



Parallel session 3C-2.2

Exploring alternative urban futures

Tuesday 12 November, 14.00 – 15.30

Pearson Building G07

Chair: **Prof. Camillo Boano**, Professor of Urban Design and Critical Theory, UCL

Cooperative urbanity: scaling-up self-managed housing policies

Prof. Santiago Benenati Balparda, Associate Professor, FADU (School of Architecture, Design and Urbanism), Uruguay

The Uruguayan cooperative housing movement is one of the largest and most elaborated cooperative experiences in the sector worldwide. Growing at the end of the 1960s from the articulation of grassroots organisations with a group of politically concerned architects, it was rapidly institutionalised by an innovative legal framework that gave strong state support to the model. In this context, it managed to define a clear protocol for self-managed housing procurement for mid- and lower-income households that has had a major impact on Uruguayan cities. Since then, it has grown to become the mainstream procedure for social housing provision in Uruguay. Among its main achievements are: its affordability; its contribution towards the decommodification of housing by the development of alternative tenure models like the communal ownership of the buildings; its innovative approach to architectural and urban projects; and its capacity to deliver cohesive and resilient housing environments. In that sense, this experience could be understood not only as a prolific architectural experience, but also as a social movement involving new understandings of urban governance. Nevertheless, recent projects appear to have difficulties in proposing an updated set of strategies to face emerging challenges, particularly in relation to the urban environment produced under the model. In this regard, three main debates are discussed to problematise its current performance: the lack of design autonomy of the cooperatives to respond to emerging socio-economic challenges; the difficulties in establishing a network of stakeholders that enrich the cooperative project; and, finally, the enclosed nature of the cooperative developments. In this respect, the modification of its current institutional framework to habilitate the articulation of a variety of stakeholders – as well as defining a more flexible normative framework for state support that does not compromise the cooperative's autonomy – are proposed as possible paths for further development of the model.

Temporary Collectives in Beirut

Sandra Frem, Lecturer, American University of Beirut; Founder, Platau | platform for architecture and urbanism

Taking the ongoing economic crisis as a departure point, this design research considers the real estate hiatus as an opportunity to test new models for development in Beirut. Instead of replicating large-scale investments that target fictional customers, an alternative urban approach would give priority to the temporary reuse of vacant properties. In a context where public space is obstructed through its sterile management, this research advances that collective experiences in Beirut can be enacted in the private sphere through the temporary reuse approach, and through a collaborative process that could be an alternative to formal planning models in Beirut.

Since the end of civil war in 1990, Beirut's socio-political ethos of polarised communities has resulted in a sharp absence of public infrastructures that nurture collective experiences in the city. Furthermore, processes such as privatisation of public space and exclusive development have reshaped the urban experience of the city in the past two decades, to cater primarily for private real estate development. Yet today, Lebanon is witnessing an acute economic crisis that has resulted in a complete halt of real estate investment, with high rates of vacancies in the building stock.

This paper investigates local urban practices in Beirut that have managed to escape formal channels of development and planning, in order to create temporary investments that yield collective experiences in the city. Case studies include Mansion, a cultural co-op which emerged from a barter agreement between owner and occupants; Citerne Beirut, a temporary hangar that hosts the yearly BIPOD festival; the Mar Mikhael Train Station, which is today the site of popular events after fifty years of abandonment... Building on these precedents, the project proposes to use vacancy as an opportunity that could yield temporary collectives. The design research advances a new urban profiling process that helps such vacancies find interim investments and draw public engagement. The process starts by the creation of an intermediate agency that catalogues vacancies in real-time and makes them available to interested investors through a digital database. The agency will act as a mediator between investors, community groups, municipality and owners to facilitate the temporary reuse of vacant properties in a barter or low-rate agreement, in order to test community-oriented programs and raise the value of the properties at the same time. Through different mappings, the research showcases typologies of vacancies, reuse scenarios, and actors involved.

Slow Urbanism in Ho Chi Minh City: Experimenting the possibility of a metropolitan garden

Prof. Anne Jauréguiberry, Associate Professor, École Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture de Strasbourg

As Vietnam's economic capital, Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) is caught in an intensive 'development' process, supported by government, the real estate sector and international aid agencies, and fuelled by a growing demography. Areas historically considered unfit for construction are now under the pressure of development (Harms, 2016), regardless of their geographic and climatic role in environmental risk mitigation (Daum, 2019).

Located relatively close to the centre, the peninsula of Binh Quoi, Binh Thanh District, is such a territory. Subject to a series of masterplans awaiting funding, the area has been frozen for over 20 years. Consequently, Binh Quoi appears as a rare green 'island' with numerous gardens, agricultural lands, recreational ponds and abandoned zones. Meanwhile, with no right to develop, sell or improve their land, residents live in a precarious situation.

This paper focuses on a research-action project that experiments 'slow urbanism' as a tool to develop a collective thought about this territory, its resources and resourcefulness as a metropolitan garden.

First, it enquires into the geography, landscape and climate of Binh Quoi, before showcasing the human intelligence and capacity to adapt to the territory through vernacular architecture. The research then focuses on concepts of vulnerability, isolation, resistance and beauty as responding and complementary processes that reflect on the resilience of the natural environment, humans, and their interconnections.

Finally, as the research continues, the architecture and urbanism festival Playtime integrates experimentation. Knowledge is exchanged during the building of temporary installations and playgrounds using vernacular materials, as well as during participative activities, enabling neighbours, researchers and participants to discuss the living environment in Binh Quoi and its existing qualities.

Housing cooperatives in Kigali: what is there to show for?

Billy Ndengeyingoma, PhD candidate, LSE

There is increasing research interest in the rising global phenomenon of civil society participation in housing provision. This phenomenon, often characterised as collaborative housing, takes many socio-spatial and legal forms, such as co-housing and housing cooperatives. These cooperatives are often presented as a promising avenue for affordable housing in the Global South, but the volume and the diversity of research on cooperatives in urban Africa remain scarce.

Drawing on a nine-month fieldwork period, I investigate the roles and activities of housing cooperatives in Kigali, Rwanda's capital city. These findings shed light on the intentionality of Kigali residents in becoming recognised stakeholders in urban housing and on alternative rhythms and mechanisms of strengthening social capital. The qualitative interviews with cooperative members reveal that most cooperatives in Kigali stagnate in the organisational phase of their projects, without moving to the building phase and the living phase. Though housing projects take time to materialise, I argue that cooperatives play the role of rendering visible the social capital of their members. In fact, cooperatives consolidate the pre-existing social relations of their members in a registered, formalised, and visible organisation. This visibility of social capital is explicitly sought out and valued by cooperative members because it sustains the hope for the accumulation of financial capital, be it through housing ventures or otherwise.