

CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS



Balkan Architectural Biennale 2019 Faculty of Architecture in Belgrade International Conference: Decoding Balkan

4th BAB INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

DECODING BALKAN: ARCHITECTURE, URBANISM, PLANNING

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A WORD FROM EDITOR

IDe)coding Balkan presents a process od recreating Balkan identity based on previous traditions and future intentions towards desirable images. It is also the main topic of International conference which will be held from 15-17thof November 2019, venue Faculty of Architecture in Belgrade, gathering academics, professionals and practitioners in the fields of Architecture, Urbanism, Technology, Design, Geo-informatics. This year the special focus in on using contemporary instruments and tools in the process of sending messages in between Balkan differences focusing on enabling understanding and common space for creating new Balkan identity.

Therefore, it explores past, present and future codes of building, designing, urban regulation, morphology, urban planning, used instruments and tools towards new paradigm of green: more transparent, efficient, ecologically friendly societies urbanism, architecture and design. Ecology is one of the main issue of global society, so the focus is on using contemporary tools in the fields to meet global standards and traditional diversity exploring / decoding the past and present traditions to code them into coherent future actions among Balkan and the region.

Special topics of the conference are:

01_ARCHITECTURAL PRACTICES IN CODING NEW IDENTITY

02_PARTICIPATORY ACTION IN PLANNING, DESIGN, MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY — INSTRUMENTS AND TOOLS FOR CODING AND DECODING COMMUNICATION

03_URBAN DESIGN STRATEGIES FOR TERRITORIAL DEVELOPMENT — CODING STANDARDS, PROCESSES AND TRANSFORMATIONS

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PRACTISE BEYOND CONTEXT: Seeking For Difference

Author 1: Pavle Stamenović, Faculty of Architecture, University of Belgrade, SERBIA; Author 2: Mila Mojsilović, Faculty of Architecture, University of Belgrade, SERBIA;

Abstract

Outside platform sets the framework for research into architectural practice by examining the conditions of contemporary context. The OUTSIDE project proposes the notion of *otherness* by rethinking the existing architectural concepts materialized in practice, while striving to structure new mechanisms for their interpretation. In this way, selected projects become elements for the interpretation of reality - a radical critique of modern society, the genesis of the multiple layers of perception or the experience of the impossible. One of the main intentions was to underline the capacity of a regional scene for producing architectural *newness* beyond the local framework of architectural education, regulations and structural patterns of the practice. The presented research argues that formal regulations and conditions of architectural practice are inversely proportional to the innovative approaches in architecture.

Key words: Outside platform, otherness, architectural practice, context, architectural competition, self-initiated project.

I. Introduction: About Outside Platform

Project OUTSIDE was launched in 2015 as an extracurricular program of BAB 2015, as an architectural platform for interaction of ideas, knowledge and thought in the framework of regional context. The approach itself is based on research, guided by the idea that architecture and architectural thought goes beyond the conventional framework of architectural discipline and practice. OUTSIDE platform focused on architectural projects and practices that transgress the local architectural context, and have the ambition to go beyond a presumed structure. One of the main intentions was to underline the capacity of the regional scene for producing architectural newness beyond the local framework of architectural education, regulations and structural patterns of the practice.

2. THEORETICAL CONSTRUCT : POSITIONING THE OTHERNESS

In the preface of his book *Progetto e Utopia*, Manfredo Tafuri discusses the condition of the discipline of architecture which is constrained and driven by the capitalist society of the late XX century. Architectural discipline today is even more at odds with its position within a predominant culture and society, where the space for the architectural exploration is constrained by the capitalist logic, intensified by the peripheral forces of this specific territory within the global networks. The ambiguity of contemporary concepts of architectural theory, in return destabilizes the continuity of architectural practice towards fragmented experiences of spatial voids and its

structural narratives. The narrative itself, contained in a vague dialogue of spatial fragments, becomes a narrative of discontinuous architectural reality. In this context, the Outside platform can be understood as an attempt to position the breaking points (divergence, separation, void) as intersecting lines for new possibilities for pure conceptual creativity in creating new architectural reality beyond the already defined boundaries. This notion of *otherness* through design is made possible by an open system of contingent architectural theory and practice that opens the field for *newness*. In this sense, contesting architectural modernity and spatial tendencies becomes a condition for the manifestation and conceptualization of redefining the architectural conceptions, both in sociocultural and theoretical discourses.

The OUTSIDE project sets out the idea (position) of *otherness* by rethinking the existing architectural concepts materialized in practice and trying to structure new mechanisms for their interpretation. In this way, selected projects become elements for the interpretation of reality: 1) a radical critique of modern society, 2) the genesis of the multiple layers of perception or 3) the experience of the impossible. We can say that contemporary architectural practice is stratified and fragmented in its ambivalent endeavor to connect the incompatible, based on the instability of open possibilities. The shifting of the center of gravity refers to the deviation from a stable position as a condition for creating new opportunities in the conditions of fluid context. In fact, it is about the openness of the system, to the extent that it opens for all diversity as a primary quality. The new definition of values and criteria is based on creativity and difference, thus introducing a metanarrative of multiplicity - a multitude of ways to decipher things and reality. Being on this edge of chaos, as a liminal condition, is to be in a zone of greatest complexity and creativity. More broadly, this would mean that unpredictability could be read not only as a new architectural paradigm and practice, but also as a matter of ideology and belief (Carpo)¹. This interplay of potentiality and its non-execution opens up a variable field for conceptualizing architectural reality. It is about contesting (architectural) reality and creating conditions for the newness as a space of opportunity, defining new conditions in the design of its own transgressions.

3. THE METHOD: SEEKING FOR DIFFERENCE

The Cases: An Exception that Validates the Rule - Difference as an Act of Rebellion

The OUTSIDE concept started from a vague point of reasoning that fresh, critical, or somewhat utopian positions could be found outside of the comfort zone of architectural conventions. Today, in the context of market driven society, architectural practice is commonly perceived as a service, rather than a practice of conceiving space and relations. For this matter, as an act of rebellion, architecture seeks for new, different ways of practicing the issues of content regarding space and society. The research was conducted through a sequence of exhibitions followed by a catalogue. One of the main goals of these exhibitions was to emphasize the capacity of regional scene for producing newness in architecture, outside of the usual frameworks of architectural education, regulations and structural patterns in practice. Competition projects as well as self-initiated projects are the dominant mode of production of architectural ideas. Crucial for generating these ideas is seeking for the newness, which, we argue, is immanent to architectural practice.

OUTSIDE exhibitions and the following catalogues are the result of a two months long (re) search with the aim to find and put together a set of competition and self-initiated projects that are in some aspect peculiar in relation to the regional architectural scene. This search was facilitated by an open call, followed by a persistent search for practices and projects that were *floating* in the vastness of networks. Editorial work started with the presumption

¹ Mario Carpo. The Digital Turn in Architecture 1992-2012. Wiley, 2013: 80-81.

that there are vivid practices existing within the architectural scene, coming from the margins; that there are bold projects that have not received enough attention, and therefore are less-known to the general (architectural) public. We were confronted by the reality in which there is a lack of communication channels and visibility, as well as a deficiency of content that would fit all of the presumed qualities. At the same time, this exact insufficiency is the reason for creating this exhibition in the first place. Namely, the basic aim of the exhibition was to make those *hidden* projects visible. While trying to uncover a fragmented layer of transgressions in contemporary competition practice, we aimed to discover the unconventional, critical or fresh, while browsing through a tick tissue of compromises. We strived to locate the place for smart architecture in between success and failure.

2.1 Case 1: OUTSIDE: A Second Look at Competition Projects

Architectural competitions were always a platform for seeking new approaches, as well as for affirming new architecture in the public realm. The importance of competitions today in the regional context, more than ever, is induced by the limited possibilities to build architecture that is based on spatial qualities, rather then profit and market. Within before mentioned contemporary conditions of the context, proposing a competition project implies thinking and conceiving architecture as an opportunity to envisage and design spaces and structures from a critical point of view, in which architecture becomes autonomous when it disengages from the structure of socio-cultural framework (Hays, M.)



Figure 1: Thessaloniki's Wet Dream team: Not a Number Architecs, Greece 2013. & Badel Redevelopment Competition team: Dedić, Dragić, Lazarević, Stojanović, Serbia, 2012. & Astronomy Center Redsand: In-Between team: Kruh, Poloncic, Zupancic, Slovenia, 2015.

OUTSIDE: A Second Look at Competition Projects exhibited proposals that were not awarded in the formal competition procedure. The curatorial team selected proposals that did not fit the demands of the competition, and were thus not awarded, but nonetheless had a certain quality of excellence. These projects failed to fit within the framework of a competition brief, yet succeeded in offering fresh design approaches, positions and unique, critical and/or utopian, research based architectural visions. The focus of the exhibition was mainly on international competitions and research based proposals, which, to some extent, succeeded in developing a critical position towards the competition brief itself. The aim of the exhibition in question was to show a part of this production, and to offer these projects a second look, from a different perspective. This exhibition was a chance to promote and expose new practices and approaches to architectural design, which carry certain uniqueness, either by their elaborated approach, graphics, bold concept or traces of potential that could be realized through future architectural theory and practice.

2.2 Case 2: OUTSIDE: Self-initiated projects

Within contemporary conditions, initiating an architectural project without any predefined assignment whatsoever implies thinking and conceiving architecture as an opportunity to envisage and design spaces, structures and relations from a critical point of view, while at the same time seeking for the newness, which is immanent to architectural practice.

In the context of contemporary business trends, which favor entrepreneurship and proactive participation in the market of ideas, which are largely dictated by the expanding IT sector (Start-up companies, Kick starter initiatives, etc.), what are the possibilities for an architect to affirm his work and knowledge in a similar way? If we take in account the social capacity of architecture, and therefore architectural education, then architectural profession goes beyond the framework of the service, and becomes an agency in the context of social engagement.



Figure II: QUIUBOX- A nomadic workshop, team: Prišmontas, Italy & UK 2017. & RED FRIDAY team: Šulkić, Audrey Štecinjo, Serbia, 2017. & AIGALEON 639 team: AREA Architecture Research Athens, Greece 2014.

OUTSIDE: Self-initiated Projects exhibited projects that were initiated by the architects themselves. In this case, the curatorial team selected proposals that did not have a formal brief to be addressed and therefore were able to offer fresh design approaches and positions.

Selected Projects were placed into 3 categories:

I) Concepts for space

This group of works presented architectural experiments that mostly refer the scale of the city or a territory. In short, these are conceptual propositions and speculations about space.

2) Digital research

These works presented experiments through digital media, concerning space and architecture that offer new readings and interpretations, without necessary direct implications into physical realm. Also, this line of work is encouraged by the individual need to perceive space and architecture through the creative act.

3) Small interventions

This selection of works was dedicated to projects that intervene with the built environment in a precise and localized scale. Further more, these are the projects that correlate with the environment with a mission of focusing on a direct problem, with a particular problem-solving agenda.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This Research raised questions that address the contexuality of architectural practice, namely the question of the autonomy of the project of architecture.

Related to this, the results of this research can be consolidated into following statements:

- 1) In order to imagine the newness in architectural space, one needs to transgress the structural codes of the discipline, which are driven by the logic of the market.
- 2) The newness in architectural practice does exist in a thin stratum (layer) in between compromises and fiction.
- 3) Contemporary Conventional architectural practice is constrained by the capitalist client/service logic. Even thought architectural theory moves forward end evolves, conventional architectural practice stagnates in postmodern condition.
- 4) Therefore, a certain transgression is necessary in order to create newness in the field, so that the practice can match theory.
- 5) Affirming architecture as a contemporary practice implies new strategies of managing and conceiving the project that exclude client-service relations.

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