Spatial Practices in Borderlands: Bottom-Up Experiences and Their Influence on Border Communities

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Abstract

Differences and conflicts are most evident at borderlands, which act as balancing tools to organize and filter economic and migratory flows. The increased militarization of these areas, which often requires creating empty spaces next to the fences, fosters deterritorialization processes that not only have profound effects on the territory, but also on the people living in these areas. As space shapes people, this paper analyses the effects of marginalization and violence, as well as hope for a better future for people and migrants living in these places. After evidencing place disattachment and life disruption originated by strong transformations to their environments, a review based on literature of several bottom-up experiences acting in these areas is presented. Based on subversion, contamination, hybridization and transgression, these examples show the interesting ambivalence of borderlands, which provide a provocative and inspiring arena for new local planning and architectural design for recovering place attachment, stronger community identities and the development of new models of coexistence.

Keywords

Borderlands; urban transformation; deterritorialization; re-framing border; bordering practices

"When goods won't cross borders, armies will do" (Bastiat 1990:52)

Introduction

Globalization considers borders as elements that have to be crossed by goods as fast as possible, in their displacement between their places of production and consumption, remaining unaware of the territory they cross (Castells, 1996; Cidell y Prytherch, 2015). Migratory flows can be understood in a similar manner, but often generate turbulences and new territorial configurations due to countries' efforts to limit new entrances (Cimadomo and Martínez Ponce, 2006). Borderlands are commonly peripheral locations, where marginality and the lack of economic dynamism are frequently found, creating a great contrast with globalized flows, whose economic interests can be considered to govern the way borders actually work. The imposition of stricter requirements on allowing goods and people to enter industrialized countries is an increasing trend, going hand in hand with the increasing militarization and control of borderlands. Territorial planning usually does not define the transformation and development of borderlands, their definition being mostly of political and military use, which often leads to opportunities to increase flexibility in the use of these territories to become lost. The result is that spatial planning in borderland contexts rarely manages to transformorm the territory in ways that might improve the social and economic life of its inhabitants, as safety issues are given priority. However, safety is ambiguous as the use of military corps, and military originated tools to screen borders do not always result in a safer environment for the citizens (Correa-Cabrera and Garret, 2014; Heiskanen, 2016)

The idea of borderlands as fixed and unchanged locations through time has evolved towards an understanding of dynamic and mutant spaces, able to adapt to the transformations of contemporary societies by acting directly in the territory. These transformations are no longer strictly imposed by political and government bodies working with international organizations that have final control over the decisions related to security and commerce. The claims of citizens are also key, which through bottom-up processes are becoming more and more important for dynamics related to architecture and planning (Lange, 2012; Cimadomo, 2014a; Hou et al., 2014). The environment built together with the experiences of citizens is relevant to the characterization of urban locations and to create place attachment; in fact physical locations have ontological importance, being more than a mere backdrop to social phenomena (Gieryn, 2000). From this point of view, they are not only places to screen economic and migratory flows as well as arms and drug smuggling that create disruptions in the lives of people living close to borders, but also central places where citizens live and experiment common practices influenced by strong conditions (Montañéz Gómez, 2001, Restrepo-Botero, 2012).

In this paper, we look to understand specific feelings generated in borderlands, where military technology is used to create a kind of deterritorialization in order to achieve a better control of the land. In particular, we aim to comprehend how people feel these places are being transformed by top-down processes (Herner, 2009; Woodward, 2005). In the case of borderlands, we find a tendency to create a *terra nullius*, a void that is much easier to patrol and defend, erasing any previous existing character and producing proceses of deterritorialization. As any transformation, doing so promotes disruptions in the lives of affected communities and their attachment to place, especially if driven from governamental bodies. Bottom-up processes mobilize citizen participation, and are recognized to improve place attachment and place identity (Manzo and Perkins, 2006). With the exeption of Smith, Castañeda and Heyman (2012), who focus on the relations between occupiers and homeless during El Paso protests in 2011, the presence of bottom-up processes in borderland areas has remained largely absent in academic debates within community and environmental psychology, planning and geography. This paper argues, nevertheless, that these experiences could provide important insights to how marginalized and conflictual areas like borderlands can be better understood and supported.

The organization of this paper is as follows: in the first section, a review of selected literature is presented around borderland and space to develop the idea of borderlands as core places where people spend their lives and have a crucial role in their transformation, against the more common idea of borderlands as marginal and deadlocked areas. Next, the effects of top-down policies on borderland territories and their citizens are discussed, grouped into two collections of nouns (Fear-control, Hope-opportunities), which could seem opposite but can also coexist in these areas. These nouns reflect the effects of borderland deterritorialization on communities and individuals and their implications. Finally, we demonstrate how different approaches in planning and design practice for these areas have different effects on the people living in them, and can be powerful tools to improve social conditions and place attachment and habitability within borderlands. They are used to restore and communicate a relation of space with people, and highlight the power of communities to adapt the environment to their needs.

Towards an Understanding of Borderlands as Living Places

Borderlands seem to be a representation of governmental decision systems, where political policies are developed in response to conflictual relations among countries, and are closely related to the possession of the territory. A survey of urban planning in conflictual border regions like the U.S.-Mexico border, the UK-Spanish border in Gibraltar, or the Spanish territories in Africa bordering with Morocco, shows a poor consideration of these spaces and of any kind of strategic implementations to strengthen their development and to power up new opportunities (Cimadomo, 2015a; Cimadomo 2015b). Borders are hence considered as end points for planning and are treated as marginal places, and the

opportunities existing on the other side of the fence are usually ignored. Also, although it is not always the case, improvements at a trans-regional scale are more frequent, as can be seen in the Interreg program fostered by the EU. Depending on the relations existing on each side, benefits for each community are obtained. In any case the effects of these policies should be considered as spatial issues, as they substantially transform the built and urban environments.

To broadly understand what occurs in borderlands, it is useful to look at more generic studies on the development of urban spaces to be able to compare these special places and the differences that can arise in opposition to other more specific locations. The first work we refer to is Mirko Zardini's Sense of the City, probably the first to consider the need to use all five senses to experiment contemporary cities, in order to balance the predominant studies based on visual inputs (Zardini, 2005; Pallasma, 2005). The essays presented in the edited volume offer a reflection on the use and enjoyment of the space around us, as sensorial experiences help to understand the physical and built environment with all of the five senses complementing the limited faculty of sight, too often the only starting point for our decisions related to urban space.

In the specific context of borderland studies there are also several works that theorize the need for the widest of reflections over the direct and indirect effects of borders on the territory and on the people living there. Werlen (2005) deals with the regionalization of space, with a radical shift from the idea of space as a generator of the actions realized in borderlands to the idea of space derived by the action of man. According to Werlen space is not something that preexists and determines human actions, but rather the target of these actions and thus poses the need to study how different individuals act, relate to and transform space, and not only how they live in it. Not only the production of space is deemed interesting, but also its appropriation by prominent subjects who are able to define socio-spatial relations. Van Houtum and Strüver (2002) also focus on this shift, considering thresholds and doorsteps as key concepts in transborder relations. Doors not only exclude the other side from our control and domination, but also offer the possibility to get in touch with the strange, showing how necessary it is to fully understand these realities and to put people at the core of the research, as they are the ones who separate, limit and ultimately build these doors, while also having the power to decide when to close or open them to get in touch with the 'other'. These decisions are also relevant for the space at the other side of the gate, as in the last instance they offer the opportunity to transform it as long as it becomes part of a wider region with strong ties at each side. What is really interesting is to acknowledge the possibility of change inherent to the people living in these places, and how they can have an active role in modifying the territory in which they live. This is possible thanks not only to their perception and appreciation, but also to the relationships they can create with those living on the other side of the border, according to its level of permeability and openness.

Different Ways to Live the Border

'Good borders make good neighbours' is a common saying that has several nuances, which are pointed out by Newman (2003), who deals especially with the negative easiness of borders to hide the 'other'. This effect offers the opportunity to develop identities of and life in border settlements regardless of the realities at the other side (Habraken, 1998; Newman, 2003). The same asymmetry that this behaviour promotes is the origin of the flows of migrants attracted by better economic and social conditions. When these flows rise mixing becomes unavoidable and everyday life suffers fusion and hybridization. Blending is one of the most interesting situations created, not with a negative connotation but rather as a way to share and find a common cultural identity among the people at each side. This is what happens in open borders, those which tend to disappear or give freedom to people and goods to trespass them. For instance, in the case of the Brasilian *Faixa de Fronteira* a common identity is at the base of a participative program aimed at strengthening links with Paraguayan citizens. The project *Fronteras abiertas*, on the other hand, developed by Centro Studi di Politica Internazionale based in Rome, has the aim of strengthening collaboration networks in Latin-American borderlands based on previous transborder dynamics and relations (Rhi Sausi and Conato, 2009; Oddone and Rodríguez Vázquez, 2015).

In order to delve in detail in this analysis, it is useful to consider the basic elements of the concept of citizenship, which can be commonly resumed under three key ideas: the individual, the community and the relation between them. This relationship between individuals and communities is particularly interesting as is key to promote stability based on common identities and the legal rights obtained over time (Wiener, 2007). Common cultural identities are certainly crucial, as its absence or destruction is at the root of many political and military actions and tends to define strong limits in the territory based on race or religious differences. The effects of globalization on society generate multiple discordant readings, but focusing on the transformations that it impels on the territory we can observe some effects of interest. First, the reduction of the importance of permanently redefined boundaries (Castells and Muñoz, 1995; Indovina, 2004; Indovina 2014), the limitation of national powers to the benefit of international entities such as the IMF or other regional organizations (Evans, 1997; Scholte, 2005), or even the reduction of the weight of everything that is far from the international centers of economic or political power (Ernst, 2005; Cimadomo 2014), with a generic effect of national borders blurring. At the same time, it is possible to recognize how there is an impulse to strengthen or to raise some new borders, especially in places experiencing an unexpected tension due to migratory flows, as in the recent crisis in Europe with the exodus of citizens from Syria. The result of the latter shows a scenario in which a growing number of countries are reestablishing their border controls to curb immigration, which has reached emergency levels despite humanitarian efforts by the EU and several EU countries. In both cases, one of the effects produced is the erosion of citizenship, with a loss of social cohesion and

citizenship rights. It has been argued that this is the result of the trend of an increasing individualization of identities, which together with diffuse processes of belonging to a globalized space, mean that each citizen looks for limits according to its personal identity (Paasi, 2003, Obkirscher, 2015). Falk (2000) considers that a pivotal change is to move from a space-centered conception to one based on time, where flows also have a relevant role and diminish the importance of territoriality in the definition of community identity. Also, his work suggests a more generic relation between the state and its citizens, which facilitates the recognition of the influence that walls and fences have over the territory, and how these kind of elements involve opposition with each other (Paasi, 2003).

In the next sections, we will attempt to unpack the feelings originated by the most relevant effects of economic and migratory flows, as well as government policies aimed at citizens living in borderlands. These areas are considered by many authors as a frame of reference where actions and activities are performed, and as the expression of the society that lives there, where all localization, mobility, hierarchies and functional activities which transform people and their relation with the space they occupy, converge (Castells, 1996; Werlen, 2005). According to the definition of Tejada González (2004, 79) "(A) border is defined as a physic demarcation which defines the limits between us, whoever we are, and the others, whoever they are". As this space exists to control the flows between people of different countries, contextualizing borderlands and its relation with citizens in this light allows us to understand why people settle in these areas and how they are able to manage and sometimes take advantage of the hidden opportunities they offer.

Considering the complexities that can be found in borderlands, we propose to group the more prominent feelings observed in citizens living in borderland areas under conflict, being aware of the risks of using dichotomies that could simplify and mislead the reality of such a complex and rich reality. The geographical area under study comprehends the US-Mexico border, the frontier between Israel and Palestine, and the Mediterranean EU borders. Fear and the effect of being surveyed comprise the first block, directly originated by the increasing militarization of borderlands (Heyman and Campbell, 2012, Payan, 2014). If this militarization is done with the aim of ensuring more safety against the 'enemy at the other side', it is also obvious that it also enacts strong political power, unilaterally controlling and defining what to do in borderlands. The second block of feelings under consideration deals with hope and opportunity, usually shared by migrants when they arrive at or cross a border. It is very important to consider that these feelings are not mutually exclusive, as fear and hope can coexist, as is the case in different contexts.

Fear | Control

To fully understand how fear surges in borderlands, it is important to consider the increasing militarization used to control these areas within a society of

risk, which is defined as "[A] developmental phase of modern society in which the social, political, economic and individual risks increasingly tend to escape the institutions for monitoring and protection in industrial society... [Risks are] undesired, unseen, and compulsive within the dynamic of modernization" (Beck, 1998, 3; Beck, 2009; Hough, 2013).

Beck talks about new risks faced by countries and citizens that are much more sophisticated and hence more difficult to identify and deactivate. These risks are the result of our changing society, where globalization introduced global and more structured risks than in any other period in history. Also, if fear has always been an emotional answer to threats considered as objective, globalization and the terrorist attacks at the beginning of the 21st century have transformed this definition, hardly adaptable to our contemporary reality (Ordoñez, 2006; Virilio and Richard, 2012; Williams, 2011). Global events such as the Olympic Games or Football championships attracting hundred of thousands of people or the international transport of containers, controlled only randomly by customs due to their increased volume (Fig. 1), have transformed the way each country can effectively control its territory and borders. The result is a switch towards the fear of a *possible* threat, whose vagueness supposes a completely subjective reality in any moment and place. It is the origin of the architecture of fear, which has several representations in the configuration of urban spaces. Among many trends, we have the proliferation of gated communities, enclosed spaces offering a greater security for its inhabitants derived from the selectivity generated by belonging to a restricted and selected community and from private surveillance often existing to control the access of visitors, always considered as a threat. Governments are also transforming urban spaces into sanitized areas, with hard surfaces and obligatory routes which allow for the control of urban flows by means of CCTV and are promoting new policies attempting to limit or eliminate the right to public assembly, by criminalising protests (Graham, 2006; Tierney, 2017).

Fear is used by governments to justify their military driven actions and responses towards threats that are difficult to predict. The common justification is related to an appropriate answer towards attacks on the nation, which are no more considered simple criminal acts. This trend has been radicalized in places like the United States of America after the 9/11 attacks, demanding a reform of the existing immigration, transport, and border patrol policies, to move towards a closed fortified space against terrorist threats, something renewed during the last presidential campaign. Another consequence of this common trend is the creation of archipelagos where borders or clear limits become blurred, and the status of exception derived by permanent threats is used to suspend legality and the rule of law: the Guantanamo detention camp is only the most well-known examples of this kind, which is also found in the Immigration Detention Centers spread by the European Union in the Mediterranean or the offshore detention camp in Manus Island, Australia. These settlements have been condemned by all International and Intergovernmental Bodies and by the majority of Countries that signed the IV

Geneva 'Convention relative to the protection of civilians in time of war' (Flynn, 2013; Hyndman, 2012). However, we recognize how such settlements still have and will continue to have a strong presence in the territory, until migrants are no longer seen as threats, but just as human beings.

Figure 1. Air view of Sydney container port. The increasing amount of containers reaching international ports requires new methods of screening which actually cannot guarantee exhaustive control of goods. Author: Aaron Jacobs. CC2.0

Despite the implementation of several new technologies to perform better screenings, threats are becoming difficult to control, due to the increase of all kinds of flows, with the final outcome being a generalized feeling of fear against something that is extremely difficult to suppress. This new need for exhaustive control of the territory is particularly visible at national borders, and a common trend for US and other Western countries' policies. For instance, the primary aim of the attempts to develop a smart border on the frontier with Mexico is to show the rest of the world the virtual sealing of the territory. Doing so can be seen as the Government's answer to the threats of terrorism and chemical weapons smuggling, a danger that is also transmitted to the inhabitants of these areas. It requires emptying the areas next to the fences, an imposition over any territorial logic for the need of a permanent control, which directly affects the citizens living in these areas. This results in the creation of marginal spaces, which can be directly linked

to fear, unsafety and to the loss of diversity, complexity and the creation of 'inequality topographies' (Muñoz, 2008; Pain, 2000, Tulumello, 2015; Wacquant, 2014). Although the USA-Mexico border is perhaps the most analyzed scenario, it is very similar to other realities in the rest of the world. The Integrated System for Exterior Patrol -from the Spanish acronym SIVE- has been used in Spain since 2002. Initially used under a pilot experience in the Straight of Gibraltar and in the Canary Islands, it has been extended to the entire Coast of Andalusia. SIVE is the most advanced tool in Europe used to patrol the Mediterranean Sea, its southern border which turned into a hot spot for the tragedies occurred during the past years (Fig. 2) (Andrijasevic, 2006; El País, 2013).

Figure 2. Boat people arriving at Lampedusa. Author: Vito Manzari. CC2.0

The aim of this system is to detect, identify and control possible smuggling operations and human trafficking on the Spanish coast. The official presentation of this military system points out the humanitarian aspect, which offers the possibility to rescue migrants transported in risky conditions by traffickers from the North African Coasts. Despite the fact that a reduction of these flows has not been experimented, the complete deployment of the system only pushed displacement of the smugglers' routes to the East, where distances to cover increase, as the risks of wreck (De Soto, 2006; Guardia Civil, 2005).

To understand these kinds of feelings, it is also important to examine the arts, which look at hidden aspects of society and are able to express peoples' emotions. Antoni Muntadas is the artist who, more than any other, has studied fear around borders in several different countries. His series 'On Translation' started in 1995 aimed to inform, ethically and esthetically, the anthropological role of new technologies, often posing social critiques of neoliberalism and mass media activities. In 2005 he presented 'On Translation: Fear/Miedo' a videocreation showing interviews of citizens living near the US-Mexican border. All of them expressed concerns related to people at the other side of the border. The main outcome was the recognition of the common feeling of fear among all the people involved, unifing all of them (Crespo Fajardo, 2013). In 2007 he repeated the same work based on the rising conflict in the Straight of Gibraltar, with citizens of Tarifa, on the South Coast of Spain, and Tangier, on the North Coast of Morocco. 'On Translation: Miedo/Jauf' focused on the fear derived by the expectations for a better future, of the expulsion of illegal migrants, and most interestingly, the fear not to meet expectations. This last fear shows that the difference created by the border in this case is not only physical, but also acquires relevant psychological aspects. The author presents the themes of displacement, border crossing, survival, or the search for personal improvements, shared among people interviewed at both sides of a border (Muntadas, 2008). Borders become obstacles for flows of people and goods, who have to stop in their proximity in order to wait for the moment they are allowed to cross, or the opportunity to illegally enter the other country. Borderlands are hence created as unsafe areas that should be kept empty for control purposes, resulting in feelings of fear found in the citizens living in borderlands and these areas. In this way, deterritorialization and disconnection among citizens and the territory under control is established, something which increases disingegration and marginalization.

Hope | Opportunities

Hope is crucial in borders as they are spaces where migratory flows are filtered. Contemporary migratory flows have their greatest origin in countries with high levels of poverty and/or conflict; however, they also are generated where ethnic or religious repressions put lives at risk. Among the the most common reasons for emigration, which are broad and complex and its analysis are beyond of the scope of this paper are the search for new labour opportunities as well as non-economic motivations such as migrants' attempt to obtain or recover their lost dignity. This feeling usually originates in the same border areas where fear exists, where an asymmetry between 'us and them' defines new possibilities, or where there are opportunities to improve life conditions. One of the first experiences related to offering new opportunities in borderlands is the program developed by Mexico since the 1960s, through the Border Industrialization Program and later on with the Inbound Plant Program or Maquiladora program. Aiming to reduce the rate of unemployment existing in the country., these initiatives offered foreign companies the possibility to build factories in the proximity of the Northern border

(Bustamante, 1976; Smith, 1992). The creation of these factories required a great amount of non-specialized workers, and resulted in more than doubling Mexico's manufacturing employment rates between 1980 and 1993 (Calderón Villareal and Mendoza Cota, 2000; Dorock and Brzgowy, 2014). Maquiladoras offered a way to improve the possibilities of impoverished families and have a pull effect (Fig. 3). As such, many migrants end their journey on the South side of the US-Mexican border, having found new opportunities before attempting to cross the riskiest border of their voyage (Fuentes Flores and Peña, 2010). More than fifty years after the implementation of these programs, the results are still open to different readings. The Government demonstrated a great flexibility in adapting the programme according to the new needs of private companies. Also, detractors point out that the Mexican side of the border is the most violent and dangerous areas of Mexico, while the American side is one of the safest of the United States. (Bustamante, 1976; Heiskanen, 2016; Heyman, 2012, 53; Heyman and Campbell, 2012).

Figure 3. Workers in a Maquiladora-factory in Mexico. Guldhammer. Public Domain

The consolidation of these factories also offers opportunities for a number of complementary informal activities, creating a dynamic and growing economy for the ever-increasing population. Hope is based on the presence of alternatives

that also emerge within the informal market, fostered by market deregularization. These activities offer income possibilities for the subsistance of a wide sector of citizens possible, including potential migrants to the north who end up staying here, and should be considered part of a broader economic system addressed by governances (Koff, 2015). These practices are a provocative but accepted answer to top-down processes, creating new collective identities and a cohesion strengthened by mutual aid and a sharing similar circumstances. It is a bottom-up response related to the occupation of space, where migrants carry their lifestyle with them, using public and domestic spaces. Furthermore, these opportunities transform this territory and migrants identity, creating sense of belonging to a community and of place attachment.

Bottom-up spatial experiences

Among these informal bottom-up experiences, it is worth mentioning several activities driven by architects, NGOs or community associations. For instance, the work of Teddy Cruz in San Diego and Tijuana takes into account the dramatically different lifestyle of migrants when establishing on the North Side of the border. Simple transgressive strategies are established to defy urbanism codes. The project 'Affordable Housing Overlay Zone (AHOZ)', developed with the NGO Casa Familiar in El Pueblito (San Ysidro, USA), recognized the transgressional tendencies that are informally created in certain communities and which force rigid rules to adapt to their cultural particularities (Cruz, 2006). Questions about density and the means of housing in these contexts are at the root of small scale interventions, based on the collaboration among neighbours and public establishments that can generate a fertile ground for a chain of new projects. In this initiative, a planning tool developed between the community and the municipality offered the possibility to increase housing density together with the opportunity to have mixed uses in a mostly residential neighboorhood. The process started with the identification and documentation of illegal constructions, mostly additions located at the back of a plot. Negotiations would allow a small overlay zone, that led to the legalisation of these illegal and fragile units and allowed for their replacement by new ones without penalizing the property owners. The property owner, in consideration of this density increase, join forces to produce alternative services, generating a 'Time Bank' for the dweller who in turn can invest it or exchange it for other services inside the neighbourhood. New relationships arise, so that private developers who want to benefit from the higher densities proposed by this overlay zone would have to comply with the social and public programs that accompany these developments.

Figure 4. Analysis of illegal granny houses and building typologies in El Pueblito neighbour, San Ysidro (CA). Casa Familiar.

Another example of bottom-up initiatives of place-making are the experiments of the architecture collective Decolonizing Architects, founded in 2007 in the West Bank. This collective put subversion at the base of their work and looked for political action through the transformation of space. They do not look directly for the end of the conflict, but rather give a new sense to the term 'decolonization', in order to transform it into a vehicle of change in the deactivation of the previous systems. Working with the concept of decolonization means that they aim to reuse and deactivate infrastructure built for control and defense by the occupiers, considering these changes as an opportunity to offer new uses that will undo the historic footsteps of previous ones (Hilal et al., 2010). They use concepts like Ungrounding and Un-homing in the transformation of the military base of Oush Grab (The Crow's Nest). Built by the English army in the 1930s and later used by the Israeli army until they retired from the region in 2006, they developed a proposal alongside the Palestine Wildlife Association and several others NGOs. The proposal transformed this military base into a park and nature observatory, offering shared uses where the previous establishment impulsed division and fragmentation. Controlled demolitions were planed to make the buildings less liveable for humans, but not for birds. The modification of topography was a key aspect of the design, remembering the demolitions of

'illegal' houses carried out by Israel, as well as the demolition of Israeli settlements in Gaza previous to its return to the Palestinian National Authority.

Also in this region is another initiative: the Israeli Committee Against House Demolition (ICAHD), which was created in 1997 with the aim of fighting against the injustice of the demolishing orders perpetrated by the State of Israel against Palestinian families who permanently saw their building permits rejected. The demolition of houses is part of a wider policy that attempts to expel Palestinians from their land, against all established International Law (Halper 2009). Fear that a house can be demolished is considered as a deterrent to the construction of new buildings. ICAHD uses an active resistance, blocking the work of bulldozers, mobilising diplomats and reporters against these actions, and also helping and financing the reconstruction of houses when it is not possible to stop their demolition (Halper 2009). ICAHD organizes International Volunteers Camps to rebuild houses demolished in the Anata's area as a declaration of friendship and dignity between the international participants, Arabs and Israelis. It brings different cultures together, and seeks a united will of cooperation to answer to the acts of repression carried out by the government of Israel, attempting through active resistance and small scale interventions to dismantle discrimination against Palestinians. The awareness of this activity for the participants and the multiplier effect into the international community is seen as one of its most important outcomes.

Figure 5. Rebuilding of Atta Jaber home in the West Bank, after being demolished by Israeli army. ICAHD, 2016.

The rise of the question about architecture and urban planning as generators of opportunities for people to not only experiment some improvement in their social or economic conditions, but also as tools to benefit from the transformations of the territory, can be emergent and experimental. At the beginning of this article, we described how borderlands tend to become void spaces impulsed by military decisions, leaving few opportunities for territorial or architectural transformation driven by professionals and technocrats. The bottom-up initiatives analysed in this paper, however, demonstrate the opportunities that emerge from place attachment , and the social and economic territorial transformations that can bring improvements for those living in borderlands. The experiences recalled here highlight the opportunity for public policy makers and enforcers to revise borderland policies related to the social and economic wellbeign of the inhabitants of these areas, and consider spatial transformations driven by participation as best practices to be applied on larger scales. They are actions raised by informal and subversive experiences that directly transform territories, and promote new trends to move design into activism. Bottom-up practices are nowadays common in many fields of our society and are also found in borderlands as impulses to create new opportunities (Cimadomo 2014b). Words like subversion, mixing, hybridization, transgression or appropriation offer new opportunities for the marginalized, those who suffer the effects of political top-down decisions which shape these areas.

Conclusions

Feelings originated in borderlands are very different and sometimes opposed to each other, but can coexist in complex, even contradictory ways. Fear and hope can be considered two faces of the same coin, for this reason being indissoluble, even if one of them is more prominent than the other. Although these feelings can be found in other spaces, in borderlands they seem to become crucial given their activities and processes. When decisions are taken at a distance from these areas, without any real knowledge of the territory or the people affected, a radicalization of tensions is commonly produced increasing marginality and insecurity, and consequently reducing the involvement of people with their environment. In these cases, urban and architectural activities do not focus on the reduction of these effects, and lead to the distrust and aversion towards architecture and politics by those affected on the ground (Correa-Cabrera and Garrett, 2014; Payan, 2014).

When initiatives come from the bottom, from the very people who live in and know the problems the border produces, actions based on subversion, mixing, hybridization, transgression or appropriations appear. Examples like the AHOZ in San Diego, where it would be very difficult to imagine similar planning transformations in more traditional and consolidated neighbourhoods, or the attemps to break Israeli plans with civil counteractions like in the case of ICHAD, or through deactivation of the government's policies present in the work of

Decolonizing Architecture, serve to consider community participation as an impelling need to improve place attachment and social and economical wellbeing. Spatial transformations have a significant role in these experiences, mostly from an informal standpoint, producing new creative opportunities. They provide the opportunity to help silent changes, at times difficult to recognize, in a context where noise is dominant, and to directly help people living in scarcity and in very difficult situations, due to the impositions and transformations impulsed by their environment. They also show how unfortunate were the declarations made by architect Ricardo Scofidio to the New York Times. When asked to envision the future of the US-Mexico border at a moment when new US Foreign policies were publicly discussed, he said: 'You might as well leave it to security and engineers' (Hamilton, 2006). Noam Chomsky (2013) expressed in very explicit ways the meaning of this border when saying: 'The US-Mexican border, like most borders, was established by violence — and its architecture is the architecture of violence'. This declaration resonated with the American Institute of Architects when new US president Donald Trump presented the idea of a competition for proposals for a new fence for the entire US-México border. Different points of view are becoming more common, as architect John Beckmann, speaking on behalf of the Third Mind Foundation, stated: 'I believe there is an extraordinary opportunity for designers, artists, and architects to become engaged with the problem. The scale is profound, the implications are enormous' (Quito, 2017). Therefore, initiatives to improve borderlands through design and urban strategies remain crucial and necessary to address. In his recently published book *Borderwall as Architecture: A Manifesto for the US Mexico Boundary*, Ronald Rael (2017) recognizes that as borders will be built in the future we must commit to plan how to alter and transform them into productive infrastructures. He proposes to refit a borderland ecosystem, pointing to bottom-up, creative alternatives to strenghten place attachment and wellbeing, such as the ones discussed in this paper.

Recognizing these often invisible experiences is the first step towards the development of new models of habitability and coexistence in borderlands. Spatial transformations through community participation can have a fundamental role in this process, but it is essential to recognize the value of bottom-up activities in the face of governmental policies which neither consider the complex realities of these areas, nor respond to the needs of the people who live in borderlands.

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