

Hors-série

6 20

www.urbanisme.

IN ENGLISH

LA REVUE

urbanisme

European,
une aventure à suivre

European, an ongoing adventure

Play the Sleeping Dog? Ways for implementing a winning European project

*“Mes enfants, you mustn’t go at things head-on,
you are too weak, take it from me and take it
on an angle.....Play dead, play the sleeping dog”*
-Honoré de Balzac, Les Paysans

These words of Honoré de Balzac could have been addressed to the European 13 session winners who have recently entered in the implementation stage of their proposals. In fact, the words could have been addressed to any European winner, including myself as well, since I was part of the winning team for the Heraklion old city waterfront redevelopment, Crete, Greece back in European 4, 1996. Entering the stage of implementation is a sort of ritual where the cities of each participating country, with their protocols and urban cultures, escort the winning project through a non linear trajectory full of surprises, (Stratis, Socrates, "Welcome Back In My Back Yard: an urban porosity interrogation" in "Ideas Changing, European Implementations", European Europe, 2012, pp. 46-50). The ritual is rather different across Europe in regard to the kind of escorting offered to the winning project depending on the readiness both of the country's urban institutions as well as on that of the European's national secretaries. Balzac's words though, bring to our attention that the power relations among the urban actors along such trajectory do not often comply with the changes that come with the proposals.

Keller Easterling has brought forward Balzac's excerpt to refer to the potentialities of the figure of the architect, closer to that of an activist entrepreneur, (Easterling, Keller, *"The activist entrepreneur"* in Gutman, Robert (ed), *Architecture from the Outside In*: Princeton Architectural Press, 2010, pp. 318-323). Easterling urges the architects, and I add, all those practices that aim to introduce changes in the urban environment, to study carefully how the entrepreneur regards innovation taking place in multiple cycles, with limited duration and with partial characteristics. She goes on criticizing the figure of the architect whose logic and frame of mind is rather theological than entrepreneurial. The architect's figure is quite often devoted to absolutes and ideologies also charmed by the utopian figure that imagines changes taking place only during a unique moment instead along a multiple cycle of innovation.

In fact, European is a fertile ground for Easterling's search for architects as activist entrepreneurs, as well as for partial changes along a multiple cycle of innovation. The European network, during its almost 30 years of existence has generated an astonishing data of urban design practices engaged in partial changes, all over Europe, which unfortunately still remains unexploited.

Despite the fact, that the architects are still the majority of the participants in the competition, their approaches are more inviting to other professions such as landscape architects, urbanists and media practitioners. The project teams, themselves, are gradually becoming nationally heterogeneous, based on friendships built across countries thanks to the Erasmus programs. The approaches of the winning projects, especially those for the French sites, are about complex scenarios of programmed timelines and processes interrelated with spatial protocols that take into account the uncertainties of the implementation stage, (E13, winners in Bondy, France). They are projects with incremental character and multiplying effects that create dynamic relations between physical objects, processes and urban actors. In fact, they seem to have more chances to traverse the passage to implementation incorporating uncertainties and new urban dynamics, (E13 winner

in Vernon, special mention in Montreuil, France). They risk however, to get involved in very long project timelines. The implementation of the European 4 project in Heraklion, Crete was based on a similar approach. Thanks to the team's reflective practice, such issues became explicit during the extremely long implementation process (from 2000 until now), and shared with the rest of the project actors, through moments of negotiation.

Following the logic of the architect's figure as activist entrepreneur, the European 13 project teams need to develop a reflective approach during the implementation process to continuously readjust the proposal's strategies and tactics. At the same time, the project team should become quickly aware of the collectiveness of such rite to implementation, where its members are part of a heterogeneous assemblage of urban actors that have the power to alter the project's priorities. How to make alliances through multiple negotiations, how to change the game by introducing new visual data and images of the possible, how to formulate new questions that introduce uninvited actors, become a major component of the team's practice.

What Balzac did not mention was that "les enfants", while taking things at an angle, or playing the sleeping dog, they were changing themselves. Along the same line, the European projects actors' priorities and imaginaries do change during such rite of passage to implementation. While playing the sleeping dog, the winning team gains extra time to reflect on the on-going processes transformed into a valuable learning device.

Article by Socrates Stratis
Dr. Architect, Urbanist
Associate Professor
Chair, Department of Architecture
University of Cyprus
Member of European Europe Scientific Committee
www.socratesstratis.com
www.aaplusu.com