Charrettes for Developing a Transdisciplinary Approach to Urban Housing

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Abstract: *This article is based on the importance of co-existence in urban housing and the search for methods that are capable of increasing the forms and tendencies of dwellers' participation. Today, with shifting roles in architecture, it is essential to adopt an approach that involves architects, designers, planners, experts, and dwellers to create a fusion of different housing approaches. Therefore, how can a seamless collaboration be established in cities such as İstanbul, where participation is relatively low? A possible approach to rethinking co-existence as a design process is to apply transdisciplinary (TR) approaches through architecture and design charrettes that enable active participation through open and interactive dialogues. Therefore, architectural charrettes play a role in the application of transgressing conventional modes of participatory processes, replacing them with the TR approach's development of an open and interactive atmosphere.*

Keywords:Co-existence, charrette, active participation, role-sharing, transdisciplinary approach.

1 Introduction

Today, along with the network connectivity that shapes cities, developing urban housing faces new challenges posed by social changes, economic growth, urbanization, innovations, changing lifestyles, and increasing cultural heterogeneity in different aspects. Processes such as urban dissolution, functional destabilization, gentrification, social change, lifestyle diversity, segregation, polarization, and post-Fordist flexibilization are the main concerns of 21st-century societies. Globalization has brought about the speed of change in human life, alienation, and deficiency from the powers that are shaping the urban environment, as well as complexity to patterns of urban development. Globalization has not only transformed patterns in housing production, but active participation and non-governmental organizations have also become increasingly influential in the planning of our cities and buildings (Borsdorf, 2004, p. 12).

In this context, these transformations occur both at the global and local levels within changing urban structures. Today, housing has become a tool for top-down planning policies in many countries.

Housing emphasizes that in socio-economic and political contexts, it is not just a matter of design as an instrumentalized commodity or status object, but also the roles of dwellers and the meaning of co-existence and co-design. As new knowledge, concepts, tools, and technologies change contemporary housing narratives and gain importance in the urban narratives of the future, changing housing needs must be evaluated at different levels, and dwellers need to be more involved in the design and planning processes with more active practices.

Therefore, this article focuses on developing alternative ways for better interaction between theory and practice in housing, involving many actors, experts, and dwellers through transdisciplinary approaches. Therefore, how can the phenomenon of housing and co-existence in a global city be handled in metropolises such as İstanbul, where intense urban mobility and migration are experienced? How can active participation be addressed in the co-existence of dwellers, designers, experts, and policymakers? Architectural charrettes can contribute positively to the implementation of active participation in places where these practices are not widely applied. According to the *National Charrette Institute (NCI),* a charrette is a collaborative design and planning exercise that occurs on-site over four to seven days and includes all involved parties at important decision-making stages (Roggema, 2014, p. 16). In this framework, co-existence can be considered a metaphor for housing design policies and production processes. Therefore, the article emphasizes the importance of charrettes in ensuring co-existence, especially for cultures, such as in Turkey, that do not have a deep-rooted experience of participatory processes in design, architecture, and urbanism.

2 Co-existence in Urban Housing Planning

In the 1960s, because of the liberal political, social, and cultural context, many architects devised tactics for active cooperation and engagement with consumers in the design process (Hill, 2005, 56). In the modernist movement of the 1970s, architects increasingly used design processes and roles in which the distribution and balance of power sought to be equally balanced with the user. Architects and planners involved future users as participants in the process through workshops, consultancies, and offices established in the neighborhoods. One example is the 1971 *Maison Médicale Student Accommodation* designed by Lucien Kroll, which included input from the building's primary users as well as other users. Similarly, examining the concepts of open housing and building at the level of participation in different layers, John Habraken worked on flexible housing models, especially mass-housing design, where various interventions can be made. On the other hand, Yona Friedman discussed self-help housing, including self-building, understanding that residents would develop a strong community by being active in the design and construction of their homes (Spatial Agency (n.d.)). Bernard Rudofsky's milestone book *Architecture Without Architects: An Introduction to Non-Pedigreed Architecture* (1964) examines spaces and buildings built without the input of architects, emphasizing spatialities as a common endeavor before becoming a specialist art. Rudofsky emphasizes the necessity of dynamic practices that involve the user being active and producing (Rudofsky, 1964).

In addition, sociologist Amitai Etzioni's concept of an active society and Henry Sanoff's active participatory methods can help us rethink co-existence and active community participation in housing. Etzioni's active society was conceived when participation in the planning process faced several problems. According to Albrecht, an active society is more responsive to its members than a 1970s society and promotes values rather than the instrumentalization of social relations through the activation of its members and increased responsiveness (Albrecht, 1998, p. 25). Johann Albrecht defines the components of active participation and orientation as "consciousness, knowledge, commitment, and power" (Albrecht, 1998, p. 28). Participatory design faces many problems, including decision-making regarding "the smallest common denominator," "understanding between architect and clients impeded by differing knowledge and value systems and by opposing taste cultures," "role of the architect reduced to a mere facilitating activity by "service-mentality," "lack and misuse of participation," and an "absence of a theoretical framework" (Albrecht, 1998, p. 28).

Similarly, Henry Sanoff spoke of public participation as follows: "People choose to participate if they see themselves affected by an issue because of a possible threat or benefit of a proposed facility," "have

an economic interest in the outcome of a particular decision," "need to protect or increase access to the use of a facility or service," "perceive an environmental or health risk associated with a proposed action, or if an issue affects strongly held religious or political beliefs" (Sanoff, 2000, pp. 17-18). In addition to participation, which also plays an important role in increasing social cohesion, De Carlo mentions that identifying the demands of the user is not only a necessity for the process but also a focus on key choices and orientations, concrete social conditions, and the gathering of information and criticism to reveal the imposed value system (De Carlo, 2005, p. 14; Creighton, 1994). When dwellers "collage their own collage onto other collages," new possibilities emerge (Petrescu, 2005, p. 45).

Today, however, we need different methodologies and approaches that weave different views on housing in an overlapping fusion, derived from interaction with different roles, designers, residents, experts, and housing authorities. A one-sided approach to housing creates weaknesses in terms of user satisfaction and belonging to the place and environment. Co-existence refers to living with diversity in a spatial environment that does not eliminate differences but leaves open doors for the intervention of residents defined by different roles in housing design and policies.

3 Charrettes for Developing Co-existence and Active Participation

Banerjee and Loukaitou-Sideris (1990, p. 116) define competition as "very open, civic-minded, and public-spirited." Competitions enable an increase in design quality. However, as Schlunz (1982) mentions, competitions have provided a safe zone "against incompetent or mediocre design" (Banerjee & Loukaitou-Sideris, 1990, p. 117). Banerjee and Loukaitou-Sideris (1990, p. 118) ask if competition can "guarantee community participation and involvement," but note that, "the competing and conflicting demands of a pluralistic society" need to be addressed more clearly.

The value of the competition also depends on the jury's evaluation, though the ideologies and values of the jury may differ from those of the users. It is important to note that some successful urban design projects depend on a collaborative design process, as well as the fact that competitions are against the idea of collaboration (Banerjee & Loukaitou-Sideris, 1990, pp. 127-128). To create such a collaborative atmosphere in design competitions, participation, knowledge sharing, and creating a dialog based on an interactive dialogue between participants provides more beneficial results in inclusive design. In addition, involvement and participation in the planning stages can provide competitors with a more integrative approach to the social, political, or behavioral aspects of the design problem. Therefore, the charrette-type design process, which can be used for uncomplicated design problems, can be beneficial in improving interaction among users, experts, and designers (Banerjee & Loukaitou-Sideris, 1990, pp. 127-128).

Charrette's history dates back to the late 19th century, when architecture students at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts Faculty gathered with a push chart (or French *charrette*) that became the place to finish the final touches just before the project deadline. The wheeled pushcart later evolved into a competitive decision-making environment in architecture and into an environment with short design intervals. A charrette means working collaboratively with a variety of participants, and as such, it is "a time-limited, multiparty design event organized to generate a collaboratively produced plan for a sustainable community" (Condon, 2008, p. 1). A mixed group of participants works collaboratively on a particular design topic in a short time, often just days.

A design charrette "integrates intuitive, rational, and emotional knowledge; is an inventive approach; includes idea-generating forces and results in envisioning futures; is set up in a creative atmosphere to allow many different stakeholders to collaborate; alternates between plenary discussions and small mixed design teams," and "uses maps and other visual tools to allow people to collaborate and integrate topographical, ecological, as well as social and economic aspects" (Roggema, 2014, pp. 19-20).

Roggema lists "knowledge creation," "the thin slice," "creativity," "governance," "transformation," and "let it flow" as the characteristics of a charrette (Roggema, 2014, pp. 16-19). According to Roggema (2014, p. 24), there are five application dimensions for contextualizing and realizing a design chart: the type of

participants, the project's location (urban-rural), its complexity, the country's development, and the scale at which the project is defined.

A charrette may offer "high stakes projects involving substantial public and private investment," "volatile yet workable political environments," complex design problems," and "real projects that include imminent development" (Roggema, 2014, p. 16). The benefits of participation through charrettes are that they enable participation in creative ways to consider the future, use technological facts creatively to generate reaction ideas, create design concepts based on ambiguity and unpredictability, hypothesize about future change and ways of living, open minds and debates, that do not necessarily take place within established structures and practices in government or elsewhere, work in a bottom-up fashion, and take local knowledge and perspectives into consideration while planning and making decisions, collaborate and share duties across disciplines, companies, and levels of government (Roggema, 2014, p. 20).

One of the well-known design charrettes was launched in New York in 1997 as *The Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) Expansion,* a charrette where 10 architects such as Rem Koolhaas and Toyo Ito were invited to take part in their own sites and programs (Foster et al. 1998, p. 3). Charrettes, whether for visioning or implementation, strengthen participation among different participants. In these models, the designer moves from the role of the designer to the role of serving or facilitator (Roggema 2014, p. 20). The eight levels of participants are specialists such as academics, architects, urban designers, and landscape architects, as well as artists or other creative professionals, and citizens as "the potential new inhabitants of a landscape, neighborhood or a building," along with experts, students, and governmental agencies the "local council/municipality levels and state levels who are "responsible for planning processes" and for "guidelines and overall planning regulations," as well as developers and industry partners, and children who are often neglected (Roggema, 2014, pp. 24-25).

Two types of charrettes, known as "visioning" and "implementation charrettes" (Condon, 2008 p. 17), can be useful in creating a supportive atmosphere for role change and design thinking. Visioning charrettes produce illustrations of an image of a district, city, or region and create projections for the future. Participants in visioning charrettes can be design professionals and non-professional stakeholders (Condon, 2008, pp. 17-18). Implementation charrettes, on the other hand, attempt to generate an applicable plan and regulatory papers with a higher level of responsibility and immediacy than visioning charrettes (Condon, 2008, p. 27). Participants, such as developers, municipal planners, engineers, public safety officials, state and regional regulators, utility providers, and advocacy groups, can be involved in discussing, approving, or implementing a plan. The participants in the implementation charrettes are the main stakeholders and design facilitators (Condon, 2008, pp. 27-28).

The first charrettes in Turkey were held at the 1st İstanbul Arkitera Architecture Festival organized by the Arkitera Architecture Centre in 2004, and another charrette was designed as a two-stage process with 12 participants in a historic and tourist district of İstanbul. In the second phase, which lasted 1.5 days, the participants produced and designed concrete architectural solutions for the year 2057 (Merdim Yılmaz, 2004; Anon, 2006). Charrettes, which were realized afterward, were applied mainly in the field of architectural design in various workshops held at universities, and mostly within the framework of young participatory groups. However, on a larger scale, charrettes involving large locals and other participating profiles and actors did not become very common. Such short-term, fast, and dynamic productive design approaches have not evolved into a transdisciplinary process in which diverse actors' participation levels and roles are learned and mutually shared.

Architecture and design charrettes, mostly implemented by small organizations and design workshops, aim to develop architectural pedagogical contexts while making a significant contribution to architecture in Turkey. However, some collectives also apply participation practices in a specific area of expertise with transdisciplinary approaches. Participatory planning and practical examples have not been implemented extensively in Turkey. In particular, active participation in planning and design practices has come to the fore with the increasing number of architectural design competitions since the late 1990s. Democratic and transparent participation processes have started to increase, mainly since the 2000s. Young associations such as *Herkes İçin Mimarlık* (Architecture for All, founded in 2011) and *Şehrine Ses Ver* (Give Your City Voice) are research-based collectives that aim to raise awareness about public participation and the

recreation of public spaces. For example, the aim of *Herkes İçin Mimarlık* is to create a renewed and dynamic structure to ensure the continuity of all these open, transparent, and non-hierarchical processes. This prevents the formation of vertical hierarchical forms that are opposite to each other and ossified within the association in the fields of education and practice. These independent, young, and mostly student-led organizations seeking to set a broader agenda are emerging and becoming visible in the urban space (Herkes İçin Mimarlık, 2020; Şehrine Ses Ver, 2020).

Given that the concepts of active participation in Turkey do not have a long history, the value of establishing ways to collaborate more methodologically is clear. To establish such participatory and reflective spaces, it is critical to promote charrettes, which have a more efficient working process, as well as architectural and urban design contests. Local governments, NGOs, and individuals should all be involved in the planning and execution of such events to ensure that they are the major actors in the process in their communities. In this paradigm, seamless and curatorless local government options are also required. However, it is critical to activate the unknown, ambiguous, and emergent patterns in the process dynamically and efficiently.

4 Transdisciplinary (TR) Approach in Urban Housing and the Potential of Charrettes

Transdisciplinary (TR) approaches emerge as "immense space of new knowledge" (Nicolescu, 2006, 143), and these contributions enable "the cross-fertilization of ideas and knowledge from different contributors, they can lead to an enlarged vision of a subject as well as new explanatory theories" (Formas, 2006, p. 42; Dunin-Woyseth & Nilsson, 2011, p. 81). Therefore, the research process becomes spatiotemporal and ambiguous.

The idea behind transdisciplinary urbanism is to use the outside world as a research strategy as well as a component of the human experience. Beyond the physical reality of the urban environment, the "reality of the outside" encompasses the phenomenological reality of the subject's "being-in-the-world," as well as the political reality that exists beyond the agendas of the elites who will never put in the necessary effort to better society. From the bottom up, from the periphery to the center, the interdisciplinary endeavor known as "the urbanism of the outside" is mobilized by many institutions (Del Cerro Santamaria, 2018a, 32).

An output of this methodology is the creation of anti-hierarchical degrees between experts and all participants on the overlap of theory and practice and the hybridization of disciplinary discussion. This methodology can add a more open and dynamic structure to construct new meanings and hermeneutic housing and requires deeper research. It would be appropriate to consider the TR approach as a model that creates its own paths. While modern science interprets the world as a proven mathematical phenomenon, different approaches are often excluded in a Cartesian view—an analytic and reducible dichotomy. In other words, during design thinking, the participants' opposing methods and perspectives are mostly removed or overlapped with the main backbone of a single approach, resulting in secondary or tertiary layers that do not dissolve into each other but rather become independent or isolated.

Housing can be addressed with a holistic approach for societies—not only theory-based but also action-oriented approaches and ways of living and working together in contemporary housing. There is a need for interfaces where people can express their thoughts. These interfaces can be created by developing lateral ontologies where production practices are brought together by living together with experts and designers in a healthy way.

As Julie Thompson Klein points out, some of the action processes in the TR approach are reminiscent of participatory approaches to architecture and urban planning in the 1960s and 1970s. However, the difference between the former interdisciplinary contributions and today's TR approaches is the deliberate inclusion of stakeholders in the definition of problems and the criteria, objectives, and resources set to analyze and solve these problems. This approach can be well integrated into addressing issues such as sustainability, people-environment relations, health, technological innovation, and risk assessment, where its application is not limited to traditional disciplinary boundaries or sectoral professional practice (Lawrence

& Després, 2004, p. 403). TR thus develops as an actor-oriented negotiation of information, or what Julie Thompson Klein refers to as a context-specific, generative kind of communicative activity (Klein, 2004, p. 521).

In architecture, this approach has been evaluated and applied to sustainability, socio-ecological perspectives (Hirsch Hadorn et al. 2008, p. 29), and urban issues. This methodology was developed for architecture and urban studies to avoid the rational scientist model for providing efficiency and better connectedness in problem-seeking and problem-solving processes. *The Interdisciplinary Research Group on Suburbs, Groupe interdisciplinaire de recherche sur les banlieues* (GIRBa), which was established in the 2000s and applies the TR approach in architecture, can be given as an example of research-based studio work for the applications of this methodology. GIRBa has implemented this approach by identifying 'complex problems' and 'customized solutions for sustainable development' within research and implementation, design, and participatory processes (Després et al. 2011, p. 34).

Furthermore, transdisciplinarity is a way of inquiry, practice, and learning in which ethics, aesthetics, and creativity are integrated into, rather than separated from, academic and professional work. It engages theory and practice, contextualizes and repositions theory and learning, and includes social, political, and ethical issues that were previously considered outside the scope of study and education (Del Cerro Santamaria, 2018a, 35).

5 How to Implement TR Approach within Charrettes

The importance of co-existence and the design of housing and housing policies is directly influenced by the involvement of dwellers. Therefore, planning activities such as co-existence can develop and implement a more democratic, fragmented TR approach in which there is active role-sharing between multiple actors, from designers to experts and agencies. Since the TR approach and methodology are increasingly being addressed from the perspective of housing, architecture, urban design, and urban sprawl, co-existence and planning activities implemented in charrettes can be used as a beneficial model by bringing together many actors, such as architects, designer planners, politicians, and local governments, in a way that does not form a vertical hierarchy.

Based on Nicolescu's (2010) description of transdisciplinarity as theoretical, phenomenological, and experimental, Del Cerro Santamaria (2018b, 58) divides urbanism into three categories: theoretical perspectives, which we investigate by pivoting on the nature, properties, perception, experience and consciousness of transurban space, "Phenomenological Transurbanism," experience of the built space, which needs to transcend both intellectualism and empiricism via Merleau Ponty's and Lefebvre's triad of spatial practices, representational space, and spaces of representation, differential space, and Soja's Thirdspace (Del Cerro Santamaria, 2018c, 75), and "Experimental transurbanism" in urbanism takes into account basic quantum concepts such as non-locality, entanglement, discontinuity, and non-separability, and aims to explain processes of planetary urbanization in the so-called "Anthropocene," which is characterized by glocalization, hybridization, complexity, sustainability, remembrance, and the reality of digital spaces (Del Cerro Santamaria, 2018d, 88).

All three categories are based on a human-centered, multifaceted assessment of the complex nature of urbanization in a world of meanings. Today, it is increasingly important to discuss a methodology that engages dwellers, experts, and designers within housing environments. The TR approach defines both a methodology and an interactive framework for ambiguous problems. Thus, it can help develop tactical and flexible strategies for uncertainties in understanding and problem-solving in the built environment.

Collaboration, worldwide networking, and education are essential in the twenty-first century to address the many challenges that arise. By greatly enhancing the capacity to address the unstructured issues the world faces today, the effective establishment of a network of international cooperation centers, and institutes will facilitate knowledge transfer and offer a variety of benefits (Ertaş, 2010, 53).

However, it may be more difficult to achieve the transition of disciplines and areas of expertise in limited time periods compared with the TR approach processes. Therefore, deepening the design thinking process

for more complex urban housing problems would be another challenge. However, these problems can be overcome by creating semi-transparent groups or collectives that allow each participant to easily join a group in which they feel comfortable and observe and witness the network of different groups during the design process. Semi-transparent groups can be organized so that group participants can also participate and observe the discussions and designs of other group participants. In this way, participants can observe the methods of the methodology, transform the methods of the applied methodology, and even take action to change it. Whether it is a visioning or an implementation charrette, the TR approach integrated into it will not be single-centered, not developed as an end-to-end plan, and can be designed to be inclusive from the beginning to the end of the process.

Since the uncertainty factor is important because of the nature of the charrettes, it will be important to organize the environment where the charrette will be built in a way that encourages democratic participation. A more egalitarian and communication-oriented seating arrangement and an area where all participants can see each other in the same environment are examples. Second, in the design of the TR approach, it is important to foster a design thinking process that develops its own paths or steps internally through the ability to deal with uncertain dynamics arising from different actors and approaches. This can positively affect the entire process, production style, and output of the charrette.

Therefore, it is important to support charrettes to bridge the gaps between different stakeholders in society. The application of the TR approach in charrettes can provide a dynamic environment for creating a more open and interactive atmosphere for building methodologies for housing. However, more charrette applications are needed to provide a more productive form of collaborative learning, to think and design together, and to sustain these pathways to make a more positive contribution to society at all levels.

6 Final Words and Discussion

The demand for effective and flexible use of areas lessens the need for newly created areas in many urbanizing places, making the evaluation of existing housing stocks a significant issue. For seamless collaboration and co-existence in housing design, a grounded approach to overcome the limitations of architectural discipline and top-down planning is required. Instead of viewing participants as having roles in housing, housing should be evaluated in terms of a new methodology that qualitatively addresses socioeconomic aspects and integrates theory, design, policy, and practice to strengthen and develop a sense of social sharing and belonging. In this sense, a TR approach radicalizes architectural autonomy and distributes authority from the architect or designer to other actors, thus increasing the visibility of both the user-subject attributed to the other and other experts in the design process. Understanding the participation aspects of the TR approach and the role of architectural paintings in practice can thus positively contribute to its practice through the open and engaging discussions they provide, and this interactive process also contributes to the production of design democracy.

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