Another Path Towards Restorative Community Design

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PAPER

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In 1969, several publications and international conferences put citizens at the center of architecture and urban design. Robert Sommer discusses the influence of space on human behavior in his seminal book Personal Space. Edward T. Hall wrote the Hidden Dimension about the relevance of cultural perspective in characterizing the space surrounding people. The Dalandhui University of Strathclyde held the First Conference on Architectural Psychology hosted by David Canter, pleading for an architecture interwoven with participatory design. Among these examples, perhaps the most influential is A Ladder of Citizen Participation by Sherry Arnstein, which combines academia and activism, asking for complete and progressive citizen empowerment in design decision-making. In 1969, architecture began to strongly demand the expansion of the discipline to share the common good from a people-centered perspective.

Fifty-three years later, the debate on orchestrating the integration of people's needs persists. Architects design logic to shape the territory following technical needs that do not always find a foothold to include emergent social dynamics. The gap between technical needs and people's everyday demands has contributed to consolidating inequalities that have already become structural.

In the inquiry for transdisciplinary strategies to overlap these multiple needs in the design field, this research proposes the framework of Restorative Community Design (RCD) which includes three theoretical bodies: Restorative Justice, the Right to the City, and Participatory Design. First, Restorative Justice is a branch of criminal justice that seeks to bring together different stakeholders affected by wrongdoing; this theoretical framework aims to address needs and responsibilities and heal damage through the close relationships between various community members. Second, RCD is also based on the theory of the Right to the City, which posits that cities are environments that either allow or limit the development of the capabilities of their citizens and that networked access to the opportunities offered by the city

is a fundamental variable to integrates citizen's capabilities to the opportunities and resources that the city provides. Finally, Participatory Design merges the two previous approaches through a critical understanding of practices to promote community empowerment.

This research proposes the working definition of Restorative Community Design by implementing a game technique called PATH (Participatory Architecture Towards Humanity). Specifically, the investigation systematizes the application of PATH in two specific case studies. The first one occurred in Petare (2015), the denser self-produced settlement -commonly called the informal city - in America, located in Caracas. The second experience happened in Flushing (2018), the most racially diverse borough in New York City. Researchers found historically disenfranchised communities in both cases, and Restorative Community Design appears as a conceptual and practical framework for people's voice integration into the design processes.

These implementations of PATHs towards Restorative Community Design discuss the difference between different forms of community engagement, specifically Multi and Trans-Engagement, as a tool to integrate community members in planning and architectural projects.

INTRODUCTION
Walking around San Angel in Mexico City, I decided to start developing the framework of Restorative Community Design as a set of practices that seek to deepen the integration of community needs in architecture and other design disciplines. The ideas emerged as a tool to address spatial inequalities through urban and architectural design?[1] I had just come out of a long and fruitful talk with the Mexican anthropologist Nestor García Canclini. In the conversation, I explained how my doctoral studies at Harvard Graduate School of Design could give me resources to address Latin American spatial justice. Nestor Garcia Canclini proposed the opposite; why not consider how citizen participation in Latin America serves as a strategy to address social inequalities in the USA?

A few weeks after my talk with Nestor García Canclini, the world changed forever. The global Covid-19 pandemic starkly exposed worldwide social inequalities[2], so did the social movements in the United States that emerged from the tragic death of George Floyd in May 2020 [3]. Currently, it is tanner evident that structural inequalities limit access to resources such as education and the job market globally. So the integration of citizen needs into the world of urban and architectural projects is an increasingly evident need. The world has taken to the streets to demand more citizen participation in urban projects and public policies. The Global Protest Tracker [4] explains that over 230 significant anti-government protests have occurred in 110 countries worldwide in the last five years.

But the need to bind the architectural space to the needs of citizens is not new; it emerged at least fifty-three years ago due to the rise of the global protest of 1968. One year later, several publications and international conferences put citizens at the center of architecture and urban design. For example, Robert Sommer[5] discusses the influence of space on human behavior, and Edward T. Hall[6] wrote the Hidden [Cultural] Dimension that characterizes the space surrounding people. Additionally, The Dalandhui University of Strathclyde held the First Conference on Architectural Psychology hosted by David Canter[7], pleading for an architecture interwoven with participatory design. Among these examples, A Ladder of Citizen Participation by Sherry Arnstein[8] became an influential manifesto to demand a progressive but complete citizen empowerment in decision-making. Nowadays, researching participatory design is commonplace.

In our talk, Nestor García Canclini finally highlighted the relevance of multiculturalism when working on participatory projects. If the design wants to include the participation of different citizens, understanding their multiple cultural backgrounds is especially relevant[9]. This paper seeks to understand the implications of this concept from the theoretical framework of Restorative Community Design

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Restorative Community Design (RCD) is a theoretical framework envisioned to deepen the relationships between different urban stakeholders in architecture and other design disciplines to reduce the negative effects of spatial inequality.

In the paper Path towards Restorative Community Design,[10] published in the proceeding of the 2nd International Symposium, Architectural Episodes 02: New Dialogues in Architectural Education and Practice in Istambul, we narrowed down spatial inequality through forms of citizenship fragmented in spatial enclaves,[11] with special focus on how this fragmentation promotes political disenfranchisement in spatially isolated communities. When infrastructure or public policy separates communities, their ability to insert themselves

as active members in the sociopolitical dynamics of a city is limited. In this context, the framework of Restorative Community Design generates more inclusive architecture and urban design strategies.

Restorative Community Design overlaps three other theoretical frameworks: Restorative justice, the Right to the City, and Participatory Design as a set of practices to integrate multicultural perspectives into architectural and urban design proposals. The following lines will seek to explain these first two bodies of knowledge briefly. Finally, the paper aims to create a working definition of multiculturalism in participatory design from the RCD strategies in two case studies: Petare in Caracas and Flushing in New York City.

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

Restorative justice is a branch of criminal righteousness that seeks to bring together different stakeholders affected by wrongdoing.[12] The reunification of these actors opens a discussion of responsibilities and opportunities to seek common solutions to repair social damage.

But, structural spatial inequalities persist progressively over the years.[13] It is difficult to bring together all those involved in wrongdoing when it has happened progressively and through complex social relations. In this sense, RCD seeks to provide methodologies to enhance the integration of different community members concretely and symbolically to address the spatial manifestations of these -sometimes hidden- inequalities.

THE RIGHT TO THE CITY

The second body of knowledge for the RCD is promoting the Right to the city.

For Henri Lefebre, "[le droit a la ville] ne peut se formuler que comme droit a la vie urbaine, transformee, renouvelee" (The right to the city can only be formulated as a right to urban, transformed, renewed life).[14] This has been a very influential statement for those researchers who propose that improving access to urban spatial resources is a strategy for enhancing the Right to the City[15] through equitable allocation of spatial resources and their connection across the city.

Restorative Community Design seeks to understand Restorative Justice from the projective perspective of architecture and urban design. The proposal goes beyond understanding social inequalities; it also includes actionable outcomes that allow for the progressive integration of communities that minimizes their spatial implications.

THE RELEVANCE OF NETWOKS

To summarize, Restorative Community Design (RCD) is a decision-making methodology that promotes to bring together different stakeholders for the collaborative design of an urban architectural infrastructure. RCD understands that the integration of different voices in the design process maximizes access to the spatial opportunities offered by the city.

The main objective of RCD is the creation of networks within networks, with the idea of promoting integration strategies that break the isolation generated, in this case, by political disenfranchisement. In this sense, we can summarize two types of networks that RCD seeks to promote two types of networks: community and spatial ones.

First, community networks include a variety of community stakeholders – often in conflict . When they are included in a participatory design project, they help to create a dense set of associations that promote cooperative behavior.[16] Then, through cooperation, participatory methodologies enable

the creation of shared expectations that facilitate common actions,[17] in this case, expectations about the urban architecture project.

The collaborative design transforms design projects into gestures that repair inequalities symbolically through participation and by breaking barriers created by isolation and political disenfranchisement.

Second, spatial networks that refers to the physical transformations of the urban environment through the design of connected public space system. RCD seeks to transform inequalities structurally, so the participatory process is insufficient without an architectural outcome that achieves the concrete satisfaction of stakeholders' needs in public space systems. Moreover, the transformation of the public space by itself is a vehicle for promoting the integration of different community members,[18] especially if the public space becomes a symbol of social encounter. Creating public spaces that satisfy

Figure 1: The gameboard for Restorative Community DesignW

the community's cultural values and are achieved through the process of participation is a powerful strategy for repairing structural inequalities. [19]

THE GAMEBOARD

Restorative Community Design is a participatory technique that includes a pedagogical framework. Whem designing together through participatory techniques, different actors learn from each other to generate common ideas. In this scenario, the participatory process must teach participants how to understand multiple cultural approaches.[20] To facilitate this teaching process, the application of Restorative Community Design uses game techniques to promote understanding skills, as well as creativity, in different stakeholders.[21]

The use of game techniques for planning and design is not new, and has had a particular boom in the last 10 years. For a comprehensive overview of this issue, we suggest the reading of Unstable Wormholes: Communications Between Urban Planning and Game Studies by Moozhan Shakeri.[22] For a Restorative Community Design, we work with the idea of

Serious Games,[23] which includes a teaching design framework for co-designing the architectural and urban project. A game can allow dialogue and consensus through clear rules and common objectives. Consequently, the application of RCD is through a gameboard that uses role-playing to simulate the design of urban architecture, urban design, or planning projects.

As can be seen in the illustration (See Figure 1), the game has many details, and explaining them all goes beyond the scope of this paper, but we can highlight two of them to exemplify the mindset of participation we propose for bringing together different interests despite their cultural differences. For instance, the game has rules that proposes the exchange of roles. While playing the game to design a public space, one community member simulates being another one. Additionally, the gameboard includes design actions predefined by some members, such as street pedestrianization, that can be used by another one while designing. The playful strategy of participating by putting oneself in the shoes of others has become a strategy of understanding those who are different as a design mechanism to promote a sense of togetherness.

Figure 2: The gameboard for Restorative Community Design in Flushing (New York City).

Working together, architects, urban designers, and community members decided to call the gameboard PATH (Participatory Participatory Architecture Tool for Humanity. The urban design instrument was applied in two communities -Petare in Caracas (Latin America) and Flushing in New York City (USA East Coast)-. Both cases are similar in concentrating communities around an urban territory where the intermodal transport exchange promotes an intense economic and multicultural exchange. However, both places have different cultural backgrounds, which allowed us to use the gameboard as a tool to explore multiculturalism.

Néstor García Canclini pioneered the understanding of multiculturalism. In Imagined Globalization, García Canclini[24] explains that while US multiculturalism implies the allocation of distinctly separate identities, Latin American multiculturalism refers to the mixture of different cultures. García Canclini explains that multicultural cities in USA includes culturally differentiated neighborhoods, such as Little Italy and Chinatown. On the contrary -explains García Canclini-,that multicultural Latin American city includes the fusion of different cultures. The Amerindian and African past mixes in a cultural jumble with the impact of Spanish colonization, together with the transcultural influence of contemporary migrations. Latin America is a hybrid culture. [25] Understanding these differences while applying the PATH gameboard was key to facilitate different participation strategies to achieve the sense of togetherness proposed by the Restorative Community Design. Following this lesson from García Canclini, we can say that the Latin American city is transcultural instead of multicultural, where cultures mix completely.

FLUSHING: RESTORATIVE COMMUNITY DESIGN THROUGH MULTI-ENGAGEMENT

PATH project: Participatory Architecture Tool for Humanity occurred within the 2018 Summer Fellowship organized by the New York's Institute of Public Architecture. I developed the project in partnership with Alexandra Paty -Urban Designer at the NYC Department of City Planning-and Andrew Lassiter -Urban Planner at Localize. City-, both are urban planners from Columbia University. This investigation gathered community members and designers in several Queens, including Flushing.

Figure 3: Urban Design Proposal – Flushing (New York).

Flushing is the largest Chinese community in New York City by population size).[26] Flushing is one of the most important transportation hubs in the Queens area, including the Interborough Rapid Transit Subway No.7 and 19 MTA bus lines, which connect Flushing to Manhattan and other NYC areas.[27] The proximity of migrants to intermodal modes of transportation has transformed Flushing into a thriving Asian neighborhood with plenty of local private investment in the retail and commercial sectors.[28] Flushing exemplifies the multiculturality of the US-American city explained by García Canclini. In Flushing, worldwide migrants arrive to create a strong cultural group that differentiates itself from others, while actively contribute to the city's dynamism.

In this context, multiculturalism within participatory meetings made it necessary to maximize the legibility of the Restorative Community Design to facilitate agreements among people with different cultural backgrounds. For that reason, the PATH gameboard the gameboard includes design actions by adding tokens representing buildable actions, such as treeing or street pedestrianization. In Flushing, we discovered the importance of generating sophisticated strategies to integrate different voices into the design processes to politically integrate all voices into the design process. For instance, the gameboard included little wooden cubes, acrylic rods, and flashcards signifying specific design actions, which participants placed on a map to exemplify a need for spatial transformation (See Figure 2).

In Flushing, the importance of incorporating multiple design actions allowed us the integrate multicultural communities, including Asian migrants from the first and second generations. The Multi-Engagement appears as a concept to combine different forms of agreements between various community members. For example, some participants preferred to propose actions by drawing on a map; others chose to put a wooden cube to propose a new public facility.

In the end, the project concluded with the design of a system of public spaces where the programming of multiple cultural activities was especially relevant (See Figure 3).

PETARE: RESTORATIVE COMMUNITY DESIGN THROUGH TRANS-ENGAGEMENT

Figure 4: The gameboard for Restorative Community Design in Petare (Caracas).

The Petare experience has invited us the mix engagement strategies instead of separating them as in the case of Flushing.

Restorative Community Design exploration in Petare began in 2008 when the community of Petare, an eastern sector of Caracas, called on professors of the Simon Bolivar University in Caracas to support them in the design of some sports spaces through participatory design techniques. After that, different actors met for several years in participatory budgeting meetings under the coordination of the local government.[29] This process helped strengthen community associations and build trust between different actors, which facilitated the achievement of an overlap between the normative needs of architecture and the daily needs of the community in relation to public architectural projects. This exploration continues to this day with a project called EPICo (Spaces for Community Participation and Inclusion by its acronym in Spanish) currently being developed in the Los Andinos Sector of Petare Sur.

In 2013, Petare communities invited us to conduct an urban study on the Redoma de Petare, a multi-problematic place in this sector of the city. The proposal was led and designed by the firm Arepa Architecture Ecology y Participation, the support of the Mayor's Office of Sucre, and the active participation of different community leaders that had emerged from the participatory budgeting meetings mentioned above.[30] The conflicts of the Redoma de Petare are overwhelming; for instance, more than 12,000 people at peak hours in both directions walk around an overcrowded area of fewer than 2 hectares.[31] Like Flushing, La Redoma de Petare is this city's most important transportation hub. It includes a Subway station on Line 1 of the Metro, the most important in the city, in addition to 79% of the city's bus lines that end up circulating La Redoma.[32]

But La Redoma de Petare is also a Latin American transcultural city. We can mention name thousands of urban phenomena that are mixed in Petare. Here are four of them: First, the word Petare means "with the face facing the river" in the Amerindian language, the relationship with water courses is a pre-colonial legacy. Second, the city is organized aroing the old Spanish colonial grid founded in 1621. Third, in La Redoma de Petare, the elevated highways that symbolize the arrival of the modern hygienist movement also have a strong presence. Fourth, the Subway that illustrate the Latin American boom of pedestrian
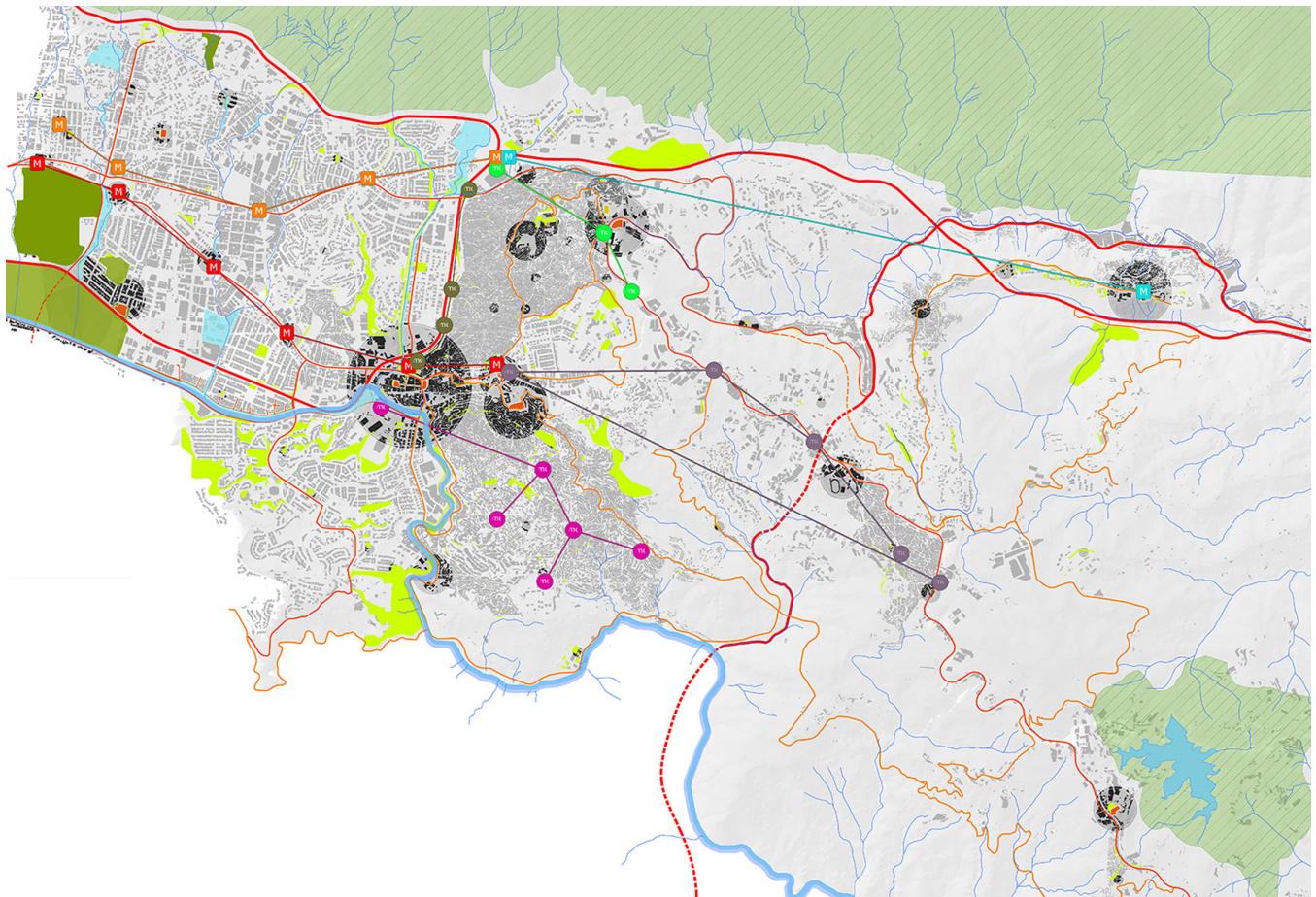

Figure 5: Strategic Urban Plan – Petare (Caracas).

public space.[33] All these elements are not separated but visually merged. The Redoma de Petare is a patchwork where everything happens simultaneously with great intensity; the empanada de pasticho is a cultural emblem of the place, food that symbolizes the mixture of cultures.

La Redoma de Petare required urban actions to reorganize pedestrian, public transportation, and trade flows amid a complex multicultural agency mixed around the territory. In this context, Restorative Community Design became a useful framework to promote agreements between different actors who did not have a consensual vision of the possibilities of urban transformation. In an environment of relative social tension between different stakeholders and socioeconomic groups, the participatory design project sought an overlapping between their various needs. That is why the case of Petare Redoma taught us that one of the most important participation strategies is overlapping, an overlap that comes from the reading of an already culturally overlapped urban built environment.WW

Consequently, Petare taught us the importance of strategies for Trans-Engagement. Transdisciplinary is a strategy where each field is expanded to the areas of expertise of other fields;[34] working towards a Restorative Community Design in Petare teaches us about translating this idea to community participation. In a Trans-Engagement strategy, each participant sitting around the PATH game had to think fluently as if they were someone else. Architects must simulate being Petare residents, clinical community psychologists, or educators to identify the community's needs and respond to them in designing the proposal. An engagement approach in trans-cultural environments requires that participants put themselves in the place of other professionals and go beyond their own areas of interest. The Trans-Engagement approach encouraged an even more complete and better understanding of the "other," being the other one who thinks differently or who belongs to another sector.[35]

To achieve Trans-Engagement strategies, the PATH gameboard included transparent acrylic sheets to overlap interventions between different stakeholders - such as peddlers or residents - and different cultural groups from different neighborhoods surrounding the area (See Figure 4). The various ideas were drawn one on top of the other to discover agreements and discuss differences to reach a consensus on the public space as a shared opportunity. The trans-culturalism of the Latin American Petare invited us to design participatory strategies where all the roles were constantly hybrid. The acrylics allowed overlapping ideas when different actors drew them, but at the same time, in the PATH game, we encouraged each participant to pretend to be someone else when drawing.

Although the experience of mixing roles and identities in the PATH game would seem frantically maddening, Petare's mix of different identities made this process easy. For a person born in Petare, it is easy to imagine being an immigrant because he has been in constant contact with worldwide migration. Similarly, for a white-skinned person, it is easy to play not to be because all its inhabitants are always mixed-blood citizens. In Petare, Trans-Engagement was necessary to facilitate the agreement between already overlapped identities.

This project culminated with design and planning documents for the transformation of the Redoma de Petare and its surroundings (See Figure 5). This experience convinced us that one of the most important participation strategies is overlapping.

WORKING TAKEAWAYS

The experience of applying the RCD in two different contexts showed us the importance of listening carefully to the dynamics of the place. Participatory design is not a standardized manual that can be applied anywhere, it should be culturally sensitive.[36] Designing the common good requires careful dialogue between different actors, including community members, architects, and other designers. Specifically, the comparative exercise between Flushing and Petare allowed us to explore the existence of various forms of cultural environment such multicultural and transcultural, respectively. This contrast invited us to Create of different engagement strategies, in Flushing systematizing tools for the participation of different modes of cultural approach (Multi-Engagement), in Petare seeking overlapping roles and design actions (Trans-Engagement).

However, this ongoing investigation inevitably leaves two open questions. These open questions emerged from remembering my conversation with Nestor Garcia Canclini in a house in San Angel, and I believe that they can contribute to the citizen empowerment proposed by Sherry Arnstein in 1969. How to include Multi-Engagement strategies, classifying topics with legibility to provide order in Petare's multi-problematic relations?

How to create a Trans-Engagement strategy within the US-American city's social relations to promote dialogues between -sometimes disconnected- communities? They are open questions that may bring new paths for a Restorative Community Design.

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