

Chapter 17

Contemporary Architecture of the Periphery:

A Structured Content Analysis – Case of Biblioteca España and La Casa de la Lluvia

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ABSTRACT

This chapter analyzes of two types of social and cultural development in the context of peripheral regions. The projects analyze a library, Biblioteca España (2007-2015), and a cultural center, La Casa de La Lluvia (2013-present). The library was designed by El Equipo Mazzanti, a design firm, as part of the social urbanism policy framework that characterized the city of Medellín between 2004 to 2007. The cultural center was built by Arquitectura Expandida, a design collective that has been in operation since 2010 and whose headquarters is located in the city of Bogotá. This analysis is unique in how it applies a sociological analysis to two architectural projects. It also seeks to demonstrate how two cultural models of habitat development that seem to be incompatible, in regard to their design and implementation, share a common goal: attain the social wellbeing of the communities living in peripheral regions.

INTRODUCTION

Currently, the construction of community spaces and of low-income urban housing, requires considering new relationships, classifications and values through the guidance of responsible architecture (Waisman, 1985). From this perspective, architecture must take on some of the most important problems of society

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such as socio-spatial segregation and urban marginality. With a clear commitment to society and culture, such problems give importance to the idea of a profession that is capable of improving an understanding of the dynamics of a contemporary city.

To gain this understanding, architects must continually critique the institutionalization of architecture as part of their praxis and professional know-how. They must have a close understanding of the context in which they are working to strengthen a project's social function. Contemporary architects must balance their professional work with the constant practice of acknowledging context through fieldwork. By including this practice with an interdisciplinary approach, architects can recognize the different social problems of a region and city. A greater understanding of the conceptual structures of their practice – along with the objectives, problems and strategies of their practice throughout a region – will therefore be decisions that reinforce how they practice in the future.

The discussion on the role of architecture opens up an array of dialogues that are not only part of the spatial aspects of architecture, but also its regional aspects. According to Saldarriaga (1996), the field of architecture itself is not based on the theoretical and methodological notions inherent to a language of aesthetics and planning; it is a socially and culturally developed act that has been enriched by the different perspectives of the social and human sciences. With this context in mind, this research primarily aims to answer the following question: What cultural model was implemented in the excluded territories where the projects Biblioteca España and La Casa de La Lluvia took place?

In these terms, the aim of this article was to capture two ways of intervening architecturally in peripheral contexts. On the one hand, through the experience of the Biblioteca España built between 2006 and 2007 located in the Santo Domingo Sabio neighborhood in Medellín, Colombia, one of the core projects of Social Urbanism, and on the other hand, the practices of the Arquitectura Expandida collective, particularly with the projection of the Casa de La Lluvia, Neighborhood located in La Cecilia, San Cristóbal Sur, Bogotá and built in just 45 days in 2012. This compares two diametrically opposed experiences one of an official character and other of a community character.

This analysis is based on the comparison of two forms of patrimony that converge in the construction of the territory. On the one hand, the official forms where aesthetic values and monumentality are privileged, and on the other hand, the more experiential and habitable forms of a living memory, which through processes of resistance is close to the concept of patrimonial communities (Carrera Díaz, 2015; Consejo de Europa, 2009; Salge Ferro, 2020). This makes it clear patrimony, beyond being conceived as a social and cultural construct, also operates as an object of struggle in the minds of social inequalities and social alienation (Bourdieu, 1999; Llano, 2014; Serna Dimas, 2001). This means that the discussions on patrimony in relation to territoriality need to be thought of from the logic of cultural legitimisation and not simply from the processes of selection of objects, image strategies or the external reading of cultural practices. Hence, this research uses a more sociological theoretical framework to highlight the cultural models behind the interventions in the territory.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A theoretical framework was chosen for this research that could break down the representations of habitat that come from approaches of traditional urbanism. The framework also uses sociology to not only understand spatial perceptions, but the direct relationship between occupied spaces and the social perception held of them. According to Llano, as a physical creation of space, the city has the quality

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