Revisiting the History of Participation: Urban Design as Commoning and New Theoretical Frameworks

Other Conference Item

Author(s):
Charitonidou, Marianna

Publication date:
2021-09

Permanent link:
https://doi.org/10.3929/ethz-b-000505736

Rights / license:
Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International
Dr. ir. Marianna Charitonidou

Revisiting the History of Participation: Urban Design as Commoning and New Theoretical Frameworks

Under the headers of ‘collaboration’, ‘participatory design’ and ‘co-production’ participation is nowadays at the centre of the debate on urban design. Architects and urban designers are developing new concepts, tools and roles to comply with these new participatory modii operandi. However, it seems that it is sometimes forgotten that the issue of participation has a longstanding history. The paper aims to explore this longstanding tradition of experiments with participatory processes in the practice and teaching of urban design. Departing from the projects of ILAUD (International Laboratory of Architecture and Urban Design) in Italy, the ARAU (Atelier de recherche et d’action urbaines) in Belgium, and the SAAL (Servicio de Apoyo Ambulatorio Local) in Portugal, the paper aims investigate the various forms that participation in urban design practice can take, from collective processes of design, to collaborative construction and common management. Understanding the critical differences between these different approaches can help us to refine our theories and tools of urban design. The participatory concern in the urban design process has not only a long history in practice but also in urban design education. Various experimental initiatives with participation emerged in the domain of architectural pedagogy in the late sixties, often starting from student initiatives. Good examples are The Architects’ Resistance (TAR), a group formed in 1968 by architecture students from Columbia GSAPP, MIT Department of Architecture, and Yale School of Architecture describing itself as “a communications network, a research group, and an action group … concerned about the social responsibility of architects and the framework within which architecture is practiced”, as well as the National Organization of Minority Architecture Students (NOMAS). Many of these groups emerged within the context of the struggles for civil rights and thus made a plea to have non-hegemonic or ‘other’ voices heard in the urban design process. These initiatives explored how new concepts, roles and tools for participation could become part of the education of the architect and urban designer.

The objective of the paper is to explore how, within the context of the contemporary interest in new urban design methods that reinvent the relationship between urban design and democracy, the long history of the participation can offer us clues on how civic engagement and social responsibility can be critically conceived. The contemporary interest in methods of ‘collaboration’, ‘participatory design’ and ‘co-production’, can learn from the long history of participation about how urban urban design can forge a critical relationship with civic engagement and social responsibility. Instead of repeating the concepts, roles and tools that were tested some decades ago, we hope that contemporary urban designers engage more intensively with the historical examples and use them as a base for new critical approaches. Most importantly, historical experiments like The Architects’ Resistance (TAR) and National Organization of Minority Architecture Students (NOMAS) remind us that the issue of participation in not only a question of urban design practice, but also – and maybe most urgently – requires experiments and changes in the pedagogy of architecture and urban design.

Selective references


Goldstein, Brian D., "Planning's End? Urban Renewal in New Haven, the Yale School of Art and Architecture, and the Fall of the New Deal Spatial Order", *Journal of Urban History* 37(3) (2011): 400-422.


**REVIEWER AVERAGE RATING**

The ratings below are the average of scores from all reviewers, which are based on a 1 (low) to 4 (high) rating system. All submissions were reviewed by a minimum of three scholars.

- New and original contribution: 3.67
- Clearly articulated argument or question: 3.67
- Successful development of the submission: 3.33