



↑ Hiria Kolektiboa.



Public space and places

The management of complexity

Public space and places: what do we want to talk about?

When we talk about the public space, we are thinking of places of coexistence. Plazas, streets, parks or corners where citizens carry out an endless number of activities throughout their lives. Imagine life in a village or a town and there will be thousands of places associated with shared memories, linked to the experience of living and coexisting.

We are always aware that urban spaces are creations that respond to society's needs, a system of values, traditions and customs. They are the result of a set of cultural, social and political realities. Therefore, diversity and complexity are two premises that need to be assumed before trying to compose and propose solutions that respond to everyone's needs.

Working in the public space implies a way of looking, a direct confrontation with life, a technical practice in which the details that make up our projects and images are based on empirical observation, on participatory processes and networks between professionals from various areas.

As a result, when approaching the contemporary question and the decline of shared space, the conclusion is the current urbanisation of the territory, but this does not generate a city (metropolis or coexistence). The only possible exit from this drift, which is destroying an age-old model of coexistence, would be to recuperate the essence of urban public spaces, which must be the great test bench of a tolerant culture.

And, as part of this way of looking, analysing and proposing places for lives, it is no coincidence that in Hiria Kolektiboa we have begun to work with women and to analyse villages and towns from a gender perspective.

The abolishment of patriarchal models will imply a redefinition of roles and models for solving conflicts, where men will have to renounce the monopoly of violence as the main way for solving the conflicts. The definition of the spaces of power will vary substantially and greater relevance will be given to works not recognize today, linked directly to the life of the public space; we are speaking basically of care work.

The towns and cities are changing, it is true, and perhaps it is necessary to understand that these changes respond to strategies in society that need to configure new spaces. Our metropolises change, without knowing, to respond to a model of coexistence under transformation which, in the aftermath of old unresolved political dreams, today undergoes a change towards an individualist existence focused on production and on consumption as paradigm of collective activity.

This contemporary challenge includes a correlation of forces and interests linked to the market and, consequently, to power, which has left the rest of us out; only a few take decisions and this -deciding together as men and women- is the key for an in-depth transformation of the way of designing and, above all, managing the public space.

At the present time, it is necessary to understand the public space as a context of modern-day life, delirious, rich, accessible, stressed and complex. Actions in the public sphere must go beyond demonstration or immediacy; network analysis must be made when acting in our cities, based on the individual as part of a whole and the whole made up of infinite parts, understanding that the public

space is the place for permanent negotiation, where the various players that intervene in urban life interact.

The places can be designed from the conflicts that arise in them; from the lines which, on paper, create beautiful compositions, or from the possibilities of making life easy in them. Or everything can be put on the table at the same time.

Let us analyse, for example, what would happen if we took into account only one of these three matters and we shall see what is lacking in new contemporary urban «creations».

- Designing places from the possible conflicts, we anticipate only a hypothesis of negative, criminal and reactionary behaviour in our society; the consequence is that grass cannot be walked on, benches cannot be used to sleep on, indoor places are rare and the public space is today an increasingly controlled place that responds almost exclusively to the needs of those who watch over it.
- Designing the spaces on paper, from technological innovation or the new materials isolated in our studies, it is very easy to think that every citizen is like the designer, and so we play at being goddesses because, without knowing what happens in the street, who uses the space and how it is used, whether or not it is very windy or if it rains on many days of the year, it is impossible to create (places) spaces that respond to the world in which they are inserted.
- Designing spaces exclusively from use, from what citizen's demand at any given time, we would solve some of the needs, but, surely, we would leave out details that are fundamental for a flexible future or for appropriate management; we would overlook the fundamental work of the technicians, which is that of transforming needs into rich experiences, in making what is necessary be accompanied by beauty and a force of identity.

Turning spaces into places is a task that falls to citizens, professionals and political players.

Thus, bringing the above together and assuming the complexity as an intrinsic value of the place and the project, we would obtain much better results. We could ensure that the key to the success of a public space depends directly on its capacity for managing the complexity of the medium in which it is inserted.

As professionals, we must go out into the street, walk along the streets, interact in the street. «In the poem, there must be mud, if the crème de la crème of poetry do not mind me saying so», Gabriel Celaya wrote and, accordingly, the project must be impregnated with a reality; it has to «be» reality. As well as dreams, desires, illusions and hopes.

And in this process, one of the main problems professionals come up against is time, time that runs at excessive speed marked by the ruling neoliberalism, which does not leave room for analysis, testing, correction or for questions, enthusiasm, learning or reflection.

In our opinion, we have to direct our energies towards the modus operandi; we have to invent new management and action tools that give us back the places that always belonged to us. We want spaces that have projects, that have ideas and imply proposal.

We would like a city where the management of public spaces generates community. A city that changes, that surprises, with places where things happen for citizens to interact, that are different at different times of the day and at different times of the year, in the same way as we, as people, also differ, as well as the use we make of the public space.

In short, living the street to make it our own, so that it comes to us full of meaning and to turn spaces into places with their own identity.

