The Advocacy Planning and the Civil Rights Movement in the United States: The Architects’ Renewal Committee and the Democratization of Urban Planning

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The Advocacy Planning and the Civil Rights Movement in the United States: The Architects’ Renewal Committee and the Democratization of Urban Planning

This paper takes as its point of departure advocacy planning approaches’ consideration that urban renewal is incompatible with any kind of socially effective urban planning. It focuses on analysing the Architects’ Renewal Committee in Harlem (ARCH), the first organisation solely devoted to advocacy planning in the United States, and places particular emphasis on the critiques of urban renewal strategies in the late 1960s in the North-Eastern American context, and on the emergence of groups that aimed to struggle for the civil rights of African Americans. It closely examines how the Architects’ Renewal Committee in Harlem (ARCH) provided technical and design advice to communities who could otherwise not afford it, aspiring to democratize urban planning. It pays special attention to the analysis of ARCH’s program entitled “Architecture in the Neighborhoods” (1970), which aimed to recruit local black youth to become architects.

In parallel, the paper compares the strategies of the Architects’ Renewal Committee in Harlem (ARCH) with those of other groups struggling over the rights of minorities and the democratization of urban planning, such as The Architects’ Resistance (TAR), and National Organization of Minority Architecture Students (NOMAS). The Architects’ Resistance (TAR) was a group formed in 1968 by architecture students from Columbia GSAPP, MIT Department of Architecture, and Yale School of Architecture and was “concerned about the social responsibility of architects and the framework within which architecture is practiced.” The National Organization of Minority Architecture Students (NOMAS) played a major role in the struggle over civil rights for African Americans in the United States. It was founded by a group of African-American architects in Detroit, Michigan in 1971 during the AIA National Convention and aimed to defend the rights of minority design professionals. The paper presents how the above-mentioned groups aimed to reshape urban planning models in order to respond to the call for a more democratic society. It sheds light on how they reinvented the relationship between architecture and democracy.

Keywords: advocacy planning, Civil rights movement, democratization of urban planning