

Armando Rabaça
Department of Architecture,
University of Coimbra

Bruno Gil
Department of Architecture,
University of Coimbra

Co-creation and the Nature of Architecture

Chief Editors' Note

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Contrary to the visual arts, in which the artist can remain in the *undisturbed peace of the work of art* and focus on his personal interests and preoccupations, negotiation is intrinsic to architectural practice and its processes. It takes place throughout the whole process, from the design brief to legislation, from the client's wishes to the official authorities, from the specificities of the programme to the users' expectations and cultural background, and from the multiple technical requirements to the specific approaches of the wide range of technicians. In short, architectural practice entails a constant process of participation and negotiation with manifold actors from the beginning of the design process to the end of the construction phase and, sometimes, to the conditions of usage.

Participative and collaborative processes are therefore in the nature of architecture, and when constructively and intelligently conducted, constitute a fundamental asset for the development of the design and the quality of the work. Clients, users, engineers, sociologists, and all the disciplines involved in the design can bring valuable contributions to the process and potentially lead the work to a better result. This intrinsic collaborative condition of architectural practice has characterized the discipline throughout its history, even if the network of actors and technical requirements implicated in today's practice is considerably more complex.

If the collaborative condition of architectural practice is inescapable, the pertinence of the debate on co-creation in the growing complexity of the present reality lies, first, in understanding how and in what terms it is possible to balance today's multiplicity of contributions while securing their coordination and synthesis through drawing. In other words, the crucial point is to understand the extent to which these contributions may participate in the design without questioning the autonomy of the discipline and its specific form of knowledge, meaning the disciplinary properties intrinsic to architecture that allow a work of architecture to be classified as such.

The specific disciplinary knowledge in the architectural field is a technical and an artistic compound. This means that a central trait of architecture rests on its formalist dimension. The notion of formalism must be here understood not as mere morphological exercise, but as "structural form," in the sense of a practice in which drawing provides the basis and the means for the mediation and synthesis of the multiple requirements, circumstances and participations involved in the process. Hence, the need to constructively face the challenges and conflicts of co-creation from an agonistic mindset — that is by recognizing the added value provided by each of the contributions in the design process. It hardly needs to be recalled, however, that the use of drawing as a central methodological tool — which is at the basis of architecture and its disciplinary autonomy — is the role and responsibility of the architect.

There are two main reasons to call attention to the formalist dimension of architecture in an issue devoted to co-creation. The first is that participants in processes of architectural design other than architects are often unaware of the differences between the decorative and structural dimensions of design and tend to regard drawing (*disegno*) as an aesthetic layer superimposed on the work, rather than a structural tool central to the process of architectural creation. The second reason is that, in the present situation, the contemporary debate on architecture is subjected to multifarious, centrifugal interests and arguments that tend to dislocate the core of the discipline to a secondary plane. This dislocation is usually associated with intellectual pressures that very often impose an oppressive *either/or* binomial upon politically correct topics, leaving no space either for counterarguments or for intermediate positions: either you blindly accept every argument on one subject or you are labelled as an opponent of the cause. More often than not, these intellectual pressures assume an anti-formalist posture: either one is a formalist, hence oblivious to social concerns, or one is concerned with social issues and must reject every concern with form. This anti-formalist position means the dissolution of the very nature of the discipline, for it ignores the fact that such nature rests on a process of creation ruled by drawing, and that therefore, it forcibly implies an aesthetic dimension at its core. While believing that collective participation is a powerful tool in today's context, it is with this risk of dissolution in mind and a sense of critical negotiation of such intellectual pressures that we would like the reader to approach the subject.