Generating the ‘new’ through a project-based action in architecture: The case of Agii Anargiri, Larnaca Europan 8 Cyprus

Usually, when we refer to the idea of the “new”, we have in mind novelties related to object-like architectural issues. Even more, the idea of the “new” has absolute connotations: novelties in building technology, for example.

On the other hand, when we start relating the idea of the “new” to a project-based logic in architecture, a whole world of possible novelties is revealed. Novelties that are not anticipated are in fact revealed in various contexts in which the architectural project is inscribed. A point made by Pascal Amphoux, in one of the workshops during the Closing Forum of Europan 7 in Athens. To paraphrase him, the definition of the “new” is in fact its non-anticipation. You find it where you do not expect it. This revealed world of novelties comes from the various contexts of inscriptions of a project-based action in architecture: not only from its physical contexts but also from its temporal and pragmatic ones. The dynamic relations between elements of those three contexts become indeed a major issue to discuss.

In all three sorts of contexts, the idea of the “new” can be of a relative value and not of an absolute one. For example, a new element in a pragmatic context of an architectural project in Cyprus could be a banal thing in another country, (i.e. the changing of the moment of contribution of the various actors of the project).

The making of the Europan 8 competition for the redevelopment of the refugee housing in Cyprus has yielded all sorts of novelties in the three kinds of contexts of an architectural project.

Generating the “new” through pragmatic contexts of the architectural project

One pragmatic context of the architectural project is that of its actors being involved in the making of the project. So far, the actors of the redevelopment of the refugee housing in Cyprus have been Government departments – mainly the Department of Planning and Housing. Through the initiative of Europan Cyprus, the redevelopment of one of the refugee housing sites has been given out to the Europan 8 competition. In this manner there has been a change regarding the actors involved in the making of the project, both on local and on European level. Consequently, the framework prepared could encourage the introduction of the “new” through elements of the projects inscribed in physical and temporal contexts. The joint Norwegian-Cypriot jury for the Europan 8 competition facilitated the opening up of the project making.

Another important point related to the actors invited into the making of the project, is the crucial relationship between local conditions and dynamics introduced by networks. In this case, Europan has functioned as a network platform that introduced all sorts of dynamics on a local level that seemed very difficult to be launched solely by the local environment. In addition, the network dynamics introduced gave local architectural teams the chance to deal with local problematics not previously offered by the market. (There is still a lot to do for larger participation of architectural teams based in Cyprus in Europan).

Generating the “new” through physical and temporal contexts

Through the workshop with the theme ‘Renewing for which inhabitants’ during the Forum of Cities and Juries in Sintra, Portugal, held in January 2006, there was a discussion around this public accessibility regarding the sites, among others, of Puchal, Portugal; Istanbul and Antalya, Turkey; and Larnaca, Cyprus. One major issue was the degree of accessibility that the actual inhabitants had to urban infrastructure both on a physical and institutional level, and what the projects propose concerning this logic.

It is interesting to see that through the change of the pragmatic context (that of the actors involved in the making of the project), in Agii Anargiri, Larnaca, a series of novelties were allowed to come out from the winning project and the runner-up regarding the degree of accessibility to the urban infrastructure. The winning and runner-up projects in Larnaca, Cyprus propose new relationships between the public and the private domains, and thus, on one hand, increasing the accessibility of the inhabitants to the urban infrastructure. On the other hand, they attribute a new role of the site regarding the urban agglomeration. The large-scale open spaces proposed in the site could generate a series of transformations between the site and the city regarding the physical and temporal aspects of the project.

Generating the ‘new’ through the implementation phase

After the competition was launched, a new political condition has appeared: the refugees who have been staying in State-owned housing projects for the past 32 years are going to become owners of their residences. It is actually a decision that changes completely the social housing policy in Cyprus. A tricky decision, with everybody admitting that it is based on a political rather than on an urban and social context. The winning project will have to introduce the “new” within this process of privatization: introduce new conditions between public and private in the housing typology. The housing layout of the winning team allows flexibility and can hopefully confront the ever-changing political condition of the refugee problem.

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