

Revisiting Civic Architecture and Advocacy Planning in the US & Italy: Urban Planning as Commoning and New Theoretical Frameworks

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Under the headers of ‘advocacy planning’, ‘collaboration’, ‘participatory design’, ‘co-production’, ‘commoning’ and ‘negotiated planning’, participation is, nowadays, at the centre of the debate on urban design. Architects and urban designers are developing new concepts, tools and roles to comply with these new participatory modii operandi. The participatory concern in the urban design process has not only a long history in practice but also in urban design education. Various experimental initiatives with participation emerged in the domain of architectural pedagogy in the late sixties, often starting from student initiatives. Representative cases are The Architects’ Resistance (TAR) - a group formed in 1968 by architecture students from Columbia GSAPP, MIT Department of Architecture, and Yale School of Architecture, - the National Organization of Minority Architecture Students (NOMAS), the Black Workshop, the City Planning Forum, and Associazione Studenti e Architetti (ASEA). Many of these groups emerged within the context of the struggles for civil rights and thus made a plea to have non-hegemonic or ‘other’ voices heard in the urban design process. These initiatives explored how new concepts, roles and tools for participation could become part of the education of the architect and urban designer. The paper investigates an ensemble of counter-events, counter-publications in the US and Italy during the sixties, shedding light on their impact on the institutional status of academia and on how activism can reinvent the relationship between architecture and democracy. Its objective is to reveal the tensions between enhancing equality in planning process and local bureaucracy in the case of advocacy planning strategies, on the one hand, and to reflect upon the necessity to reshape the urban planning models in order to respond to the call for a more democratic society, on the other.

INTRODUCTION

Within the context of the contemporary interest in new urban design methods that reinvent the relationship between urban design and democracy, the long history of the participation can offer us clues on how civic engagement and social responsibility can be critically conceived. The contemporary interest in

methods of ‘advocacy planning’, ‘collaboration’, ‘participatory design’, ‘co-production’, ‘commoning’ and ‘negotiated planning’ can learn from the long history of participation about how urban design can forge a critical relationship with civic engagement and social responsibility. Instead of repeating the concepts, roles and tools that were tested some decades ago, we hope that contemporary urban designers engage more intensively with the historical examples and use them as a base for new critical approaches. Most importantly, historical experiments like The Architects’ Resistance (TAR) and National Organization of Minority Architecture Students (NOMAS) remind us that the issue of participation is not only a question of urban design practice, but also – and maybe most urgently – requires experiments and changes in the pedagogy of architecture and urban design.

Useful “for realizing the implication of the implementation of participation-oriented strategies is [the distinction,...] between the “collaborative approaches” and the concepts of “co-production” and “negotiated planning”. As Vanessa Watson has highlighted, “co-production, along with collaborative and communicative planning positions, assume a context of democracy, where “active citizens” are able and prepared to engage collectively and individually (with each other and with the state) to improve their material and political conditions”¹. Relating the concept of “negotiated planning” to the growing interest in the common practices goes hand in hand with taking into consideration the actual “actors and power dynamics, involved,” and “the ‘virtuous cycle’ of planning, infrastructure, and land.”². Another notion that has a dominant place in the contemporary debates regarding participation-oriented strategies is that of urban commons. David Harvey’s remark that resources are socially defined in the sense that they are always related to technology, economy, and culture is useful for comprehending the commons beyond their reduction to natural resources, it would be useful to understand the “urban commons” as a network of technological, economic, and cultural parameters³. A tension that is enlightening for better grasping the notion of commons is the interrogation regarding the understanding of commons as community or their understanding as public space. Comprehending the commons as community implies that community is conceived as a homogeneous group of people, whereas comprehending the commons as public space is based on the intention to take

into consideration the relation between heterogeneous communities⁴. As far as participatory design is concerned, the Nuovo Villaggio Matteotti constitutes a case that reveals the myths of participatory design approaches and of their endeavour to replace the representation of designers by a representation of users. A remark of Giancarlo De Carlo that is of great significance for the comprehension of his participatory design approach is his claim that “[p]articipation implies the presence of the users during the whole course of the operation”⁵. The importance of this observation lies in the fact that it renders explicit that a transformation of how the architect conceives the users implies a reorganisation of the design process and a re-articulation of all the phases of the procedure⁶. The point of departure of De Carlo’s participatory design approach was the rejection of the linear design process of modernism, which, according to him, was based on the following three distinct phases: the definition of the problem, the elaboration of the solution, and the evaluation of the results. The tension between control and freedom was of the utmost importance for the participatory design approaches that were at the centre of the epistemological debates during the sixties. According to De Carlo, the shift from modernist architecture to an architecture of participation implied a reorientation of architecture’s scope and a shift from an organisation based on the aforementioned three distinct phases towards a

non-hierarchical model of architectural design processes during which the user is welcome to participate in every phase.

To better grasp the ideas presented in this paper we should conceptualize it in relation to a comparative perspective between the re-invention of the social scope of architecture and urbanism in Italy and the US⁷. We should also take into consideration the fact that the social scope of architecture and urbanism in Italy is part of a longer and ongoing postwar and European philosophical and theoretical discussion. The social scope of architecture and urbanism in the US, which is connected to the larger Civil Rights struggles of the 1960s, is more pragmatic. The debates concerning the social scope of architecture in both contexts are related to the question of how democracy informs the decisions regarding architectural and urban design processes. A question that is of pivotal importance for better understanding the role of democracy in architecture and urban design is the interrogation regarding the most effective forms of democratic architectural and urban design processes. To address this question, one should respond to the dilemma whether top-down elected centralised republic formats or less autocratic local forms promote more effectively the democratic aspects of architecture and urban planning.

REVISITING THE URBAN RENEWAL PROGRAM

The term “urban renewal” refers to a federal government program that was initiated in 1954 with the purpose to replace blighted urban areas with new urban projects. As Fern M. Colborn remarks, in *The Neighbourhood and Urban Renewal*, an important turning point regarding the emergence of the urban renewal politics in the United States of America during the post-war years is the Housing Act of 1949, which was supported not only by professional urban planners, but also by city officials, and business leaders among others. According to Colborn, the 1949 Renewal Program defined urban renewal as “the diversified efforts by localities, with the assistance of the Federal Government, for the elimination and prevention of slums and blight, whether residential or non-residential, and the removal of the factors that create slums and blighting conditions.”⁸ (fig. 1). This program contributed to the formation of a certain kind of ethics regarding city rebuilding. Before the revisions of the program in 1954 the term that was officially used was “urban redevelopment” instead of “urban renewal”. H. Briavel Holcomb and Robert A. Beauregard, in *Revitalising Cities*, argue that after the 1954 revisions of the program urban renewal became more attractive to private investors⁹.

The exhibition “Fringe Cities: Legacies of Renewal in the Small American City”, which was curated by MASS Design Group and was held between 2 October 2019 and 18 January 2020 at the Center for Architecture in New York, intended to render explicit the damages that the Urban Renewal Program provoked. In order to grasp the impact of Urban Renewal Program, we should think of its immense scale and of its nature as act of federal funding to cities to cover the cost of acquiring areas of cities perceived

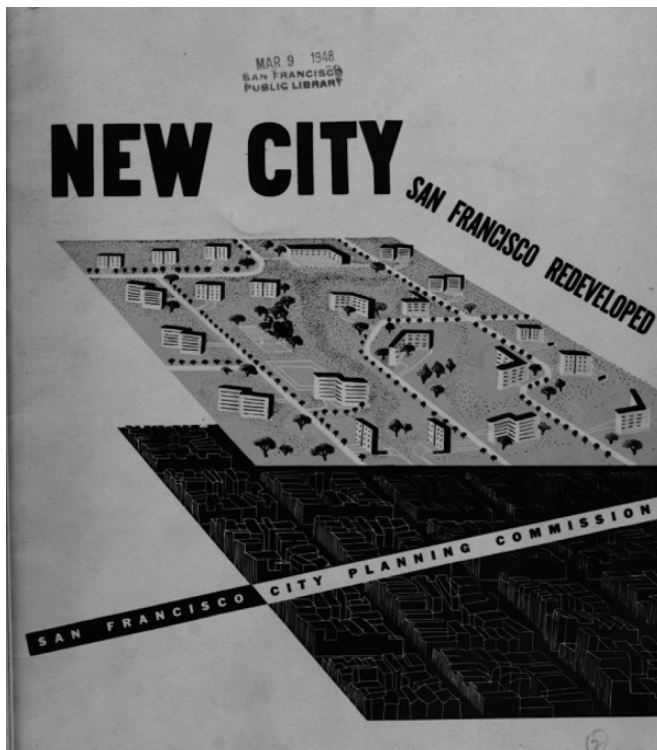


Figure 1. Cover of Mel Scott for the San Francisco City Planning Commission, *New City: San Francisco Redeveloped*. City Planning Commission (San Francisco: San Francisco City Planning Commission, 1947).

to be “slums”. Between 1945 and 1965, within the framework of the Urban Renewal Program, federal funds were used in order to construct hundreds of thousands of public housing units in many American cities. The two cities that used most of the federal funds for this purpose are New York City and Chicago. By 1960, New York City was the city that received the highest percentage of federal money for urban renewal. This money was used to replace “slums” with modern public housing. Holcomb and Beauregard have shed light on the reasons for which the Urban Renewal Program was largely criticized. Economist Martin Anderson, in *The Federal Bulldozer: A Critical Analysis of Urban Renewal, 1949-1962*, has also analyzed the large criticisms of the Urban Renewal Program¹⁰. The main reason that justifies the disapprovals of this program is that fact that it provoked the replacement of low-rent dwelling units with high-rent ones.

Despite the fact that the urban renewal was still presiding in the United States, a group of students coming from the Department of City Planning of Yale University’s School of Art and Architecture, reacted against the extensive redevelopment of New Haven in the 1950s and 1960s, marshalling a critique of their university’s role in this top-down reconstruction project. This response of Yale students is interpreted as a rejection of the dominance of “urban renewal”, which had still a dominant place within the north-American context of the mid- and late-sixties. To better grasp the role of the student protests for the reorientation in architectural education in the United States during the late 1960s and especially in 1968, one should take into account the six weeks student protests at Columbia University and the intention to respond to the fulfilment of needs related to the welfare of the society as a whole and the responsibility to provide equal housing opportunities and equal access to

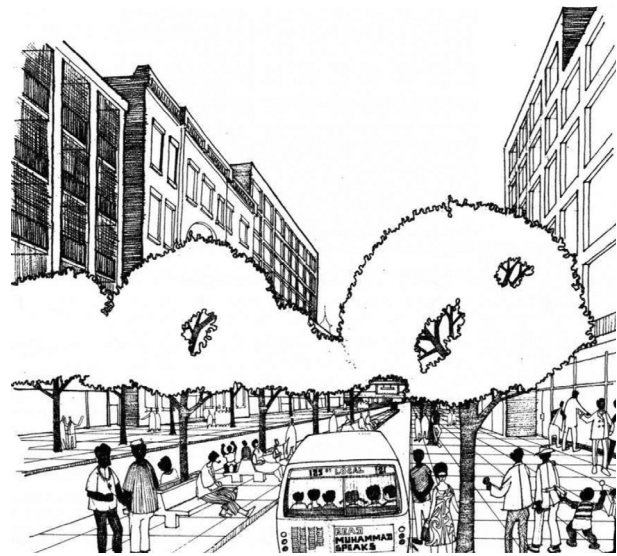


Figure 3. Architect J. Max Bond Jr. served as executive director of Architects’ Renewal Committee of Harlem (ARCH). In 1968, ARCH produced this community-oriented design for the 125th Street East Harlem Triangle Plan. Drawing by E. Donald Van Purnell. Courtesy of Arthur Symes.

public amenities regardless of race, religion, or national origin¹¹. Paul Davidoff paid special attention to the concern of advocacy planning about establishing “the bases for a society affording equal opportunity to all citizens”¹². Thomas L. Blair, who was more skeptical than Davidoff regarding the ability of advocacy planning to really enhance equality expressed his doubts regarding the capacity of “advocacy planning really [to establish] [...] a participatory democracy”, maintaining that, in some cases, it functioned as “a pretext for public manipulation”¹³.

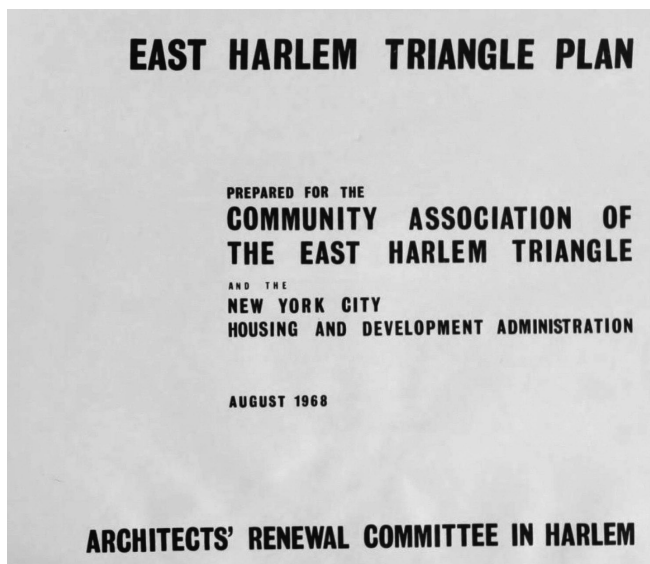


Figure 2. Architects’ Renewal Committee in Harlem, *East Harlem Triangle Plan* (New York: Architects’ Renewal Committee in Harlem, 1968).

ADVOCACY PLANNING MOVEMENT AND THE SOCIO-POLITICAL CLIMATE OF CIVIL RIGHTS AROUND 1968

During the late 1960s, pressures to reshape the methods of urban planning in a way that would take distance from urban renewal models pushed local chapters of the AIA to establish the so-called Community Design Centers (CDC), which, in many cases, collaborated with universities, and aimed to support low-income groups. In order to grasp the relationship between the re-invention of urban planning strategies and the student protests around 1968 in New York City, we should take into consideration the emergence of Advocacy planning movement and especially the founding of the Architects’ Renewal Committee in New York’s Harlem neighborhood (ARCH) (fig. 2, fig. 3), which is the first organization solely devoted to advocacy planning in the United States. ARCH was founded in 1964 and was one of the first CDCs. It emerged within the context of the civil rights movement in the United States and intended to provide technical and design advice to communities who could otherwise not afford it. Paul Davidoff, in “Advocacy and Pluralism in Planning” published in 1965, remarks that “[p]lanners should be able to engage in the political process as advocates of the interests both

of government and of such other groups, organizations, or individuals who are concerned with proposing policies for the future development of the community”¹⁴.

As Daniel Matlin has remarked, “[a]cting as advocates for the protestors, the Architects’ Renewal Committee in Harlem (ARCH), which had formed in 1964, charged the state with imposing the office building on the local community, in much-needed space on Harlem’s key thoroughfare, without consultation and to the neglect of Harlem’s pressing needs for affordable housing, cultural facilities, and a high school”¹⁵. The Advocacy planning movement rejected the methods of urban renewal that had contributed significantly to the transformation of the urban fabric of New York City and other American cities such as Chicago during the years that preceded 1968. The objectives and vision of Advocacy planning movement should be understood in relation to the socio-political climate of civil rights around 1968. Among the architects that were involved in Advocacy planning movement in New York City were Elliott Willensky, R. Richard Hatch, Robert Stern, and Jim Frei. According to Matlin, during the period that followed the 1964 Civil Rights Act, an ensemble of intellectuals, artists, and professional urban planners aimed to respond to the question of how the civil rights transformations during the 1960s influenced famous black neighborhoods such as Harlem¹⁶.

THE DEPARTMENT OF CITY PLANNING AT YALE SCHOOL OF ART AND ARCHITECTURE AND ADVOCACY PLANNING MOVEMENT

During the 1950s and 1960s, in reaction against top-down redevelopment in New Haven, students in the Department of City Planning at Yale School of Art and Architecture expressed their disapproval against urban renewal politics. The Department of City Planning was founded in 1960 and emerged from the city planning program at Yale School of Architecture, which had been founded in 1949. After the appointment of Christopher Tunnard in 1966 as Chair of the Department of City Planning at Yale School of Art and Architecture, the department took distance from urban renewal politics and started supporting advocacy planning movement, favoring the collaboration with communities while rejecting top-down methods. In 1954, Tunnard established City Planning at Yale, a collection of essays focusing on urban planning issues¹⁷. The phase of the Department of City Planning that started with the appointment of Tunnard was related with the intensification of the critique against the involvement of Yale University in urban renewal projects in New Haven that were based on the close collaboration between Yale University and the City of New Haven, which was a fact and was largely criticized by Tunnard. It was during that same period that the famous Advocacy planner C. Richard Hatch was teaching a course entitled “Planners and Clients” at the Department of City Planning at Yale University.

During the period that preceded Tunnard’s appointment, Yale University had acted as a principal partner and consultant in

the city’s urban renewal efforts¹⁸. During this phase, Arthur Row was the Chairman at the Department of City Planning at Yale University and a top-down approach concerning urban planning was dominant. As it becomes evident reading “The Physical Development Plan”¹⁹, Row supported top-down strategies in urban planning. He was responsible for Philadelphia’s Physical Development Plan, which was completed in 1960. In 1969, in reaction to the top-down strategies in urban planning, a group of students founded a new governance committee named City Planning Forum. This committee, which consisted of all full-time faculty members and students and in dialogue with the civil rights movement and had as its main purpose to bring greater diversity to the department, collaborated with Forum and the Black Workshop. The latter was an activist group formed by ten African American design students in late 1968. Its main aim was to enhance interdisciplinary discourse and being an important component of the quotidian life and debated at the Yale School of Art and Architecture²⁰. The chair of City Planning Forum was Professor Henry Wexler, who, in spring 1968, issued an official recognition of both the Black Forum and the City Planning Forum.

The activities of the City Planning Forum and the Black Workshop played a significant role in challenging the top-down strategies related to urban renewal and contributed to the promotion of advocacy planning strategies. The Black Workshop was at the beginning named Black Environmental Studies Team (BEST). It was founded in 1968 by ten students from architecture, urban planning and environmental design, who submitted a proposal for a new course study that would fight against the racial barrier between academy and inner city. The workshop aimed to link the “urban crisis” to the “black experience”, and collaborated closely with the architects Don Stull, Max Bond, and Art Symes. During its first year, Richard Dozier was its director. The students that participated to the Black Workshop selected and hired their instructors themselves and set their own educational agendas²¹.

An important instance of the generalized critique against urban renewal during the 1960s, and, especially, during the period that followed the 1968 student protests, is the opposition of a group of students from Yale School of Art and Architecture, Columbia University, University of Pennsylvania, MIT, and Harvard University at the New England regional conference of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) on 8 November 1968²². Some months earlier, in June 1968, civil rights leader Whitney M. Young Jr., executive director of the National Urban League, had delivered a keynote address at the American Institute of Architects’ (AIA) National Convention in Portland, Oregon. On 12 May 1969, Kingman Brewster Jr., President of Yale University since 1964, met with activist students at the School of Art and Architecture. Some days later, on 27 May 1969, he announced the dissolution of the Department of City Planning, which remains closed until today, and invited Tunnard to leave his position.

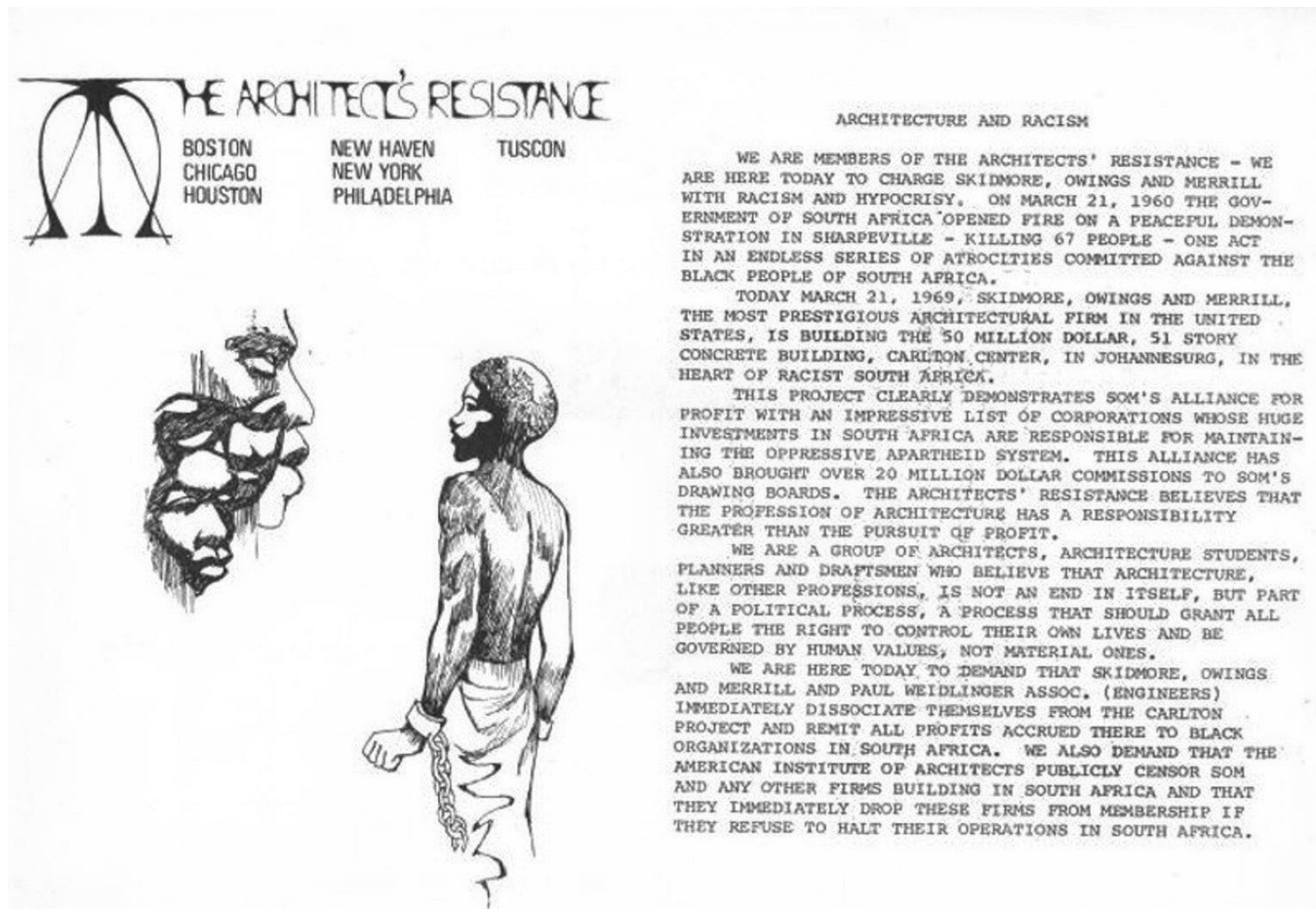


Figure 4. TAR, "Architecture and Racism" handbill, 1969. Copyright TAR.

THE COUNTER-GROUPS OF STUDENTS IN THE NORTH-AMERICAN UNIVERSITIES AS EXPRESSION OF CIVICNESS IN ARCHITECTURE

The Architects' Resistance (TAR) was formed in 1968 by architecture students from Columbia University's GSAPP, MIT, and Yale. TAR described itself as "a communications network, a research group, and an action group ... concerned about the social responsibility of architects and the framework within which architecture is practiced."²³ TAR's engagement with contemporary architecture provided the basis for a radical critique of professional culture and the role of the architect within society²⁴. TAR published position papers such as "Architecture and Racism" (fig. 4), "Architects and the Nuclear Arms Race", and "Architecture: Whom Does It Serve?", and organized counter-conferences. TAR declared in one of its position papers: "Architecture is not an end in itself but part of an economic, political and social process. The Architects Resistance hopes to bring social and moral conscience to the practice of architecture."²⁵

TAR's "alternative meeting" entitled "Design for Nuclear Protection" held in March 1969 was conceived as a counter-event to an AIA-OCD workshop held in Boston, and had an important impact on academia. Symptomatic of its popularity

is the fact that, it attracted 150 attendants, while the official venue only convoked 12 people²⁶. The National Organization of Minority Architecture Students (NOMAS) also played a major role in the struggle over civil rights for African Americans in the United States was founded by the African-American architects Wendell Campbell, Nelson Harris, William Brown, Robert Wilson, Robert Nash, Leroy Campbell, John S. Chase, Harold Williams, Kenneth Groggs, Jeh Johnson, D. Dodd, and E.H. McDowell in Detroit, Michigan, in 1971 during the AIA National Convention. The main purpose of NOMAS was to defend the rights of minority design professionals and fight for policies that condoned discrimination.

ASSOCIAZIONE STUDENTI E ARCHITETTI VIS-À-VIS THE CITTÀ-TERRIOTRIO

Associazione Studenti e Architetti (ASEA) was a student group at the Faculty of Architecture of Sapienza University founded in 1959. As we can understand reading its founding manifesto, which was signed by a number of students including Manfredo Tafuri, the main intention of this group was to "reconnect, in historical terms, to the moral, social and cultural premises that inform the Modern Movement"²⁷. In order to grasp the impact that this group had on the reorientation of the pedagogical

strategies at the Faculty of Architecture of Sapienza University, we could bear in mind that Dean Saul Greco had authorized the teaching of a parallel course in urban planning by the ASEA. During the period that the ASEA was active, many student protests had taken place at the Faculty of Architecture of Sapienza University. The first occupation at the Faculty of Architecture of Sapienza University in which Tafuri was involved took place in 1958. Tafuri also participated in a “60-day occupation of the Faculty of Architecture in 1963 that resulted in Zevi, Quaroni and Luigi Piccinato being called to Rome as new professors”²⁸. Five years later, on 1 March 1968, a battle between the students and the police around the Faculty of Architecture of Sapienza University in Valle Giulia in Rome took place.

In Italy, a network of significant events extending from the fight between the police and the students outside at Valle Giulia in Rome to the students’ occupation of the 15th Triennale di Milano in 1968, and the counter-event “Utopia e/o Rivoluzione” at the Politecnico di Torino in 1969, triggered the rejection of the concept of the “nuova dimensione” in favor of the rediscovery of reality’s immediacy, the “locus” and the civic dimension of the architects’ role²⁹. The intention to rediscover reality’s immediacy, the “locus” and the civic dimension of the architects’ role were at the center of the debates and should be interpreted in relation to the vision for a non-capitalist logic of education. Giorgio Piccinato, Vieri Quilici and Manfred Tafuri, in “La città territorio: verso una nuova dimensione”, (fig. 5) argued that “the term of città territorio indicates already a change of scale in the structure survey, and not just a different visual angle”³⁰, referring to the conference entitled “The New Dimension of the City” that Giancarlo de Carlo organized in 1962. Tafuri, Piccinato and Quilici conceived the “città territorio” as a concept aiming to grasp the mutations of urban fabric and to incorporate the complexity of the new network of transportation and the expanding flows of the suburbanized city. They highlighted the ideological value of the “città-territorio”, maintaining that “the city, considered as the highest social and cultural concentration, empowering political and social energies, can only be considered as the best tool for those who intend to act on its structures and institutions that are concretized in it”³¹. Two other articles that are of great importance for understanding the debates around the concepts of the “città territorio” and the “nuova dimensione” during the 1960s in Italy are Tafuri’s “La nuova dimensione urbana e la funzione dell’utopia”³² and “Il problema dei centri storici all’interno della nuova dimensione cittadina”, published in *La Città territorio. Un esperimento didattico sul Centro direzionale di Centocelle in Roma*³³. The examination of the questions addressed in the framework of seminar on “La città-territorio” held at the University of Rome in 1963 are important for understanding the efforts to invent new tools and concepts for analyzing the urban dynamic of post-war Italian cities and their expanding suburbs. The interest in the concept of “la città-territorio” is closely linked to the re-organization of the Faculty of Architecture of Sapienza University.

LA CITTÀ TERRITORIO VERSO UNA NUOVA DIMENSIONE

GIORGIO PICCINATO
VIERI QUILICI
MANFREDO TAFURI

per lo studio AUA di Roma

Figure 5. Giorgio Piccinato, Vieri Quilici and Manfred Tafuri, “La città territorio: verso una nuova dimensione”, *Casabella Continuità*, 270 (1962), 16.

THE CORSO SPERIMENTALE DI PREPARAZIONE URBANISTICA IN AREZZO

During the same period that important changes in the pedagogical curriculum and the institutional structure of the Faculty of Architecture of Sapienza University were taking place and the concerns about the notions of “città territorio” and “nuova dimensione” were acquiring a central place in the epistemological debates regarding urban planning in Italy, Adriano Olivetti’s *Movimento di Comunità* was trying shape new tools intending to enhance social awareness and to promote the interaction between technology, sociology and political sciences³⁴. These new tools were based on the faith in the potential of the re-conceptualization of territory. Within this context, the Olivetti Foundation organized the Corso sperimentale di preparazione urbanistica in Arezzo in 1963. This experimental course is of great significance for understanding the questions that dominated the debates regarding urban dynamics during this period. During this course, Aldo Rossi - who at the time was working as assistant of Carlo Aymonino at the Istituto Universitario di Architettura di Venezia (IUAV) - had one of his very first teaching experiences. Ludovico Quaroni, Giancarlo de Carlo and Manfred Tafuri also contributed to this course. As Pier Vittorio Aureli has mentioned, “[t]he theme of the advanced course was the updating of the discipline in the face of the changes that had occurred within Italian cities and their surrounding territory under the pressure of the economic boom of the 1950s and early 1960s and the accompanying of the poor south to the industrialized north”³⁵.

The objective of the experimental course in Arezzo was to conceptualize the “new urban dimension”, which had provoked the emergence of many new conceptual tools and neologisms. Among these neologisms, one could mention “urbatecture”, which would be, in 1979, mobilized by Tafuri “to describe the

large infrastructural projects Italian architects produced in the early 1960s³⁶. As it becomes apparent from how the debates evolved during the Arezzo seminar, Rossi rejected the concept of “la città-territorio”, which was promoted by Manfredo Tafuri, Giorgio Piccinato and Vieri Quilici, who were members of the AUA, which dissolved a year later. Rossi’s urban theory was focused on the concept of the “locus” instead of that of “la nuova dimensione”. In contrast with Rossi, Quaroni and De Carlo, along with Tafuri, were supportive of the notion of “la città-territorio”. Rossi refused to endorse the idea of “la città-territorio” because he was convinced that the latter disregarded the importance of the individuality of the urban artifacts.

The Centre-Left national coalition was focused on economic programming and urban planning, paying more attention to quantitative rather than qualitative characteristics of urban expansion. During the Arezzo seminar, Tafuri, De Carlo and Quaroni, in contrast with Aldo Rossi, supported the concept of the “città territorio”. Rossi rejected the concepts of “city-territory”, “network” and “open project” because he believed that the potential of the creative forces of architecture and urban planning were embedded in the form-making of architectural objects and that the above-mentioned concepts did not permit to grasp the architectural forms in their concreteness. Moreover, he maintained that the starting point should be the design of well-defined and determined architectural forms and not the abstract, quantitatively oriented procedures of urban analysis. Claudio Greppi and Alberto Pedrolli, who were studying at the School of Architecture in Florence at the time and supported Operaism, also rejected the concept of the “città territorio”, as it becomes evident reading “Produzione e programmazione territoriale, where they argued that the concept of the “città territorio” was an expression of a general tendency of capitalist instrumentalization of urban planning:

the obsolete concept of the self-sufficient satellite city still reacting to a static relationship between city and countryside is replaced by the city-territory, understood as a structure that organizes the totality of the urban territory in order to make it more productive³⁷

CONCLUSION: ENHANCING EQUALITY IN PLANNING PROCESS VERSUS LOCAL BUREAUCRACY

The epistemological shift that characterizes the Italian and American context during the 1960s concerns the efforts of architectural discipline to adapt to the transformations related to the fact that the new scale of reference was territory instead of the city³⁸. These epistemological mutations regarding the change of the scale of reference were related to the need of re-inventing the social scope of architecture. Within this context, the role of the university and especially of the schools of architecture in the society appeared as problematic and as an issue that should urgently be reinvented. The cases in the US and Italy that are analysed in this paper should be situated within a broader context of interest in participation during the sixties and seventies.

Interesting cases in this regard are International Laboratory of Architecture and Urban Design (ILAUD) in Italy³⁹, the Atelier de recherche et d’action urbaines (ARAU) in Belgium⁴⁰ and the Serviço Ambulatório de Apoio Local (SAAL) in Portugal⁴¹.

Regarding the American context, ARCH, TAR, Black Workshop, City Planning Forum, and NOMAS’s aspirations to democratize urban planning should be understood within the context of the struggle over civil rights for African Americans in the United States in the 1960s. A paradox underlying their efforts is the fact that, despite their intention to broaden opportunities in participation, they were based on policies that maintained the centrality of federal aid and the prominence of professional expertise. President Johnson launched a “War on Poverty” in pursuit of his “Great Society”. ARCH and City Planning Forum’s strategies, to a certain extent, were aligned with the ambition of President Johnson’s Great Society to renew citizens’ role. They were characterized by a tension between the intention of advocacy planning approaches to bring equality into the planning process and the risk of being co-opted by a local bureaucracy or a more powerful interest group. Davidoff, had already, in 1965, discerned the opposition between “bureaucratic control” and “the demands for increased concern for the unique requirements of local, specialized interests”⁴². However, his intention to support both “the welfare of all and the welfare of minorities”⁴³ shows that advocacy planning was trapped between the non-flexibility of bureaucracy and the idealistic vision of equality.

Regarding the Italian context, concepts such the “città-territorio” were the outcome of a necessity to relate urban planning to its accompanying social, cultural, and political aspects and to reveal the empowerment that this relation can promote. The rejection of the concept of the “nuova dimensione” through events such as the students’ occupation of the 15th Triennale di Milano in 1968, and the “Utopia e/o Rivoluzione” at the Politecnico di Torino in 1969 should be understood within the context of a more generalised epistemological shift. These reorientations should be interpreted bearing in mind that democracy is neither “a form of government nor a style of social life”, but “an act of political subjectivization that disturbs the police order by polemically calling into question the aesthetic coordinates of perception, thought, and action”⁴⁴.

ASEA’s intention to shed light on “the moral, social and cultural premises that inform the Modern Movement” is not far from ARCH, TAR, Black Workshop, City Planning Forum, and NOMAS’s aspirations to democratize urban planning should be understood within the context of African Americans’ struggles for civil rights in the United States in the 1960s. The fact that several organisations and groups emerged within the contexts of prestigious universities and their aspiration to bridge the profession and the education shows that the emergence of counter-events, counter-publications and new modes of collectivities influenced significantly the institutional status of academia. It also invites us to reflect upon the necessity to reshape the urban planning

models in order to respond to the call for a more democratic society. Even if certain of the struggles for civil rights of the aforementioned groups and organisations did not meet with much success, a systematic study of their modes of disseminating knowledge and of reinventing the professional and academic agendas would be revealing regarding the way activism can reinvent the relationship between architecture and democracy.

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