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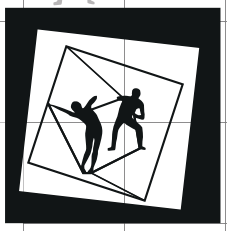

EM24

EURAU - EUROPEAN RESEARCH ON ARCHITECTURE AND URBANISM INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

IN-PRESENCE / THE BODY AND THE SPACE

The role of corporeity in the era of virtualization

Edited by: Marco Bovati, Anna Moro, Daniele Villa

ISBN: 978 · 88 · 99586 · 40 · 9

PVBLICA

Marco Bovati, Anna Moro, Daniele Villa
IN-PRESENCE / THE BODY AND THE SPACE.
The role of corporeity in the era of virtualization
© PUBLICA, Alghero, 2024
ISBN: 9788899586409
Pubblicazione luglio 2024

Tutti i testi di PUBLICA sono sottoposti a double peer review.

PUBLICA
Dipartimento di Architettura, Urbanistica e Design
Università degli Studi di Sassari
WWW.PUBLICAPRESS.IT

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11th INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

EUROPEAN RESEARCH ON ARCHITECTURE
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IN-PRESENCE / THE BODY AND THE SPACE

The role of corporeity in the era of virtualization

For those who deal with the city and the territory, space refers to the body
(C. Bianchetti)

The EURAU Milan 2024 Conference aims to unpack the significance of corporeality in contemporary times and its relevance for the upcoming years. Specifically, the focus is on the relation between body and space and how this relates to architecture, the city and the environment, interpreted as physical facts and processes. Within the background of a technological turn, the focus is now on what has changed or will further change in this relationship and what, on the opposite, remains unalterable, inherently bound to the material and impervious to the virtual.

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Addressing vulnerability through place-based knowledge and co-design practice [1]

Key Words
Vulnerability, Disaster risk reduction, Architectural ethnography, Co-design, Education

Overview
Vulnerability is a characteristic shared by human beings and the space they inhabit: bodies and places are, by their nature, constantly exposed to events that can alter their physical condition and cause biological, social and economic consequences. While there is an analogy between the vulnerability of bodies and places, there is also a clear cause-and-effect relationship whereby the fragility of the territory makes the condition of those who inhabit it vulnerable; similarly, the construction of places by man can also make them exposed to risks of any kind.
The relations between architecture and anthropology [2] take on a clear significance beginning in the 1950s, with the emergence of a critique toward functionalist architecture by architects who were also very different from each other, such as, for example, Aldo van Eyck and Aldo Rossi [Bilò 2019, p. 1]. In this regard, Giancarlo de Carlo claimed that the "purpose of architecture is not to produce objects but to give organization and form to the space in which human events take place" [3]. This makes anthropology, as a discipline that observes, understands, and interprets the physical and social environment of humans, the privileged cognitive tool of the link between space and humans by breaking the fence of disciplinary knowledge and practices of architecture. The use of ethnographic practice serves to question the specialized knowledge of architects to learn from the "bastard conscience" what needs to be translated: the organization of space [Bilò 2019, p. 146].
In recent years, the role of practices that bring architecture and anthropology together has become increasingly relevant in the design of vulnerable places for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and Disaster Risk Management (DRM), involving urban and spatial development policy agencies on the one hand, and the work of architects and organizations engaged in emergency prevention or management projects on the other. On the level of policy initiatives, the Sendai Framework (2015-2030) developed by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction

(UNDRR) and adopted by the UN state members, defines four priorities that contain goals and target actions that often need an active role of the population: (1) understanding disaster risk, (2) strengthening disaster risk governance to manage disaster risk, (3) investing in disaster risk reduction for resilience, (4) enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response and to "Build Back Better" in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction [UNDRR 2015, p. 14]. In particular, the second priority expresses the need to understand disaster risk in all aspects: vulnerability, capacity, exposure of people and assets, hazard peculiarities, and the environment, including promoting communication and education activities. The fourth priority suggests actions for community involvement in preparedness with a focus on empowering women and persons with disabilities to avoid gender inequalities and promote universally accessible responses, as well as the desirability of measures to "Build Back Better" and community involvement in participatory decision-making processes.

One of several manuals and toolkits inspired by the Sendai framework is the "City Resilience: Action Planning Tool" [UN-Habitat 2015], which aims to make it possible for neighborhoods or districts of larger cities or metropolitan areas, as well as local governments of small to medium-sized cities, to organize and carry out effective measures to increase the resilience of their cities. The CityRAP tool offers a method to coordinate municipal authorities, communities, and local stakeholders in a step-by-step participatory planning that includes a set of training exercises and activities with the aim of enhancing urban resiliency. The development of the participatory process implemented by the tool takes about two to three months and is divided into four stages: (1) understanding Urban Resilience, (2) data collection and organization, (3) data analysis and prioritization, (4) development of the City Resilience Framework for Action (RFA). The tool is based on the principle of bottom-up planning, which includes engaging stakeholders, communities, and citizens from the beginning through participatory risk mapping activities, focus group discussions, and cross-sectoral action planning.

A perspective on architectural design

From the perspective of design practices, the relationships between anthropology and architecture as a tool of DRR and DRM are visible in the work of architects such as Atelier Bow Wow and Yasmeen Lari. From the second half of '900, Tokyo started a process of radical urban transformations, reflecting a mix of Japanese and Western culture. In this context, the atelier bow wow, established by Yoshiharu Tsukamoto and Momoyo Kaijima, begins to observe buildings that are defined by accidental conditions or needs of their occupants. The survey was published as a guidebook titled Made in Tokyo [Kaijima et al. 2001]; it illustrates by drawings the peculiarity of those living spaces composed of aggregations of different functions and elements that accommodate their inhabitants' livelihoods. After the 2011 Great East Japan earthquake disaster that caused the tsunami and the meltdown of the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant, Momoyo Kaijima was part of the organizing committee of ArchiAid, a network of 300 architects and 16 university laboratories involved in post-disaster rehabilitation. Addressing the reconstruction plan of the coastal region of Ishinomaki-shi, they made a field survey, interviewing the village residents about their daily life and mapping the landscape and things that disappeared to figure out the reason for the destruction and make drawings of the lost spaces. The result was a collective drawing that linked the past, the present, and the future. In "A Pattern Book for Oshika Peninsula" (ArchiAid Oshika Peninsula Supporting Seminar, 2011-12), they showed the possibility of a new life in villages and a catalog of new elements needed for reconstruction. This method of putting together different pieces in one's memory could be called "Architectural Ethnography" [Kaijima 2018].

In 1980, Yasmeen Lari co-founded the Heritage Foundation of Pakistan, a not-for-profit organization engaged in research, publication, and conservation of cultural heritage to promote social integration, peace, and development. After the 2005 earthquake in the Kashmir region and the 2011 flood that devastated rural villages and beyond, Lari worked for the reconstruction and resilience of communities by engaging them in a self-help approach. Using traditional construction techniques is one of the key elements of Lari's work as it combines cultural values, empowerment of women and communities, and the use of zero-carbon construction processes. These technical solutions were outlined in the manual "DRR-Compliant Sustainable Construction, 'Build back safer with vernacular methodologies' Technical Support Program" [Lari 2011] through which artisans could be involved and trained for settlement rehabilitation and reconstruction. In the field of education, the "Disaster Preparedness Manual" and "Disaster Preparedness and Management" DVD [Lari et al. 2013] were additional tools of risk prevention realized in both English and Urdu for a broad understanding. The handbook includes illustrations and photographs that make clear the steps that should be followed "before, during, and after" the disaster so that people may understand and share the information. In the work of Lari, the knowledge of the place and the in-depth study of the past reveal its modernity [Corradi 2021] and the opportunities for human survival in the contemporary world.

Conclusion

In conclusion, before or after a disaster, vulnerable places must be understood by the nature of the territory and the relationships between the place and the community living there. Risk reduction strategies adopted by policymakers identify place-based knowledge and participatory processes as key elements that challenge architects' disciplinary expertise. The work of Atelier Bow Wow and Yasmeen Lari shows the advantages of a new relationship between architecture and anthropology. On the one hand, ethnographic observation makes it possible to (re) construct the narrative within which architecture exists: a landscape of memory that unites habits, livelihoods, and a sense of place. On the other hand, community involvement through education, participatory decision-making processes, and the recovery of traditional building techniques to "Built Back Better" is an empowerment tool that ensures the survival of the culture and economy of communities inhabiting vulnerable places in the future.

ENDNOTES

[1] This study was carried out within the RETURN Extended Partnership and received funding from the European Union Next-GenerationEU (National Recovery and Resilience Plan – NRRP, Mission 4, Component 2, Investment 1.3 – D.D. 1243 2/8/2022, PE0000005).
[2] See Architettura e Antropologia: Bilò 2019, pp. 11-23.
[3] G. De Carlo, Riflessioni sullo stato presente dell'architettura: De Carlo 1992, p.137.

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PVBLICA

Marco Bovati, Anna Moro, Daniele Villa
IN-PRESENCE / THE BODY AND THE SPACE.
The role of corporeity in the era of virtualization
© PUBLICA, Alghero, 2024
ISBN: 9788899586409
Pubblicazione luglio 2024

Tutti i testi di PUBLICA sono sottoposti a double peer review.

PUBLICA
Dipartimento di Architettura, Urbanistica e Design
Università degli Studi di Sassari
WWW.PUBLICAPRESS.IT