
<hr/>					

'Find an Architect' RIBA's search engine layout analysis by the author

Search by categories, architectural communication through image galleries

of the different studios enhances the search experience in that, although it is very comprehensible and organized, it is far less complete than the already poor quality press-release websites. However, before choosing an architect the professional society must be convinced that hiring one is an intelligent decision, because not only is this compulsory, but also their practice is as vital in the design process as the surgeon is in surgical procedures.⁷

Another relevant way to disseminate information about the discipline is to bring architecture into the arena of public discussion. On their websites, professional associations spread news, promote exhibitions and announce proposals for public competitions. Such scope introduces a local scale, as opposed to a global one of press-release players. Additionally, online communication overflows their websites. In order to approach a population in general, different associations promote discussion forums on *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *Instagram* and other forums. Recently the Portuguese Association of Architects (OA) promoted the ‘right to architecture’ campaign online which, in parallel with other initiatives, resulted in a revision of the law through par-

a radical overhaul in 2014. [...] The ‘Find Architect’ service is perhaps the most important section of our website for members and clients alike, so it will be significantly enhanced, both in terms of usability and functionality. We will be improving everything from the layout to the filters and the capacity of members, Chartered Practices and advisers to tell their story with an improved platform for case studies and photography. Members will be better supported in showcasing just what can do and it will be easier for clients to find practices that can do just what they want. It will be easy to see what services are on offer and, more importantly, to access them easily.” (RIBA, 2014, p. 9)

⁷ The professional associations have been trying different approaches to spark awareness regarding the importance of hiring the right architect. While the *Royal Institute of Dutch Architects* [BNA] has established an emotional strategy, the OA settled on seven rational bullet points:

“An architect will be working in your dream. Here you can find the right one. A house is a success for the architect only if you feel at home. Read the experiences of others who came before you. How did they achieve their ideal home? How was the collaboration with the architect? And if their house becomes their home?” (BNA, “Werken met een architect”, 2015)

“Seven reasons to hire an architect. They are the only qualified professionals to do architectural projects; help you to seek the best solution to your problem; solve your problem with creativity; and save you time: they know how to manage and coordinate the project process; save you money and maximize your investment... and may lower the construction and maintenance costs; help your business: a well-designed building is more inviting and functional for workers and customers; have the expertise to manage the project coordinating all the different areas.” (OA, “Consultado um Arquitecto”, 2015)

ARQUITECTOS VÃO PASSAR A OPERAR DOENTES EM LISTA DE ESPERA COM MAIS DE 2 ANOS

**A CLASSE ACREDITA QUE ESTÁ HABILITADA PARA O EFEITO,
VISTO LIDAR COM X-ACTOS DESDE TENRA IDADE**

ORDEM DOS ARQUITECTOS SECÇÃO REGIONAL NORTE - ESTA MENSAGEM FAZ PARTE DE UMA CAMPANHA DE SENSIBILIZAÇÃO
CONTRA AS PROPOSTAS DE LEI N.º 228 E N.º 227/XII, SENDO O SEU CONTEUDO TOTALMENTE FICTÍCIO

Pelo direito à arquitectura

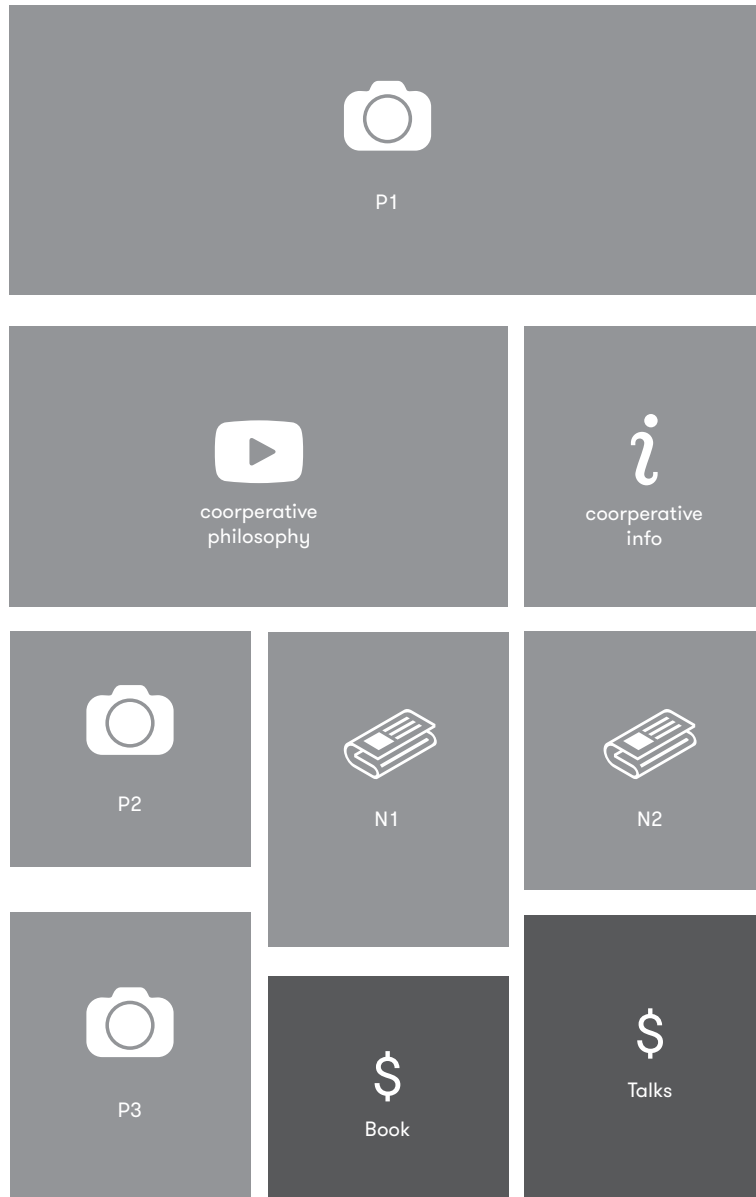
Ordem dos Arquitectos Secção Regional Norte

liamentary discussions. The proper use of the Internet as a communication channel can shape behaviours that will eventually lead to a better-built environment.

The dissemination of architecture and its communication towards society are emerging as priorities for professional associations. The progress is undeniable, but there is a long way to go until the moment when someone unfamiliar with architecture and professional practice can find trigger information “*aimed at providing more holistic support to our clients, assisting right from the inception of an idea to the opening of a building*” (RIBA, 2014, p. 10). Further initiatives should take full advantage of the spectrum of receivers online and must always position people at the centre of the action. Serving society in the first instance will ultimately be the best way to benefit architecture and its professionals.

Gehl

Architects



Gehl Architects homepage layout analysis by the author

cooperative philosophy video, 3 Project links,
2 news, monetization through talks and selling books

Architecture Studios' webpages

The Internet has revolutionized how architecture firms present themselves to society and gather new clients. Before the digital revolution, the traditional media was the main channel of communication for approaching the masses, but it presupposed a previous recognition of the developed work. Today, all entities can to highlight both portfolio and philosophy to the entire world. Nonetheless, some challenges have emerged from this opportunity: what is the output of the studios which are successful online? Are consecrated studios providing online pedagogic support?

Contrary to what might be expected, there is no clear parallel between the successful architectural firms in traditional media and online. The nature of digital platforms varies from studio to studio. While some awarded architects, such as Souto de Moura and Rafael Moneo do not have any official online platforms at all, others like David Chipperfield and Tadao Ando rely only on photographs to communicate their practices on their own webpages. The approach reveals a lack of consideration and awareness about the Internet rather than a sabotage objective. Despite the 'library profile', disclosures parallel a disregard posture, featuring a selection of different contents not meant for that specific website, but contributing to the overall comprehension of the intellectual work developed. Even though it is far away from an ideal one, the outdated Álvaro Siza website provides dozens of video interviews and conferences, critical articles and even some descriptions of fundamental buildings in the renowned architect's career. Other professionals whose works have been published across the Internet could easily replicate such solutions by providing an official selection of articles, according to their philosophy.

The 'diagram websites' are distinguished among the other typologies by the fact that they have established "*new means of communication with the community illustrating their design philosophy*" (Smith & Smith, 2015, p. 94). They feature simple schemes

Project Title



gallery of the project

Description of the problem



D1

Description of the facts



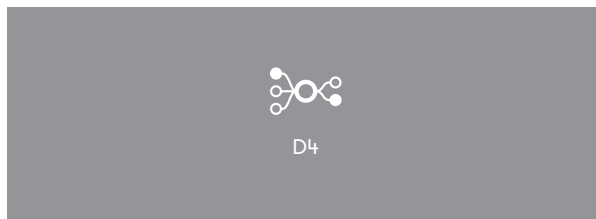
D2

Description of the facts



D3

Description of the Solution



D4

Description of the Solution

Client

Team

Location



Date



complete
pdf

Share

Gehl Architects project page layout analysis by the author

access to the full documentation package, 6 images,
3 infographics and 800 words article on average

that form basic analyses of light, traffic and program, and appear to generate an architectural solution. The recipe is simple and made for everyone, thus it results in a tremendously profitable methodology. Architecture studios like *BIG* and *COBE* have witnessed rapid growth, motivated mainly by the combination of diagrammatic schemes and the viral power of the Internet. Nevertheless, this practice raises some ethical issues because, while the reality is simplified in a fictional manner, society begins to ignore the actual complexity of architecture.

On the other hand, some exceptional studios approach non-architects without falsifying the complexity inherent to architecture. The formula is apparently to present a summary of the real process that supports the architectural proposal. For instance, Gehl Architects's webpage showcases different projects with detailed infographics, architectural drawings and complete descriptive memory. Although it features a lot of information, it is organized hierarchically so users can decide to immerse themselves or only read the brief. Moreover, the architecture studio has the audacity to create short explanatory videos that communicate their philosophy and *modus operandi*, which are deeply connected to a scientific way of analysing the interaction between people and built space. While the studio invests in pedagogic communication, it enhances their position in the market as experts. Gehl's practice causes a buzz and discussion around public space, and municipal councils in the world's biggest cities often consult the firm on the redesign of such space.

Gehl Architects publish all their theoretical research about the relations between people and architecture in different media. The results are conferences, publications, such as *Life Between Buildings* (1971), *New City Spaces* (2000), *How to Study Public Life* (2013), the documentary *The Human Scale* and also a blog, where his team disseminate their findings. Although there is still room for improvement, this methodology showcases an active practice of architectural communication. If more studios had the same approach but different insights, the Internet would be a richer platform and also closer to people.



Homabout logo

Augusto Lopes

3 *Homabout* practices and strategies

Homabout is born from the will to answer to an online editorial gap. Quantity and speed of content are valued at the detriment of quality, mainly due to an almost instantaneous process of communication provided by the internet which privileges immediate content without any critical perspective. Thus, the most relevant architectural broadcasters are not focused on explaining buildings in a simple but comprehensive manner to society, instead they rely essentially on pictures and easy skimming descriptions to disseminate their message. In addition, the existing offer diverges to two poles: the generic and the specialized. Hence *Homabout* has the opportunity to build bridges between these two poles, stimulating the transition to relevant platforms, like the Architectural Review.

The current proposal does not aim to revolutionize architectural communication; it rather relies on history to recycle past solutions to offer a further step to the current offer. *Homabout* aims to stimulate architectural knowledge across society by telling the story behind inspiring architecture in a simple and understandable way. The main editorial strategy attempts to supplement the spatial experience in a virtual environment, which obliges the representation and simulation of reality, rather than to criticise design purposes or reduce them to simple diagrams. It adopts a

visual communication based on drawn information opposing the current practises of the press releases websites. It does not pursue a simplistic language; alternatively, real solutions for real problems are the key strategy for editorial speech. *Homabout* intends to spark curiosity, get society reflecting and guarantee anyone interested has the opportunity to immerse themselves in the architectural world. Only a high quality editing process of the content can enhance the standards and lead to the superior criteria required by those who commission design work.

Target

Placing society at the centre of the communication, *Homabout* aims to make architecture more understandable, and therefore more democratic. Architecture reflects our history, values and vision for a better future, thus to understand it is not only an intellectual gratification, but also a fundamental identity matter.

Editorial strategy. Why homes?

Architecture, as all disciplines, covers a broad spectrum of programs and topics. The editorial option could be whether to publish massively and try to cover all areas, or whether to focus on one program and try to add a proposition value. In addition, online users understand websites that are dedicated to mono-products best. Hence, *Homabout's* editorial policy is limited to housing, since it is the program that society is most familiar with and can relate immediately to in daily life.

Considered as a fundamental human right, housing is also the most common program, since most people have a place to live.²¹ All individuals have an emotional

²¹ The right to housing was consecrated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. Until then, the European investment in a high quality-housing portfolio was undertaken essentially by a privileged sector of society that had the economic conditions to hire skilled professionals. Government involvement was rather temporary and not relevant, and housing efforts in many large cities were aimed at poor households. After the atrocities committed by the Nazis became public, governments around the world recognized the need for a declaration that endorsed the fundamental human rights that every individual is inherently entitled to.

insight into what counts as good or bad design and what functions or not. Homes are also the primary architectural program and derive from the most basic and fundamental need for protection. They play a critical role of ensuring human dignity and healthy living. In addition, housing fulfils psychological needs for privacy, security, protection from weather, and helps inter-personal relationships to be maintained. Dwellings are extremely complex organisms that embody all challenges inherent in architecture. A house is more than a group of rooms where different activities take place; it is a cultural convention of spaces dedicated to specific actions with *“an astonishing variety in the ways in which these activities are accommodated in the houses of different historical periods and cultures”* (Hanson, 1998, p. 2).

Lastly, housing represents the largest expenditure for the majority of families. According to the OECD European households spend 21.9%²² of their Gross Adjusted Disposable Income on accommodation. Owning a home is a life changing decision, an investment made of years of savings. Therefore different factors, such as location, infrastructure, financial sustainability, and last but not least, architecture, should be taken into consideration. It is a rational verdict rather than a hasty one.

Communication and Layout

Online communication depends on both content and form. However, layouts are the most fickle component of webpages because they reflect the trends and browsing technology. The design aims to be clear and light. The information is organized in horizontal sections and the selected pallet of colours privileges neutral tones in order to balance with the featured pictures that already set a rich chromatic environment.

²¹Article 25.

Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control. (UN, “Universal Declaration of Human Rights”, 1948)

²² Value calculated based on the document *OECD Better Life Index*, concerning 2013.

TOPIC NAME | CURATOR



Homabout homepage layout proposal by the author

photograph + axonometric + typology

Nevertheless, different pages require adjusted layouts according to the scope.







The homepage is the face of the platform, thus both value propositions and ethics must be clear. In spite of crowded environments full of advertisements being the common practice, *Homabout* aims to display a spotless and informative page. The layout is organized according to a two columns grid, where pictures are alternated with axonometric perspectives. In addition, general information like the name of the building, the architecture firm responsible for the design, and typology, complement the communication. Most of all, the goal is to appeal to the interests of visitors through spatial concepts rather than iconographic images.

The 'project page' is the heart of the platform. Although it follows the same design structure as the homepage, here the grid is divided in an asymmetric way in order to rank the information displayed. At the outset, each house has an audio narrative, so users can analyse all the drawings while listening to the description prepared by the curator. The initial design proposes an attempt to reduce the unbridled scrolling by featuring information through galleries. As a result, the user is encouraged to take the time to understand the building instead of looking over it. What is more, all photos are complemented with information regarding its shoot location, in order to support the story that is being told. Finally, all the recommended external content, such as books and videos, are featured at the bottom of the article.

Information architecture

The 'housing project' is the DNA of *Homabout*. The precise categorization of it supports a comprehensive online navigation experience. Thus, non-architects understand better the different contingencies that each project involves and how different challenges are overcome by architectural solutions. The following elements compose the 'housing project'.

TOPIC NAME | CURATOR

 Main photograph	firm location year photographer tipology audio project story
 context axonometric <hr/> program strategy	 project story
 photographs gallery	 location of each photograph
 axonometric of the 1 st floor <hr/> + all other stories	 project story
 photographs gallery	 location of each photograph
 perspective section <hr/> + all architectural drawings	 project story
   publications of the same curator	 curator description
 <hr/> firm description <hr/> documentary <hr/> books <hr/> contacts	 firm picture

Homabout project page layout proposal by the author

12 images, 4 axonometric perspectives, 3 plans,
 2 sections, 4 façades and 500 words article on average

Project categories: The right labelling provides not only a solid website organization, but also the possibility to search easily, according to the users interests. Therefore, *Homabout* lists different categories: physical context - single-family dwellings in urban environments, private houses in remote areas, mobile homes and residential buildings; typology - patio, compact and folded; main construction materials; location; curator; and architect.

Description: A curator is responsible for presenting each home and writing a short but comprehensible article about it. The script ought to simulate the spatial experience, as the reader comes closer to the dwelling, until finally they enter and understand how the house is organized. The narrative goes beyond the merely visual description; it is rather about architectural strategy and the interaction that different specialities enhance.

Perspective drawings: The illustrations should be presented so that both interior and exterior are easily understandable. Because non-architects have some spatial abstraction struggles, the perspectives should integrate different furniture and human figures, whose scale is commonly known.

Plan/Elevation/Section: Because these are 2D drawings, it becomes even harder for people to apprehend the correct proportions, hence the same conventional elements are included as shown on the axonometric. The overall objective is to display a simulation of the building, rather than conventional architectural drawings.

Photographs/Practical info: Each picture is complemented with key information such as: shoot location, brief description and area. Direct data contributes not only to the clarification of different room's characteristics but also stimulates the spatial abstraction skills of non-professionals. In addition, since the publications concern built projects, there is no need to feature renders.

INFORMATION	Axonometry	Text/Audio	Plans	Photographic Slides	Video
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HOUSING PROJECT

CATEGORIES	Material	Topic	Theme	Curator	Typology	Architect	Location
	x	Urban Remote Mobile Residential B.	x	x	Patio Compact Folded	x	x
				Biography Portfolio		Biography Portfolio Interviews	

Video: as in Álvaro Siza's webpage, *Homabout* aims to take advantage of the interviews and video reports made by renowned institutions and deliver this selection to society in one unique place.

Books: An extra bibliography is provided additionally, so the user can learn more about the discipline and specific authors. In the medium term, the business model of the platform may be supported in this section.

Comments: Online communities are a resource of feedback and advices for future improvements. Their contribution leads to a communication more focused on the individual's needs and arouses their engagement. In addition, interaction with the curators can create an interesting ecosystem whose outcomes are impossible to measure at the present.

In the future, more elements may strengthen the 'project page' publications, according to the resources available. However, any future development should always treat the quality and clarity of an article as the main priority.

Supply Channel

"The economic and competitive purpose of supply chain integration is the possibility of taking time and cost out of the whole supply chain process. By taking time out of the process, the supply moves closer to a real demand, thereby increasing the likelihood of producing what customers really want rather than what we think they want. Customer satisfaction goes up and obsolete stock and working capital go down, making the supply chain more competitive." (Bidgoli, 2010, p. 121)

TIME PERIOD	CURATOR'S SELECTION	EXAMPLE
Month	Material	Wood
Week	4 Topics: urban; in remote; mobile homes; residential buildings.	Cabins in Scandinavia
Every 2 days	1 Traditional Example + 3 Typologies: patio, compact, folded.	Folded home: Split View by Reiulf Ramstad Arkitekter

Homabout platform is founded on an integrated supply channel where all players benefit from the customers responsiveness. The supply chain consists of: *Homabout's* staff – managing responsible and perspectives maker; architecture studios – intellectual property owners and providers of the photos and drawings of the featured homes; curators – publication editors; and readers – feedback suppliers.

Besides the intrinsic recognition, architecture studios have the opportunity to expose their work and some biographical information directly to potential customers. In parallel, curators have the opportunity to present their critical perspectives and, as architects, they have an exclusive page containing biographical data and any other desired information, such as a portfolio and *LinkedIn* page. In addition, curators are free of tiring work, such as creating axonometric perspectives and audio files of the descriptions they wrote. Lastly, The *Homabout* team is left only with managing issues and the direct content creation required by the curators, whose systematization will optimize time management and ensure coherence between different curators' publications.

Publication *Modus Operandi*

The simpler the publication strategy, the easier it is to guarantee a high quality result. Moreover, the engagement of readers also grows if there is a coherent intersection of categories between different publications. During 2015, one construction material is selected every month to guide week curators whose publications concern only one physical context and theme. For instance, during the 'wood' month, the curator assigned to 'private houses in remote areas' presents different homes, according to the theme 'cabins in Scandinavia'. Once the curator assumes editorial control, she or he publishes an introductory article that announces the theme and describes a traditional example; then three different typologies of houses are published during the week, encouraging the visitor to follow, as if a story is being told.

4 Conclusion

Only contact with a relevant built environment can arouse architectural culture, as happened with the World Fairs during the twenty-first century. Not only did consensual buildings like the Crystal Palace have this effect, provocative constructions as the Eiffel Tower also placed architecture at the heart of public debate. The modernists were also particularly capable of communicating architecture. Although their radical ideology broke the *status quo*, modernists centred the discourse on the new technological advances that would make daily life easier. Architecture appeared thus as a platform for a holistic civilizational development. The stimulation of architectural interest was intense. Remarkable exhibitions took place around Europe and, later in the USA; the print-press brought architectural images that overwhelmed society. In addition, the cinema and television industry featured glimpses of a peaceful geometrical spatiality from where the *voyeur* could watch the wonderful richness of the world. Nonetheless, the modern vision failed and society has been reformulated through post-modernism.

The economy of attention has taken the place of passive consumerism in modern media. The Internet has established a revolution in how people access information and how consumption is measured. In parallel with other disciplines, architecture

media players reveal difficulties in adding value to online communication. Because the time available for the consumer to respond to so many stimuli is short, easily skimmed articles are prioritized at the expense of more complete publications. Hence, the press release platforms absorb the highest percentage of traffic. Besides this minimal editorial intervention, it is hardly likely to explain how buildings work and what the architectural strategy is, even for professionals. However, there are good examples, such as *The Architectural Review* and *Gehl Architects*, whose content targets mainly architects. Nonetheless, we believe there is an editorial gap in the transition area between platforms that study deeply architectural issues and the ones which present generic and superficial content.

An online platform cannot substitute the physical experience of architecture. Instead, it can trigger its happening. Non-technical language, drawn information, a strong editorial policy and clear organization are the value propositions of *Homabout*. The platform aims to be simple, but never simplistic. However, the dissertation does not offer the solution to the deficit of architectural culture. As a start-up, *Homabout* aims to create a prosperous and flexible framework that triggers interest in the discipline by delivering culturally relevant publications that enhance architectural knowledge. It aims to be a starting point and not an end in itself.

The editorial strategy envisioned demands a rigorous perseverance by the team, since the proposition value depends on them creating a significant part of the featured content. At the moment, *Homabout* has no business model that supports such a high ambition. Instead, it will be designed according to the users' interests and feedback. The finance strategy will eventually come from the free will and choice of the persons who validate the content value. Nonetheless, the webpage genesis is the stated mission, not the business model.

The *Homabout* vision is that by 2020 the platform will be recognised as a source of

advice and support in better online information on architecture, particularly in the residential sector. Additionally, our team seeks to integrate emerging technologies, such as 3D goggles, which will enhance the spatial simulation. More broadly, *Homabout* aspires to extend its activity beyond the Internet and inspire an interest in the physical experience of architecture.

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6 Annex - Survey

What is your actual profession?

- student
- architect
- professor

How many hours per week do you spend searching architecture online?

- 1-2
- 2-5
- 5-10
- 10-20
- +20

Why do you search for architecture?

- seek inspiration
- find a solution for a specific problem
- meet new architects
- get information of a specific building

How satisfied are you with the existing architectural websites?

- very satisfied
- somewhat satisfied
- neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- somewhat dissatisfied
- very dissatisfied

Which are, in your opinion, the most significant weaknesses of the existing architectural websites?

- too many projects apparently published without any criteria
- poor organization
- uninteresting written articles
- i am satisfied