

CO

Citizen - Construction

*Or how spatial design can enhance public
policies for land use planning*



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Or how spatial design can enhance public policies for land use planning

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Research work in design

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Introspection



Conflicts between residents and police in Villeneuve-la-Garenne, in France, on the night of April 20 to 21 2020 due to the tough living conditions during the quarantine © AFP

“My designer”, drawn to current political and media-related issues and to which she thought she had answers, already saw herself become a journalist.

Relating facts and denouncing injustices, to re-establish the conditions for a fairer world, is her leitmotif.

But if journalism was her ideal, she found her fight in design. Because, in a roundabout and subtle way, design implies the action of the mind, but also that of the body.

“My designer”, as for her, sees this occupation as a passion. If a designer’s commitment to a project is only half-sincere, the final outcome can only be half-convincing.

“My designer” does not claim that design will save the world, but all she hopes for in the future is to continue to defend and write the history of the subjects that matter to her, and this, by taking with her all the people who will be crazy enough to follow her.

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Icebreaker

* March 2017 study titled « les Français et les enjeux de sécurité » by Ifop for Synopia

According to a 2017 survey*, 83% of the French population feels insecure today. French people suffer from daily incivility as much as from terrorism, and we see that the same thing is happening worldwide as well. These two types of threats create a general anxiety about foreigners and a growing fear of the other. They tend to spray a climate of mistrust, and the increasing influence of public security policies on our territory is not helping to fix the problem. Because of this, we protect ourselves from unpredictable events, by creating sanitized and standardized places, which leave little space for a good community life.

* In particular that of the UN published in 2018.

In addition, a number of studies* predict that tomorrow, by 2050, seven in ten people will live in cities, compared to just one in two today. This will lead to problems of well-being, raising not only the question of primary needs, but also of coexistence between individuals.

How can the needs and uses of a community be discussed by the community members and the public institutions, whose role is to protect citizens and make their life pleasant? Can we, thanks to design, break this vicious circle of insecurity, and make the public space become again a political space where debates, exchanges, meetings and interaction can take place?

How can the spatial designer, as a mediator with a « convivencia »¹ objective, promote local democracy and citizens' involvement in land use planning projects?

To meet this issue, the first step is to show how citizens' freedom of action is defined in a space, and what currently prevents this space from being a good place for community life. It will then be necessary to demonstrate to what extent citizens' involvement in urban projects represents a major issue for democracy. Finally we will try to explain how the interior and landscape designer can lead to a democratic development of planning in order to improve inhabitants' living conditions.

1. Literally, the coexistence of religions in the XXth century but it is more used now to refer to the ability of different human groups to coexist harmoniously and peacefully within a local, national, federal, community entity and territory



Las Ramblas, the most frequented street in Barcelona
© Carlos Lorenzo

Gap between the way that public space is designed and how it is lived in



1. Towards a progressive loss of free will in public spaces

Civic liberties allow citizens, as rational beings, to think by themselves and act independently and spontaneously insofar as it does not harm others' rights and public safety. Considering this, freedom cannot exist alone, it fundamentally needs order, public order acting as a necessary balance between space and society and allowing individuals with different expectations, interests and social practices to coexist. But today, in France certain excesses in public order can be observed, with places where people's freedom to come and go is regulated and even restricted. This is why artists like Boijeot, Renault, through interventions in the public space, try to highlight the conformism of our behavior in front of restrictive measures that we no longer even question. Indeed, under the pretext of greater security, most citizens no longer object to political decisions which restrict their freedoms. So how to reconcile our legitimate need for security and our desire to keep control over how we act in space?

The growing tendency to design cities through the prism of security has had numerous consequences in the world, and influenced not only the organization of a territory, but also the way a city is experienced. It is against that background that Gated communities, residential neighborhoods, and Business Improvement Districts emerged; such phenomena should not be seen only as self-segregation, but rather as

a consequence of weakening local community ties². For Jane Jacobs³, thinking space in terms of security has led to its depersonalization and made it conducive to criminality, because a little frequented space becomes an abandoned space. It is thus clear that the insecurity concept is closely related to a neighborhood's atmosphere, and accordingly, the material quality and the condition of a space are meaningful elements in the process of space securing⁴. But the fact that today our public spaces have become unwelcoming to certain categories of undesirable populations, has also had great repercussions on our perception of these spaces' quality. For example, there are fewer and fewer benches in the public space, and fewer and fewer structures allowing several people to sit down or even lie down in the same place. All these situations highlight how much living together is partially made impossible in urban spaces today, and how the urban planning choices are based on the following principles: avoiding conflict, controlling deviant behaviors and controlling flows. So how do we make citizens react and question the space in which they move and live?

2. *Au-delà du rêve du village : le club et la clubbisation*, Eric Charmes. Métropolitiques.eu, 2011.

3. *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, by Jane Jacobs, 1961.

4. *Broken Windows, The police and neighborhood safety* by Georges L.Kelling et James.K Wilson, 1982. Article in *The Atlantic* explaining the broken window theory.



Reinforced security on Place Stanislas in Nancy for the Saint-Nicolas celebrations © Nicolas Zaogra.



Installation of a fence by Boijéot Renauld in a street of Aurillac. Almost all the passers-by have remained inert facing this border which separated them from the other side of the street, even though it seemed easy to cross it. ©Boijéot Renauld.



Photograph from The Truman Show movie, shot in the city of Seaside in Florida, an unincorporated master-planned community.

* The object citizen is the passive citizen, who is satisfied with arrangements and solutions designed for him without question them.

2. From object* citizen to subject

As seen before, a number of citizens are ready to give up some of their freedoms in aid of more security. Indeed, for many people, the public space without guaranteed security means potential risk. But Emmanuel Dockès – an associate professor of French law and labor law expert – explained in an interview that refusing any risk implies giving up freedom. So, how can we describe the acceptable risk in the public space? In other words, how much of our security are we ready to sacrifice in order to enjoy greater freedom? The amount of acceptable risk has to result from a general consensus in public opinion - that is to say a co-production between the public services in charge of spatial planning, and civil society - because it sets the limits of what is tolerable or not in the way of designing a space.

With this in mind, the question of the appropriation of public spaces also arises, because fighting insecurity, in a way, also means appropriating a space so it may not be abandoned. This is why in 2005, the city of San Francisco set up PARK(ing) DAY, a worldwide event organized each year, allowing citizens to take over the city's parking spaces for one day. These micro-spaces offer citizens spaces to experiment, exchange, debate about planning questions and make it possible to imagine new uses of public spaces. Appropriation can therefore be perceived as an active form of citizenship, but also as incivility, if this appropriation leads to the permanent occupation of this space by some people. The peaceful and pleasant occupation

of a space, hence, results from a constant dialogue between its different users. So, projects such as PARK(ing) DAY, provide answers to fundamental questions: how can city dwellers become aware of the role they can play, both in the development of their territory - in order to define in it acceptable uses and rules - and in the definition of its identity so as to exercise their citizenship? Because, even if today the status of citizens is undermined by the confidence crisis between them and their political representatives, they do not lose interest in political life, far from it, and rather aspire to a system in which they would have more decision-making power.



Appropriation of public space by a group of young people © Arnau Bach.



National Park(ing) Day, citizens reclaim the streets for a day and question the uses of public space. © Sveden.



In this annual worldwide event artists, designers and citizens transform parking spots into temporary meeting spaces. © Alternatiba.eu.

3. A yet weak will to involve citizens

The urgent need for housing following the destruction caused by the 2nd world war, encouraged the construction of suburbs and social housing estates, built too quickly and, for the most part, far from town centers. In that context, in the middle of the sixties and seventies, in several countries, many urban struggles questioned the legitimacy of urban planners and decision-makers who designed and developed urban spaces without even involving the inhabitants, who lived there on a day-to-day basis. These struggles, as well as the commitment of philosophers and urban sociologists, such as Henri Lefebvre and his *right to the city* concept, contributed to involving inhabitants in the public life and showed that a co-construction with them was possible and desirable. Thus, space obviously plays a very important role in social change processes, and makes it possible to reveal and accelerate urban and social changes.

In France, a renewal of democracy was done at the end of the nineties with the legitimization and formalization of participatory actions. But many of these approaches are today criticized by citizens, who denounce the fact that, in most debates, citizens were listened to, as land use planning actors and institutions had not been properly trained to involve the citizens in the process. The fact is that mostly, they do not have the right tools at hand to allow them to create real spaces for dialogue, which generates frustrations and widens the gap between citizens and institutions.



Excerpts from the movie « Quand les habitants prennent l'initiative 1981 » on urban struggles and the Alma-station project in Roubaix. The inhabitants worked together and took charge of the development of their district © Société Coopérative de Production.

Can the designer help reconcile expectations and objectives of each part between the hoped-for planning, the expected project and the final realization? Since the participation procedures require a lot of time to be effective, they have to be started long before the project. But the participatory dimension of a project is often decided according to the way its actors conceive and accept it. Then, how to convince professionals and politicians that to devise a general interest project, it is necessary to give more transparency and visibility to urban development projects?



Demolition of the Balzac tower, symbolic building of the «Cité des 4000» at La Courneuve, France in 2011 © Diego BIS / Flickr.

Citizens'
participation,
a key element
in the democratic
process



1. What prevents citizens from participating in improving their living environment

Therefore, it cannot be denied that, today, there is a gap between the way space is thought and the way it is experienced by citizens – and this, because most urban planning projects are thought without the inhabitants. But, citizens and institutions try more and more to collaborate and find solutions to this problem, even if many obstacles still exist. So, how can the least inclined citizens take part in participatory approaches? And how are these new ways of managing territories understood by citizens? Public policies, most of the time, aim to improve citizens' lives, promote their well-being and their fulfillment in society. In fact, living together harmoniously represents a global issue that many cities are trying to come grips with, but local authorities, today, face many problems : how to share public space, how to make a city safe, how to get different groups coexist in a territory...That is why Living Together was one of the main topics of the Metropolis XII World Congress and the 2017 convention of Francophone mayors in 2017 in Montreal, which many mayors, such as those from Berlin, Madrid, Montreal and Tel-Aviv participate in. Thus, the development of public spaces is a main concern for local elected representatives, as spaces promoting social, cultural and environmental convergence, and therefore, guaranteeing a higher quality of life. But do we really know who are the stakeholders shaping our cities today, those who make planning decisions?

What prevents citizens from participating in improving their living environment

Regarding France, the different waves of decentralization and institutional reforms since the eighties have made the institutional systems dealing with the management and production of our spaces more complex. All those involved in the process come from a wide variety of sectors and have diverse skills and knowledge that, from time to time, may differ completely. Sometimes, certain groups such as members of civil society and contracting authority do not share the same codes and language, and so communication is difficult. Besides, the language of urban renewal composed of many laws, regulations and acronyms can sometimes be an obstacle for uninitiated citizens. Is it possible to make it more accessible and understandable so as to prompt people to get committed?

* Titled in french:
Nouveau Programme
National de Renouveau
Urbain (NPNRU).

In 2017 the city of Limoges entered the New National Programme for Urban Renewal* which concerns four neighborhoods in the city. But what does this really mean?

This program initiated in 2014 deploys a set of operations intended to both promote diversity and a sustainable city in order to develop all the economic and social functions of priority neighborhoods. Factually, inhabitants have no decision-making power even if, more and more, their opinions and user experiences are recognized. But the main problem is that, today, methods for public information are not adapted, which prevents them from getting to grips with complex subjects. But, is it really possible and desirable to involve inhabitants in the main overall urban strategic guidelines that will be implemented on the long term and on a broad scale?

2. Rethink methods and tools to mobilize citizens

As will be seen below, the question of space is, intrinsically, a citizenship question. According to Michel Lussault, the production of space is the result of both individual and collective actions; and the social production of space, is part of a principle of « struggle for space » because this space is disputed. Thus, space is deeply linked to power and might be defended or conquered. Obviously, when it comes to make important decisions, most of the time, world leaders gather in one place, which highlights the fact that politics is usually a question of territory and requires the co-presence of the concerned individuals. But today, it cannot be denied that there is a lack of citizens' involvement concerning the planning of their territory, because, sometimes, individuals do not feel concerned or do not think they can find any personal rewarding in a project. Is it due to miscommunication, mismatched measures? Numerous studies have shown that young people, working-class groups and people from a migrant background are the most absent from participation structures. Can the designer therefore act accordingly and try to invent tools that would facilitate their integration? The contracting authority is often limited by the tools its disposal that they do not know how to develop and adapt to the public, for lack of time or experience; and this is why mostly, this role is delegated to external service providers, sometimes architecture or design collectives, that have real skills in this field. But the designer

Rethink methods and tools to mobilize citizens

is also in competition with participation professionals who import techniques from management and communication that encourage standardized participation in a « kit » form, such as the *Service Lab*. Such a service produces reproducible and applicable services for any planning project, instead of offering an original collective experience that questions the territory. How can the designer use this problem to foster a more humane outlook on participatory approaches and thus give them meaning? It is in order to address this problem that The Urboteca project has been created. Designed as a space serving as a test for new types of public engagement tools – due its mobile nature – it facilitates and convenes debates on land use projects at the exact location where they will take place, which really adds value to the experience they offer. But is the committed designer able to effectively transmit her spatial knowledge without influencing the inhabitants' decision?



The Urboteca project at the Street Delivery Festival in 2015

3. Designer as a mediator : a link between citizens' aspirations and public policies' ambitions

Design, born in the industrial revolution context and carrying utopias, has tackled a certain number of great problems of the time, such as the everyday life standardization in England and the abolition of slavery in the United States. In the seventies in Italy, politics became really present in the design culture, and designers played a stimulating role during crises, allowing people to anticipate and look to the future. Indeed, design is not just a methodology, it is also a culture, knowledge, references, strategy and ethics, which, most of the time are intertwined with politics. But since designers offer their services to the population, they also have a certain ethical code to respect. In his book⁵ *Psychologie sociale de l'environnement*, Gustave Nicolas Fischer explains the fact that space is a factor of influence and conditioning. So how can designers and politicians use this power of influence benevolently without exerting manipulation? Created in 2012 and described as a collaborative urban planning tool, Unlimited Cities is a visual and interactive application designed as a tool, in which the user can modify different parameters, reflected then on the screen, giving him an insight of what his neighborhood might look like. The playful dimension of this service is a selling point, both for cities that subscribe to the service, but also for the inhabitants who have fun virtually reconstructing their neighborhood.

5. *Psychologie sociale de l'environnement* by Gustave-Nicolas Fischer in 1992.

Designer as a mediator : a link between citizens' aspirations and public policies' ambitions

Should the designer's mediation in space use game to unite and appeal to the population? Can we transpose this virtual service into physical space? In the context of citizens' participation, one must see how space can promote speaking, how the meeting can be done, and in what ways. Occupy movements like Occupy Wall Street or Nuit Debout are, for instance, striking examples of spontaneous experimentations of space, which have generated several micro-architectures giving voice to citizens. But are all these projects, which take place during demonstrations or are carried out by autonomous collectives, doomed to remain simple experiments relating to a specific event or situation or, on the contrary, can they be used during an investigative process on practices and uses of a territory? Indeed, the absence of any right to make mistakes and experiment in public policies is today a major innovation-inhibiting factor.

In a few words, citizens' willingness to participate faces many obstacles, such as the complexity of the stakeholders' network, or the great amount of codes and regulations concerning urban projects. But the main item on which designers can step in today, is how to set up participatory approaches in order to make them interesting and inclusive. So, how can the spatial designer rethink the conditions for participating in a fact-finding phase prior to an urban project? Can a spatial experience allow a greater engagement from the population ?



I'VE BEEN LIVING IN THIS HUT SINCE I FIRST CAME TO NORTH ITALY.

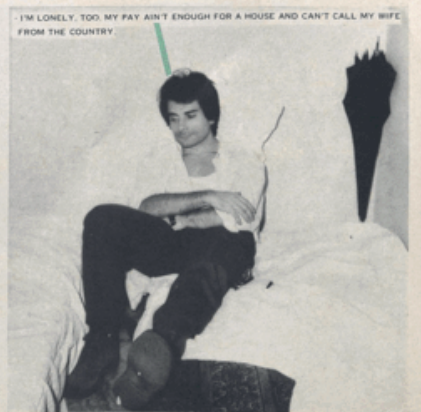


WE EXPECTED THEY'D GIVE US A DECENT HOUSE. ON THE CONTRARY WE'RE BEING KICKED OUT OF THIS PLACE, TOO.
WE GOTTA PART. GOD ONLY KNOWS WHEN WE CAN GET TOGETHER AGAIN.

IN TURIN BETWEEN DECEMBER 1968 AND JANUARY 1969, IN A PERIOD WHEN THE FIAT WAS BOOMING, A GREAT NUMBER OF YOUNG IMMIGRANTS POURED INTO THE OLD TOWN CENTER AND INTO THE SLUMS WHICH ARE TRADITIONAL PLACES FOR THE IMMIGRANTS WHO NEED LODGING. CHEAP RESTAURANTS AND AIDS OF MANY KINDS THOSE WHO WERE SO LUCKY TO FIND A BED HAD TO ADJUST THEMSELVES TO THE SITUATION IN THE IMMIGRATION CENTER FOR SOUTHERN PEOPLE. AN OFFICIAL CATHOLIC WELFARE BODY: A M. 3 X 2.80 THREE-BED ROOM AT 24,000 LIRE A MONTH PER BED OR THE ALTERNATIVE OF PAYING 1,300 LIRE EVERY NIGHT (1,500 WITH THE KEY) - A SMALLER THREE-BED ROOM AT 18,000 LIRE PER BED PLUS 1,000 LIRE A MONTH FOR USING WATER - A TEN-BED ROOM (SOME OF THEM USED IN TURN) WHICH YIELDS THE LANDLADY 300,000 LIRE EVERY MONTH. IN ORDER TO PAY A LITTLE LESS MANY WORKERS WENT TO THE DORMITORIES MANAGED BY PRIESTS OR WELFARE BODIES, WHERE THEY HAD FEW COMFORTS AND MANY CONSTRAINTS: THEY HAD TO UNDERGO THE EXAMINATION OF THE KEEPERS TO COME BACK ON FIXED HOURS AND WERE NOT ALLOWED TO RECEIVE FRIENDS OR GIRLS. THOSE WHO HAD TO SEND HOME IN SOUTH ITALY PART OF THEIR WAGES USED TO SLEEP ON BENCHES IN THE STATION HALL OR ON THE STATIONARY TRAIN CARRIAGES. THE LEFT-WING PARTIES HAVE BEEN DEMANDING FOR YEARS THAT THE TOWN COUNCIL UNDERTAKES TO BUILD CHEAP LODGING-HOUSES, BUT HAVE NOT COME TO ANY ACHIEVEMENT WHATSOEVER SO FAR.



A MATTRESS ON THE FLOOR COST ME A FOURTH OF MY WAGE.



I'M LONELY, TOO. MY PAY AIN'T ENOUGH FOR A HOUSE AND CAN'T CALL MY WIFE FROM THE COUNTRY.

The Struggle for Housing : A Fotoromanzo by Strum Grup. The first issue of a magazine from 1972, which includes fictional articles on issues of architecture and Italian society from different points of view © Strum Grup.

Interactive survey devices in favour of citizen participation



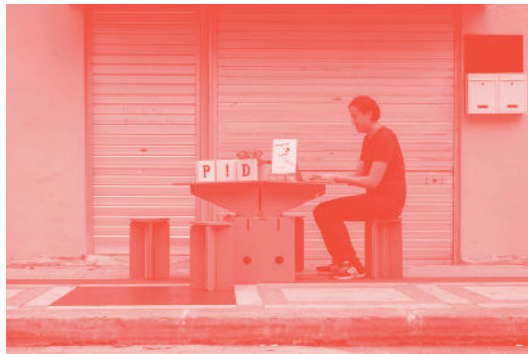
1. Beaubreuil : the choice of a deprived area

The choice of Beaubreuil - a priority neighborhood in the city of Limoges - as a study site was natural, because the inhabitants of these large « housing development » are affected by public policies, that are designed for them, but most often, without them. In addition, an immersion in the Town Planning Department of Limoges made me aware of the difficulties that project managers and development officers encounter, on the one hand to involve the population of these neighborhoods in projects, and on the other to implement participatory tools. Knowing that in the near future demolitions are planned in the neighborhood, and that some residents will be relocated and removed from the neighborhood, a question arises: is it possible to associate a population destined to disappear from the neighborhood, but who does not yet know it, to the design of a future urban project? How can the spatial designer work with the contracting authority, without being merely the person who will make people accept a decision already made? However, since the neighborhoods' inhabitants are often the first victims of segregation and discrimination, would they not be, through their experiences, the ones most likely to understand the ins and outs of the project and find new collective forms to initiate change? How, then, to establish a democratic equality situation in these spaces, where, most of the time, some speak while others are silent?

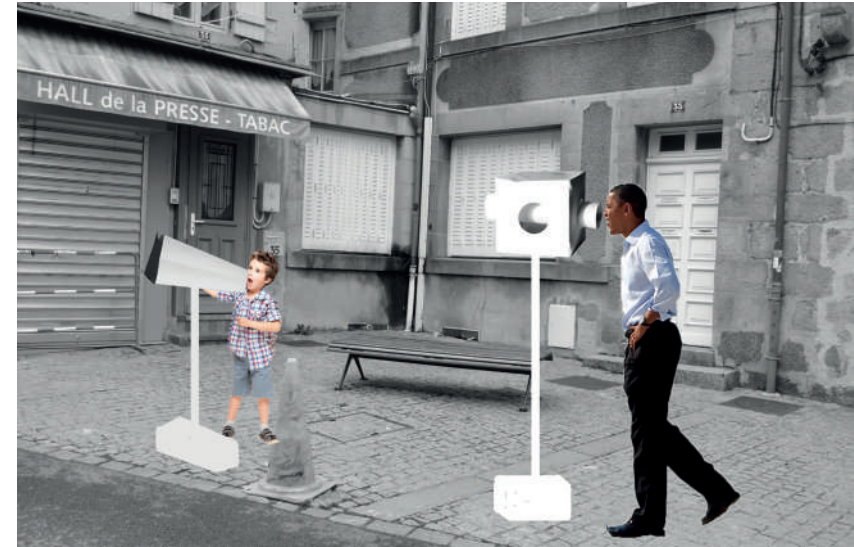


Aerial view of the Beaubreuil neighbourhood.

Some try to provide answers, such as Participate in Design and their 'Morph the moth' project: by spontaneously installing furniture in the public space, they want to reach a population who will not show up at formal workshops and community meetings. This installation takes the shape of a cardboard cube, which can then unfold into various configurations, and which contains all the necessary equipment to create a participatory space. Can a simple spatial incarnation of a meeting space suffice to make people express themselves? Is it necessary to put furniture like the Morph the moth project, or else should vertical units be created, like a stage? Is such an experience in the public space, and not in a closed place as usual, more emancipatory? Consequently, should this device be installed in the public space, where everyone can freely come to speak, listen or even participate without feeling ensnared ?



Morph the Moth projet The project invites passers-by to approach, or even sit down to discuss © Participate in design



Experimentation with devices to fit promote speaking in public space © Héloïse Bal.

2. A spatial experience to create conditions for a territorial dialogue

The investigation stage and the gathering of information is preliminary to any operation of participation or consultation with the inhabitants, but, mostly, it is, limited to oral questions or questionnaires to fill in. The fact is that these two means exclude a whole category of the population, who neither speak, write, nor read French. How, then, to overcome the writing barrier during the neighborhood investigation stage? How to create a common language that will reach every member of the community in the same way? Is the use of diagrams, graphic signs relevant in this case? With this in mind, Marion Poujade, a graphic designer, experimented an autonomous and modular device, called La Fabrique de quartier, that she placed in a public space in order to question passers-by about their habits in the neighborhood, their dreams and desires. By its visual appearance, the device appeals to the passers-by and makes them want to get closer to test the different tools. So, it is in the first place, by praxis and the act of doing that users can take part and get involved in their daily lives' transformation. The device must make it possible to break the traditional boundary between the participatory tool and the inhabitants, and to encourage them to participate by appealing to their emotions. One has to be careful anyway to not cross a certain limit, where it is no longer the participant who experiences the device, but himself who is tested by the device. Yocto Studio, for the concertation of the Bords de Vienne project in Limoges, imagined a system that allowed to survey the population while making them active, and that also offered

some transparency on the investigation by displaying its results. Indeed, displaying the answers may lead the unwilling or shy inhabitants to participate, on seeing that others did it. Here, the designer as a mediator works as much as a spatial designer as a product or graphic designer. Thus, in projects imbued with both political and social dimensions, the designer must review her posture and adapt on the basis of the expected results and the public she will work with.



*Question the inhabitants about their uses of public space
© Yocto Studio*



The unit «Tour d'Horizon» integrated into the device. The designer makes people act © Marion Poujade.

« La Fabrique de quartier » designed by Marion Poujade, and its different units, activated by the residents © Marion Poujade.



The device is autonomous which makes it easier for people to approach and try it © Marion Poujade.

3. Devices, services and methodologies to test

Devices, services, methodologies to test, aiming to improve our lifestyles and interaction between communities, and our environment >971

The meaning of the project is not that the designer will pick passers-by in the street to collect their opinions, impressions and desires, but rather that the curious inhabitants will make the first move. This is how the capability of a space to influence inhabitants can be used in a wise and benevolent way, in order to initiate the action of passers-by. But what can a device allowing spatial immersion in the neighborhood look like, especially in a benevolent way? How should maps, plans and models be used, on a large-scale, to enable the inhabitants project themselves in the area? By getting inhabitants to participate, define and understand the issues of their neighborhood, this device aims to provide answers to community life problems and improve the coexistence of individuals within the same territory. Besides, by empowering the territory's actors and by showing them what intricate choices have to be made during urban planning projects, the designer wants to give certain citizens the opportunity to appropriate the project and become, in turn, mediators for the rest of the population, thereby allowing them to play a role in the making of tomorrow's democracy.



Research about benevolent inquiry devices, which attract, question and gather © Héroïse Bal.

Towards new horizons

Can the interior and landscape designer promote local democracy and citizen's involvement in land use planning projects?
Certainly.

But currently, the public space no longer allows different human groups to live together harmoniously and to strengthen their community. there is a gap between what citizens want and what public policies think is good for them, leading to a difficult appropriation of this space that is thought for citizens, but not with them. To make up for the lack of knowledge and experience of public policies in terms of participation, citizens are organizing and gaining control over the management of their spaces. If some experiences are very successful, most citizens are hampered in their will to participate in improving their place and living environment by several laws, official documents and regulations, which they sometimes do not have access to, or do not understand. Taken together, all of these issues highlight the serious lack of design in participatory approaches today, which greatly impedes their smooth running.

As a result, the interior and landscape designer has to tackle current political problems and questions, and has an important role to play as a mediator thanks to her knowledge and skills. Thus, the living experience of a space is an important springboard to understand a territory's issues and begin to act.

Everyone can participate at their own level, each role is important. The designer must therefore use W competences in an intelligent and soft manner, so as to create new ways of living and experimenting, and so as to invite citizens to participate in order to improve everybody's living environment and the relationships between people, communities, institutions and their territory with a view to developing « convivencia » in the urban space.

Enjoy without reserve

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a piece of research carried out in French.*

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CO - Citizen Construction

Our public spaces occupy a central place in our daily lives and shape our relation to the world and the way we relate with others; they are therefore essential to our fulfillment within society.

But the fact is that these spaces are often designed for citizens and not with, or even by those who live there every day. This creates discrepancies between building and dwelling. Indeed, if, for several years, a desire to involve citizens in urban projects has been observed, in most cases, it is a one-way conversation in which citizens do not really have the floor. Therefore, today, more and more citizens delegate land-use planning to competent authorities and are satisfied with solutions designed for them.

How can the link between citizens, their territory and their political representatives be restored and strengthened? Is it possible to make the public space become again a political space conducive to debates and exchanges, meetings and interactions? How can the spatial designer act?

On several levels, this thesis questions the power of design to influence space and, hence, the individuals who inhabit it, and its capacity to make relations between citizens and public institutions more peaceful. It aims to show how the spatial designer – thanks to her knowledge of urban spaces, her interest for users and uses, her empathy and her ability to solve complex problems – is able to make citizens get committed to urban planning projects that affect their territory and thus provide answers to the current democratic deficit.