

3. Participatory Approach to Urban Regeneration Processes

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Abstract This article presents research on the participatory approach to projects and processes of urban regeneration. It looks at the concepts of Sustainability and Habitability and their relationship with the urban environment and architecture. It carries out a revision of the participatory dimension of several urban regeneration processes carried out in Andalusia region and other parts of Spain and their link to results obtained in terms of environmental, economic and social improvement. In the light of this, it defines possible methodological tools that may be effectively applied to traditional urban regeneration processes. It presents a case study and its peculiarities and it draws some conclusions on its effectiveness and suitability. It compares citizen-led processes with public management-led ones. It analyses some potential tools to be used in this kind of projects and processes and identifies the existing gaps, providing possible strategies for developing new research that could be developed in deep.

Key words Citizen Participation, Resilience, Urban Regeneration, Bioclimatic Rehabilitation, Sustainable City

1 Introduction

Urban regeneration processes often implying building rehabilitation, redesign of the urban space and infrastructure upgrade involve –in the best case scenario– emerging or poor participatory processes led by institutions.

This kind of weak processes threaten to undermine citizens' collaborative ability to engage in urban environment improvement processes.

From a sustainability point of view, urban regeneration processes in our cities should always embrace an environmental dimension related to bioclimatic design of the urban space and buildings; An economic dimension related to efficient and effective management of material, energy and information resources; And social management in relation to satisfying citizens' needs for improving their quality of life.

For this purpose, the participatory dimension of urban regeneration processes and its application to specific actions must be defined and developed.

1.1 Urban regeneration and sustainability

A starting point for the discussion of urban regeneration is necessarily contextualising the concept within the scope of sustainable development and future sustainability of our cities. Without this wider approach, urban regeneration in itself would make no sense as it would propose some change and perhaps some development, but not necessarily some regeneration with a future that would improve local and global resilience of the city in itself and the territory around it. In this sense, our starting point is the concept of urban regeneration directly linked to the concept of sustainability, developed from sustainability, in such a way that it develops and puts into practice its demands.

Thus taking the definition of sustainable development by Our Common Future report of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) (Brundtland, 1987) as a reference: “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”, we can delve into the concept and consider its implications at the urban and city scale. Without going into further details of the concept, we must remember that it makes reference to the environmental and social economy spheres.

When we approach the environmental dimension of architecture, we are talking about issues related to bioclimatic architecture (López de Asiain, Alberich, et al., 2004), to understanding the place, taking advantage of its characteristics, and designing as an answer to that place, controlling both the material and energy flows and taking nature as a reference, seeking to close both material and energy cycles within the architectural processes.

When we talk about sustainability in the economic sphere and from the point of view of architecture and urban planning, it makes sense for us to approach it from an understanding of the need of a certain economy of resources of all types: material, energy, personal, information, etc. Then we can focus on what means to do efficient architecture and urban planning, using the appropriate materials according to their characteristics in order to meet the comfort and functionality needs of buildings and urban areas. That is, we are referring to the logic of the local, of the use of local and durable resources that last over time meeting the needs or demands that would be asked of that building or urban space.

We also need to make reference to an adequate and efficient management of information as a resource, to the optimum use of the existing knowledge regarding architecture to provide the best and more adequate design, some design that adapts to the needs of the future users in the best possible way. That necessarily implies a correct management of information, both of the information that the architect must know in order to provide a suitable proposal and the management of information to get to know the authentic needs of citizens who will live in our buildings or use the public space we are designing.

When we go into the social sphere, the question is further complicated as in the latest years we are living a paradigm change in the approach of architecture to the

social dimension. In previous research this issue has been addressed through the introduction of certain aspects and indicators (López de Asiain Alberich, 2014), however it has not been sufficient and in practical terms there are only some experiences that show a real application to urban regeneration projects. The social approach does not only make reference to the concept of sustainability, but also to understanding and defining the concept of quality of life, which has also been studied and developed in research done through indicators (Leva, 2005). We aim to analyse these emerging cases and take them as a reference in order to propose an adequate way of approaching the social dimension of sustainability in urban regeneration processes.

In this article the basic premise is that the environmental and economic aspects linked to sustainability have been fully defined in the field of research and knowledge, so that we will mainly focus on the social aspects.

1.2 Habitability as the target of urban regeneration

If we understand habitability as ‘...the ability of architecture to mediate between the human being and its environment, its ability to generate a protected, friendly and comfortable space, ultimately a space that is protected against the inclement environment’ (López de Asiain, Alberich, et al., 2015), the fact that the search for habitability is one of the main targets of urban regeneration is greatly relevant. This approach to the concept of habitability –shared by many authors such as López de Asiain Martín (2010), Espinoza y Gómez Azpeitia (2010), López de Asiain Alberich, Cano y Ruano (2015) – allow us to state that ‘the space required for the everyday life of human beings must be habitable and have appropriate characteristics to meet the physical, psychological and physiological comfort conditions that enable the development of activities’ (López de Asiain, Alberich, et al., 2015).

This statement is key to put the case for the fact that if urban space and architecture in general terms must meet conditions of habitability for the development of activities, this habitability must therefore meet the real specific needs of the users of such urban architectural spaces.

Delving into the sphere of human needs is greatly complex, as stated by Max Neef in the past century (1986), but it is necessary to be aware that in order for us to meet people’s needs we need to clearly define those needs beforehand, however difficult and complex this may be, in order for the urban regeneration process to be successful.

Authors such as Alguacil Gómez (1997), on the one hand, draw attention to the disassociation that has been fostered between subject and object of the process, and, on the other hand, the detachment and isolation of the subjects approaching the problems related to the social reality surrounding these problems or situations. In this sense, we must ask ourselves the question of how we are going to solve the

urban problems if we do not know the real needs of citizens. It is therefore necessary to approach the citizen participatory dimension in order to understand the context of the problems of the urban space that want to be solved. This is key not only to know the context but also to create and check if the proposals of urban regeneration have a high success potential. (López de Asiain Alberich, et al., 2015).

Hence our proposal has to do with answering users' needs from users themselves, that is, give value to users' experience and their criteria when it comes to making decisions regarding urban architectural design.

2 Collective building experiences in neighbourhoods

It is a fact that nowadays there are more and more situations in which citizen associations claiming their right to the city are being successful and are gathering social support (López de Asiain Alberich & Latapié Sère, 2014).

In some cases these claims have been the base for collaboration with local institutions and have been materialised in specific actions developed in the city. Not all the cases are successful, but possible changes when it comes to approaching urban regeneration in the city have been envisaged. They are usually cases adopting new values (Alguacil Gómez, 1997), claiming the local and being a part of a logic which goes hand in hand with the concept of improving sustainability and resilience of cities.

In general terms, they are defined from citizen empowerment, emphasizing the micro and relationships at a human scale, rescuing the molecular dimension of social matters. (Max-Neef, et al., 1986).

2.1 The approach

According to the arguments above, the need to rethink any action in the city from the point of view of citizen involvement and participation is clear. This is understood in terms of the need to analyse, develop, work and build hand in hand with social and citizen groups towards the improvement of habitability conditions in their cities and their neighbourhoods at a smaller scale.

For this purpose, we need to start from the need to improve their quality of life and approach the process from a subjective and perceptive dimension (López de Asiain Alberich, Cano Ruano, & Mendoza Muro, 2015).

This need has been pointed out by authors such as Borja (1998), who explains how social movements of the last decades of the 20th century (he talks mainly about the 60s, 70s and 80s) have been a great contribution to city and urban space management and have achieved goals such as the reappraisal of the public space as a place for gathering and socialization, the social claim for quality of life in cit-

ies, the demand of citizen democracy, local dialogue and participation or the retrieval of the leading role of local governments in urban policy. Borja (1998) continues to state that this way the concept of citizens as passive subjects changes towards citizens as active subjects from the moment they participate in the construction and management of the city.

2.1.1 The concept of collective building of neighbourhoods

The concept of ‘collective building of neighbourhoods’ is still little known in Andalusia and Europe and is related, on the one hand, to the well known ‘social management of the habitat’ (De Manuel, Jerez, 2010), and, on the other, to participatory structures of collective building in general.

In the Latin-American context, we can make reference to numerous existing initiatives of collective building, many of which are within the urban space. Thus the Collective Construction Civil Association (2014) is defined as ‘a space for linking these experiences with the purpose of enabling people interested in organising their work with a collective point of view –away from the traditional employer-employee model– to help and learn from each other’. This lays on an ideological context thought as ‘... a space seeking to make contact and help people or groups of people trying to emend or avoid the consequences of an economic system based on exclusion. This may be from popular production models, collective land ownership projects or technical training for local production spheres.’ This association works in the sphere of local production both in rural and urban areas, but in the Latin-American context, the rural-urban relationship is different to the European context. However, the concept is fully applicable to European and therefore Andalusian cities. Now we will know some relevant cases that may be used as a reference.

Transferring the concept of collective building to the scale of the neighbourhood as a place with its own identity and self-sufficient capacity in terms of day-to-day operation, we are coming closer to the participatory dimension needed in the processes and actions of urban regeneration.

2.2 Some reference cases

There exist initiatives coming from public administrations that somehow try to engage social groups and residents in certain neighbourhoods in the development and improvement of certain areas, but always with a partial approach, undermining the real value of the participatory dimension and its potential.

In this sense, cases of citizen participation emerging from social groups themselves related to specific needs –in many occasions carried out outside public administrations– have been much more successful.

The study carried out involves numerous cases at national level where the participatory dimension has been relevant. We could mention some cases led by citizen groups without the participation of the local authorities, such as 'Playa Luna', developed by Ecosistema Urbano en Madrid (Ecosistema Urbano, 2010) where a civil group together with the residents carried out a grievance action by building a pseudo-beach in the derelict Plaza Luna in Madrid city centre; the 'Can Batlo' squat in Barcelona by 'la col' group which was partially rehabilitated as a civic centre. We could also refer to the well known 'Campo de la Cebada' case (Yiju, 2012) in Madrid, involving groups such as 'Basurama y Zuloark'; Also 'Oasis' (GSA Madrid, 2011), Moratalaz arena, in collaboration with GSA Madrid and Asociación Caminar.

Other greatly interesting cases where the public administration has taken part in collaboration with citizen groups are the following. 'Vamos a hacer la calle' by eP espacio elevado al público, in the area of 3000 viviendas and Martínez Montañés in Sevilla. This initiative aims to emphasize residents' ability to improve the public space in their neighbourhood by engaging them in the process. The case of 'Ejido Elige' in Malaga by Fundación Rizoma, Paisaje Transversal and Omau (Observatory of Urban Environment) is an example of participatory process in which the economic resources are used to build in agreement with the residents.

2.2.1 Parque Moret in Huelva

This case is a specific example in which citizen claims are heard by the public administration and there is a collaborative process in the design of a public space. This is a process starting around the year 2000 and culminating in an initial stage in 2005, when the park is officially inaugurated. There is an initial interest of Huelva city hall to recover the so-called Parque Moret in the centre of the city, consisting of 50 ha, which had been neglected for decades and was much deteriorated.

This public area had been claimed by the residents for years through the association called 'Parque Moret Platform' under the slogan of 'Huelva's green lung'. Such citizen platform –made of numerous associations and citizen groups (see fig.1) – succeeds in having the public administration set a contest for the project on the basis of some requirements previously agreed by all parts.

COLECTIVOS INTEGRANTES
EDUCAM
SCOUTS CATÓLICOS
CARAVANA POR LA PAZ
ECOLOGISTAS EN ACCIÓN
A.VV. POLÍGONO DE SAN SEBASTIÁN
ASOCIACIÓN PRO DERECHOS HUMANOS
ASOCIACIÓN DE VECINOS LOS JARDINES
FEDERACIÓN LOCAL DE AA.VV. TARTESSOS
ASOCIACIÓN DE VECINOS DE LA HISPANIDAD
ASOCIACIÓN DE PARADOS MAYORES DE 40 AÑOS
ATENEO ALTERNATIVO ANTONIO CARRASCO SUÁREZ
ASOCIACIÓN DE VECINOS MIRADOR DEL CONQUERO
ASOCIACIÓN DE VECINOS BARRIADA DE ZAFRA
AULA ECOLÓGICA JOAQUÍN FERNÁNDEZ CALLE
CONFEDERACIÓN GENERAL DE TRABAJADORES
HERMANDAD OBRERA DE ACCIÓN CATÓLICA
PARTIDO SOCIALISTA OBRERO ESPAÑOL
ASOCIACIÓN TIERRA NUEVA-VALDOCCO
UNIÓN GENERAL DE TRABAJADORES
PERSONAS INDEPENDIENTES
UNIÓN SINDICAL OBRERA
PARTIDO ANDALUCISTA
ASOCIACIÓN EDUCAM
IZQUIERDA UNIDA
SOCIEDAD HIGIA
NACIÓN ANDALUZA
SABINAS DEL ODIEL
ASOCIACIÓN CAMINAR
SINDICATO UNITARIO
COMISIONES OBRERAS
FUNDACIÓN UTOPIA VERDE
LOS VERDES DE ANDALUCÍA
PLATAFORMA PARQUE MORET-PULMÓN VERDE DE HUELVA

Fig. 1 Parque Moret citizen groups. Source: SAMA s.c.

Throughout the whole process a series of activities (fig. 2) take place with the final purpose of developing design in consensus with the citizen platform. These include:

- Regular meetings to establish objectives and contents.
- Contacting groups, political parties y other institutions to get them involved
- Talks, exhibitions, educational, artistic and environmental routes. Creation of an expert panel for a better understanding of the Parque Moret Complex.
- Historical revision for the contextualization of the Parque Moret phenomenon
- Design proposals for Parque Moret



Fig. 2 Activities carried out for the design of Parque Moret. Source: SAMA s.c.

The park is finally designed by the architecture practice Seminario de Arquitectura y Medioambiente, led by Jaime López de Asiain and based on bioclimatic and environmental criteria.

Thanks to the participatory process developed, the park's opening (fig. 3) is greatly successful and attended by large numbers of people. Despite the fact that it is an emerging urban regeneration action, the initial participatory dimension led by citizens is a key for the correct development of the project and the park's social acceptance.



Fig. 3 Official opening of Parque Moret. Source: SAMA s.c.

2.2.2 Arraijanal park in Málaga

The Arraijanal park is currently a great urban space in Malaga outskirts which has been subject to great social pressure and numerous claims. It is nowadays the only unspoilt coastal bit of Malaga city and it has great landscape, ecologic, historic and archeologic value.

Many projects have been proposed although none of them have still been approved. Within this research, the preliminary study developed by its author and collaborators¹ following a commission by The Regional Council for the Environment, Climatic Change and Land Planning in 2015 has been studied. Such proposal is not a design project but rather a participatory process project. This proposal would allow, both within its development and implementation, not only to go deep into a detailed analysis of the context and carry out a participatory design of the park itself shared with residents associations, but would also make possible a collective construction process of those stages which are liable to be built by the citizen groups involved.

The interest of this proposal as a case study lays in the analysis of the design and systematization of a specific process that can be used as a reference for the development of a specific tool for the design of participatory processes (fig. 4). The different aspects to be taken into account have been analysed, classified and

characterized in such a way that may be used as the base for the object of this research.



Fig. 4 Collaborative process for the design of Arraijanal. Actors chart. Source: Rubén Mora Estéban

2.3 Success

Further to the case study carried out using a few examples as a reference, we can state that a high percentage of the actions developed citizens have been largely successful (López de Asiain, Alberich, et al., 2015). However, they demand a highly engaged and committed group of citizens who develop it, use the space and provide activities. Otherwise, many of these improvement actions represent a specific moment but are not sustained over time, so we cannot say they contribute to local community resilience, although they improve the habitability conditions of that space in the short term.

On the other hand, actions promoted by the public administration usually develop the participatory dimension only partially –with some exceptions, such as ‘El Ejido Elige’. They tend to be successful initially but if they are not properly redirected they may not meet citizens’ expectations or even shatter their confidence in this kind of processes. Sometimes this makes certain citizen groups to exclude public administrations deliberately in their own change and improvement processes.

3 Tools for decision making regarding urban regeneration

Existing tools for decision making with regards to urban regeneration are currently scarce. We should remember that this approach includes the environmental, economic and social dimensions, despite the fact that this article is focusing specifically on the social dimension.

Within the environmental dimension, a study of the existing tools have been carried out, reaching the conclusion that there exist numerous indicator systems (López de Asiain Alberich, 2014) that allow us to have rather reliable references –as long as they are adapted to the local context– and they also allow us to elucidate the potential positive environmental effects of certain proposals, although there is no uniform criteria with regards to how important they might be. An interesting proposal to be evaluated for future research is establishing such criteria in a participatory manner. There are currently no tools developed for that purpose.

In the economic sphere, an approach based on the economy of resources rather than on traditional money economy shows there are few tools and solid studies that may help establish some clear criteria. Studies are generally centred on analyses linked to the life cycle of materials and energy efficiency, but do not go beyond these issues. The well known tool of the ecologic footprint may be useful for this purpose, but it has been very little developed at the local level to be considered a widely used tool for the small projects and actions studied in this research. We should also highlight some emerging studies or proposals for local economy development so-called ‘common good economies’ which are normally linked to alternative economic theories such as Degrowth (Universidad socioambiental de la Sierra, 2011). These studies and proposals may be a useful perspective from which to develop new tools for measuring the economic dimension of actions and processes of urban regeneration. Currently only money economy measurements are made in urban regeneration projects in terms of operational costs, and no project has been found to date that includes a solid economic study in terms of benefits neither environmental nor social.

Finally, in social terms, as has been more widely described, some interesting paradigmatic cases are starting to emerge that we can use as a reference for the development of tools, although these still need to be further developed to be applied specifically to urban regeneration. We can however conclude that many tools traditionally used in sociology, social work, mediation etc. are very useful for this type of processes, although no specific generic tools that may be used as a reference exists so far.

From the legal administrative sphere, ‘Bologna Regulation for the Care and Regeneration of the Commons’ (Silli, 2015) is greatly relevant. This document regulates collaboration between citizens and public administration for the care and regeneration of common urban properties. It follows a management model based on collaboration rather than on problematic relationships between citizens and the administration. In it, citizens are not considered mere users and receptors but are acknowledged as key actors in the treatment and management of urban commons. It regulates forms of assistance for the care and management of the urban common

goods by means of collaboration pacts based on mutual trust in a relationship of equality. This approach developed from the legal sphere is a key point and a reference for the future development of Andalusian and national regulations.

4 Conclusions

It is clearly evident that processes of citizen participation linked to urban regeneration are in an emerging stage. There exist numerous tools that may help develop such processes but the processes are currently so diverse and specific that there is no clear tendency that may define a pattern or methodology to be followed. However, on the basis that each of these processes are specific and that there are partial generic tools coming from other fields to be used, we can indeed define a series of criteria or principles that can be used as a guide for these processes. These principles and processes' definition has been initially described by this research since it has been explained into the different sections' conclusions. It will be also widely described into new future articles. We may therefore consider this an emerging research field which is necessary and greatly interesting for the improvement of urban regeneration processes in our cities.

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