

## Synopsis

In the world of construction, there is more and more talk about participatory approaches and the involvement of inhabitants. All too often, this issue is approached in a very superficial and simplistic way, being reduced to compilation questionnaires and surveys for their own sake, without any real involvement of the population in the practice of architecture. For this reason, I wanted to give an overview of the complexity that this approach actually requires.

The term "resource" is very relevant to our age, which is dedicated to consumerism, capitalism and the creation of a purely anthropocentric global vision. Resources, as we are already seeing, are running out on exponential curves. Being sustainable means knowing how to use a resource without compromising its use for future generations. To be able to aspire to this, it is necessary to conceive of nature as a limit to which we must adapt responsibly, while at the same time benefiting from it. That is why, here and now, the issue of the Governance of Commons is an urgent necessity for the architects of tomorrow. The participatory model draws its strength from the fact that when the responsibilities are also well distributed among the users of a resource, the maintenance of the management and control apparatus is much more effective and less costly.

The challenge I have decided to try to address is the creation of a body of constructed and unconstructed strategies that embody and translate, in terms of spatial organisation, the theories elaborated by Elinor Ostrom in her famous book *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*, a study published in 1990 and awarded the Nobel Prize for Economics in 2009 (together with Oliver Williamson).

The Architecture of Commons takes on the most varied forms and functions, it arises uniquely and spontaneously from the place in which it is rooted. It is a way of building that essentially works with what is already there, but creates new perspectives that are able to enhance it; it is building a network of joints, muscles, arteries and bones that are able to make the resources of the place the beating heart, or at least promote a more harmonious development with them. The Architecture of Commons, in the words of French architect Didier Faustino, is **an architecture of percolation** that filters reality, raising doubts and questions, just as a coffee pot infuses the aroma of coffee beans into boiling water. It should therefore not be taken as a panacea, but rather as a provocation aimed at stimulating change. The "input" character of this architecture therefore makes the community the main architect of this metamorphosis, as social transformation always precedes the physical transformation of the city of tomorrow. Great importance is given to connections and infrastructures (visible and invisible) because society is the result of the speed of its flows.

The Architecture of the Commons as I see it is divided into:

**The Science of Dynamic Systems:** contemplation of multiple scales of action and cause/consequence links, fractal urbanism

**The Space of Flows:** interstitial spaces that move resources and users, generating a network that connects and activates the various devices of the Commons (as in a cell, organelles are connected by the cytoskeleton).

**Unbuilt Architectures:** body of rules and strategies agreed upon by the community for the correct use and management of The Architecture of Commons (direct supervision by users, sanctions, usage limits, etc.).

**Limits: Limen/ Limes. Perspectives and Perceptions:** avoid imposing choices through architecture, but rather suggest them through non-coercive limits (e.g. topography) and through a public and easily identifiable architectural language.

**Limits: Holistic Linearity:** educate to stimulate the awareness and therefore the effectiveness of each entity and user involved in the Commons system when the designer delivers his artefact to the community (promote autonomy). Everyone must be clear about what is part of the system and how it works. This is achieved through 'panoramic' and trans-scalar architectural language.

**Categorical Hybridization of Living: Autonomy/Heteronomy:** authorities only participate in the initial phase by providing resources otherwise inaccessible to locals and by providing assistance. Subsequently, the responsibility and management of the commons system must be delegated to those directly involved (who have obvious interests in the system working by being involved), giving them the appropriate scope for manoeuvre, support and adaptation.

**Categorical Hybridization of Living: Forms of Aggregation:** The language of The Architecture of Commons is not resolved in the radical Manichaeic taxonomy public/private, but contemplates different levels of intermediate and hybrid thresholds that favour a wider range of interactions. Architecture must be able to unlock a resource and give it a public face. Anthropology and the study of different cultures around the world and in history suggests that each people has its own spatial alphabet that corresponds to certain relational levels.

The similarities with the biological world and the metabolic concepts present in nature are clear and evident as I conceive of every practice of reality as a complex system of metamorphosis activities that need to be controlled to avoid unwanted catalysis and a more responsible approach.

The question of the language and aesthetics of sustainability, too often neglected and overshadowed by technology, is thus rehabilitated and exalted, resulting in architectures that are the human face of nature and that translate the clear understanding of the genius loci into buildings.

## Genesis of an idea

A few years ago I developed a passionate interest in all those forms of urban revolution that lead to the revival of an informal approach: starting from the analysis of the events that took place in the early 2000s in Barcelona, such as the famous Forat de la Vergonya, I understood that public space and sharing can be born, in its most spontaneous form, from its users themselves. These are considerations that have matured over time and that I have been able to apply in different contexts and on different scales in every design workshop I have attended.

When in 2019 Prof. Vegetti proposed that I should tackle the development of a different form of - participatory architecture, summarised in the theme of the Commons, I decided to take the opportunity to put into practice a multidisciplinary approach, with the aim of understanding the case study in greater depth, developing a strategy that could induce (and not force) spontaneous collaboration with the users - directly involved.

In today's panorama of participatory architecture, I am deeply convinced that the architect must not simply draw on the inhabitants as references or inspirations for his design; the architect must work with the inhabitants and use them as a tool for understanding the place, as a creative potential. Another fundamental aspect is the analysis of a system in its temporal stages of development: all too often the designer becomes disinterested in his work once it has been completed. This is where the biggest mistake

made by most planners lies: they lack the impetus and the vision for the future. Of course, the architect must not even presume to believe that he can predict everything that will happen, especially since the people who live in his spaces are unpredictable. The only model he can use to contemplate future developments is the stochastic model, based on probability. That is why it is important to give a lot of flexibility to the project, so that there is never a limit to the re-appropriation of space. Bernardo Secchi often affirmed the importance of approaching urban planning with a methodology that I would define as "fractal": that is, thinking of the city or the building as a series of initial inputs, well thought out, efficient and reflecting the current situation, and then giving ample room for spontaneous development, aggregation and the novelties that could arise. The project thus becomes a constant metamorphosis in time and space, something in constant flux that never lapses into anachronistic thinking.

Laying down sound principles for the shaping of cities and the ever-growing urban and peri-urban areas is the beginning of collaboration to solve a planetary emergency. I have spoken of "resources" and "public" and perhaps these are the words that come closest to an initial definition of what a Commons is, but it must be clear that it is not merely a matter of physical resources to be exploited. Everything that is *res communis* is also Commons: rivers, lakes, forests, pastures, mines, the sea, etc. are the material transposition that can be passed on; agriculture, knowledge, tradition belong instead to the immaterial aspect, but can still be shared. The daily use of the Commons leads to societal norms or practices, i.e. *praxis communis*, which are based on mutual support and are strategies that are only proven by their empirical effectiveness and must therefore be contemplated with a view to constant experimentation. For these reasons, the proposed system is based on models with multiple variables, precisely so that it can be applied and adapted to different situations in a flexible manner, preserving and enhancing their peculiarities.

My first paper *The Architecture of Commons* embodies an initial desire to explore and formalise numerous cases of informal architecture in history (Civic Actions), seeking to extract the essential peculiarities of their success. It is my personal manifesto of what I consider to be a methodology of approach rather than a finished product: an enumeration and exploration of certain principles that I have translated into architectural terms. It is a real process of accompanying the designer towards the creative potential of a community, which first of all proposes a total analysis of the territory, of the culture of a people, of sociology, of anthropology, even going so far as to probe in a very scientific way to identify the problems. It is only after this very important research phase that it is possible to understand where and how to intervene, aiming to solve real problems and not to find pretexts for the benefit of a designer. It is essential to know how to calibrate one's design gesture, because there is nothing worse than a perfect answer to the wrong question. It was with a totally multidisciplinary approach that I approached the first case study, namely the creation of a circular economy and recycling in one of the world's largest e-waste dumps: Agbogbloshie (Ghana). After finally identifying the reasons (even remote in space and time) I was able to calibrate a single gesture that would touch all the areas of interest and be a possible answer for all the huge problems in the area. The final design gesture contemplates various thematic areas that attempt to justify an approach that is as uncoercive as possible and that translates certain forms of collective control into geometries, topographies and forms of aggregation.

The issue of coercion and "leading" to the right action is perhaps the greatest challenge for a planner dealing with public spatial re-appropriation; as Aristotle argued, "...what is common to the greatest number of individuals receives the least attention. Everyone thinks mainly of himself, and hardly of the common interest". The required architecture cannot be authoritatively imposed from above, but must grow from below; its *raison d'être* cannot be forcibly inculcated either, but must be sincerely understood through awareness and civic education. The aim of Commons Architecture is not to create insurmountable barriers, with the impossible claim of nipping in the bud every violation, but first and foremost to provide the community with a tool that facilitates the control and management of its resources, promoting a new and spontaneous ethic. It is above all with visibility and vision that we begin to build awareness. The possibility

of having "panoramic" architectures makes it possible to make phenomenologically perceptible all the components of a system, in a common space-time frame.

During my applied experimentation, I was also able to devise new synthetic representation systems that helped me to better relate the numerous pieces of information I had collected and allowed me to draw connections between them. In fact, some of the graphs I have proposed make it possible to grasp at a glance complicated relationships between apparently disconnected disciplines, promoting a systems logic.

My latest work and graduation project *Phronesis* is the practical application of all these principles to the French context of Firminy. Once again, the research phase, adapted ad hoc to the specificity of the site, provided me with the elements for understanding the territory and its dynamics, allowing me to choose the intervention sites with absolute meticulousness and coherence with the objective I had set myself: to create a microclimatic infrastructure managed with the Commons system that would allow the urban and agricultural context to face the threats and the strong climate changes due to global warming. Before acting and drawing a single line, I therefore had to construct a plausible future climate and social scenario as scientifically as possible, which I used as a starting point for my proposals.

Through small and diffuse interventions and infrastructures for the control and management of local resources, I was able to develop an approach and strategies that extended to all scales: from regional to building detail, also elaborating "unbuilt" responses (economic, managerial, agrarian, etc.). A holistic understanding of each component was therefore necessary, as I agree with Scottish urban planner Patrick Geddes when he says "*It takes a whole region to make a city*".

After proposing an alternative and innovative system of land mapping and data processing, using the latest software (GIS and Grasshopper for example), I was also able to focus on the issue of architectural language. Since the genesis of my theories and experiments, the Architecture of Commons has always wanted to be a sustainable and alternative answer to the current development models, therefore *Phronesis* is the union of a careful practice coordinated by a very defined ethical and moral background. For this project I wanted to draw on all those models that Julie Watson, a researcher at Columbia University, has called *Radical Indigenism* and the foundations of *Bioregionalism*. I therefore studied all those solutions that different cultures throughout history have adopted to meet precise climatic needs, without the aid of sophisticated technologies, but thanks to common sense and above all to a great knowledge of the land and nature. Many of these systems have come to my attention during my travels, such as the agricultural techniques of the Incas and Moray, while others I have learned during my years of study and passionate reading. In different epochs, continents and cultures, where architectural form responds to functional needs to adapt to the climate and the land, it is possible to draw analogies because the same answer to a problem has been given, declined with different nuances. It is therefore essential to grasp the common root of all these variations. The end result is a sort of body of "passive" practices (which do not require motor or electrical energy, but essentially exploit the driving force of wind and water) that are declined in small territorial devices connected by an efficient infrastructural apparatus and that allow the practice and promotion of the Government of the Commons. These are simple architectures made with local materials (some are re-uses of pre-existing structures, others are totally new) that not only unlock a resource but also give it a public "face" (i.e. they make functional aspects coexist with aspects of common use, playful and everyday aspects).

Recently, I have also been able to see for myself the scope of collective micro-architecture and the value of participation and work by carrying out an intervention to rehabilitate a public space in the Alpes-Maritimes, through the construction of a viewpoint and street furniture, working with architects (GRRIZ) who are very experienced in these fields.