

In the light of Lumen. How to get a 30 years loan of use for a common space in Florence

Francesco Caneschi^{1,2}, Cristina Setti³, Jacopo Ammendola⁴

¹FAUP-Faculdade de Arquitectura da Universidade do Porto, Porto, Portugal. ²DIDA - Dipartimento di Architettura dell'Università di Firenze, Firenze, Italy. ³Lumen, Florence, Italy. ⁴DIDA - Dipartimento di Architettura dell'Università di Firenze, Florence, Italy

Introduction

There are architects that design walls and roofs to let people in, and there are architects that design processes to let people meet. To regenerate an urban fragment, the second ones are as important as the first ones.

Lumen is a physical place under constant evolution: the result of a ten-year experimentation of temporary events. Nowadays, many professionals work across disciplines to regenerate urban spaces, and they define themselves as urban practitioners.

Practice, in this definition, can be interpreted as the Aristotelian Praxis, as opposed to Poiein. They both mean “to act”, but while the definition of Poiein means to produce something, as in building a house, Praxis means to do something that is good in itself without any permanent physically built result, as in building social relations between people that dwell in the same place.

Temporary actions for the collective regeneration of spaces

Lumen started as a happening, in a forgotten shed of a park in the city center of Florence. A group of young people organized a sort of semi-spontaneous event where for one afternoon there was music, live painting and some collective maintenance of the place. In a moment where the few free places of social interaction started to decline, such as the “case del popolo” and squats, this heterogeneous group of people wanted to offer an alternative to the consumerist leisure options that the city was offering. Years after years, the group expanded: the happening became a two days festival free of charge, named “Copula Mundi”. Illustrations exhibitions, live jam sessions and juggling were added to the program. The main associations that managed the event and the informal actors had to become a proper and defined legal entity: the association *Ichè Ci Vah Ci Vole* (ICVCV). This entity was needed because of an increase in complexity and in responsibility management. After four editions the users of the park changed, as more families started using the garden, overrunning the previous population mainly composed of kids skipping school. This dynamic forced the public administration to increase the affordability of the garden, through various interventions on the space.

Temporary events are an experimental tool for the modification of a space. As an experiment, it is replicable in different contexts, but without a standardized approach.

Experimenting the institutionalization of co-production

Aware of the potential of this approach, the public administration suggested another park to host the festival, bigger than the previous one and abandoned as well. The cultural offer, the actors involved, and the hierarchy grew with the new dimensions of the festival. Being mostly based on voluntary work, public funding and food & beverage, the organizational machine was too big to be a free of charge festival. Moreover, a temporary festival has considerable waste production, that is acceptable if the aim is profit, but it's not if the aim is urban regeneration.

The idea of establishing the festival and the association in a specific place surfaced between the organizers. How to create a path with the public administration?

A law came in hand along the process of finding a place. A law that allows groups of citizens to ask for a non-residential building that is not listed as historically relevant, and that has a covered surface beneath the five hundreds square meters.

This legal tool was created in 2017 and, until 2020, nobody used it. ICVCV found an abandoned park at the periphery of the city center, nevertheless just five kilometers from the cathedral. The 4000 square meter park has several greenhouses and an old abandoned Casa Colonica, that previously hosted a health facility for addicts. Lumen, the new name of the place, is right now in a strategic place, at the border between the countryside and the city, exactly where a new tram terminal will be built in 2024.

As in every innovative process, the beginning is always experimental. 2023 is the third and the last year of a temporary loan for use, preceding the signing of a thirty-year contract. The bargain is to have the place for free, in exchange for ordinary and extraordinary maintenance of the building and the park. After a brief estimate, the total probable investment will be around 600k Euros. Figure that will become a public profit since the abandoned farm house is a public property.

In these first three years, the interiors are being used as storage, while all the resources are being focused on the exterior of the park. That is because it's easier and cheaper to make a place work in the summer. In addition to that, it would be unwise to focus on the building instead of focusing on building a community, before signing the contract.

Accountability & Sustainability

ICVCV is an association for social promotion (APS), a legal subject that has a clear hierarchy, where the president is accountable, economically and legally, for all the association activities. The problem of accountability is a multifaceted one: it compels a hierarchy that verticalizes social relations and spatial production, it oversimplifies decision-making and makes it easier for the supervisory bodies to identify a scapegoat. This structure isn't a reflection of a common project, and recently this contrast was a further aggravation to a fine that the association received for a question regarding the 2019 edition of the festival.

Any legal or penal setback that occurs to the legal representatives, drives them to isolation.

Any additional burden they bear as individuals is mirrored by a reduction of engagement toward the members, and the decrease of interaction, in a common project, usually drifts members apart. This is the core complexity of a commoning project in Italy, that is linked to the issue of sustainability.

Three freedoms

A common project that is non-profit, that is designed to give to others, works if the people actively involved receive something back, that usually are: to feel useful, a sense of belonging, new skills or new possibilities. These last possibilities can be defined as the three freedoms used by Michael Sorkin to define a good urbanity: freedom of assembly, freedom of access and the freedom of use and expression.

The festival "Copula Mundi" worked on all three freedoms: it opened and improved the places where it has been done, free entrance meant that people were able to assemble there and, lastly, it offered the possibility of exhibition, performance and self-expression. Right now, if an association wants to use the space for a show without a ticket, the space is given free of charge.

The festival "Copula Mundi" is now taking place every summer at Lumen, still free of charge. But the space itself during working days has to safeguard access requiring a membership card, even if a cheap one. That is because of accountability. To safeguard the freedom of access, and to minimize accountability, the association rejected the proposal of the administration to manage 9000 square meters and asked instead to manage the half of it, turning the remaining 4k sq into a public garden. In this way the public space is subjected to the social control of the association activities, it's not its responsibility, and it's actually open also to the ones that do not want to become members.

To keep alive and to develop these freedoms, the architecture of the place is changing every year, to improve them and to create new ones.



Form follows contents

The 'usual' process of constructing cultural and social spaces follows a predefined sequence: the architectural container (or landscape) is designed and then built on the basis of an a-priori model that lives in the mind of the designer, and the social and cultural content must adapt to this given form.

Lumen is an experiment in subverting this predefined sequence, postponing the definition of the spatial configuration to the construction of the cultural and social content. The actual spatial design is, in fact, indefinitely delayed, resorting to provisional layouts and pop-up devices, recursively rearranging the architectural and outdoor spaces, in a permanently ongoing experimentation.

In this way, instead of forcing the social and cultural contents to adapt to a predetermined form, the physical form of the place is incrementally built around the characteristics of the people and relationships it will have to accommodate.

Indeterminacy is one of the main characteristics of a good public space, it has to accommodate the unexpected, just like a good party or a festival. Festival is, in fact, the translation, not completely satisfactory, of the "la fête" concept by Lefebvre. The philosopher stated that one of the most

important aspects of urbanity is the moment where the use value overcomes the commodity value, the moment of creation of the “oeuvre”, that he called “la fête”.

Goethe affirmed : “I call architecture ‘petrified music’”. But in the light of Lumen, architecture is more like live music.

Repurposing as Learning: Understanding the Role of Architects in Enabling Owner-Occupiers to Retrofit

Habib Ghasemi, Tara Hipwood, Peter Holgate

Northumbria University, Newcastle, United Kingdom

Introduction

In the UK, the residential sector shares 58% of the building's emissions, more than 85% related to heating space and water (UKGBC, 2021). Hence, There is a pressing need to improve the thermal performance of its existing housing stock to fit them for the future, which mainly concerns owner-occupied homes as they constitute more than 63% of existing housing stock (EAC, 2021). Whilst direct legislation is considered too intrusive and expensive to enforce (Lucas et al., 2008), the emphasis shifts to owner-occupiers' voluntary engagement. This is often followed through unsuccessful educational programs based on information deficit models and behavioural change (Abrahamse & Matthies, 2018). Recent research has argued for learning in situations where the inter-relation of energy consumption with bundles of practices that make up the everyday life of households becomes accessible (Christensen et al., 2019). Similarly, practice-based research that explored the practical enactment of house retrofit located energy efficiency within various accounts of everyday realities and emphasised the strategic position of architects in resolving conflicts and incorporating retrofitting in broader house adaptations (Hipwood, 2021).

Therefore, this paper understands 'low carbon retrofit' as upgrading existing house components to improve energy use (Shahi et al., 2020) . However, the study places retrofitting within broader goals and house development projects to investigate architects' highlighted yet under-explored position in making retrofitting sensible for owner-occupiers (for retrofit as process, see Galvin & Sunikka-Blank, 2017). In this context, 'repurposing' does not refer to changing the function or occupation of houses through intervention but to repurposing the intervention process itself - towards greater energy efficiency.

Approach and Methods

The research draws on the theory of practice architecture, which explores learning as initiation or being steered into practice (Kemmis, 2019). In the theory of practice architecture, sayings, doings, and relatings form practices and hang together as projects that are made possible by cultural-discursive (C-D), material-economic (M-E), and social-political (S-P) arrangements. These arrangements are not entirely at the disposal of individuals. Instead, they form as people encounter one another in semantic, physical, and social spaces (Figure 1). Thus, educators can be conceived as co-participants in shared sites that influence local-based arrangements and enable or constrain practices.

Accordingly, through micro-ethnographic observation of communicative spaces that architects come to share with owner-occupiers (Erickson, 1995), the research investigates the educative influence of architects in reproducing practice architectures around retrofitting. To ensure energy efficiency has a chance to emerge within these shared spaces, professional networks are purposefully searched to locate architects with pronounced ambition in employing their expertise to address energy efficiency in domestic projects. The research examines four architect-owner meetings around three projects at different stages of preparation and design (RIBA stages A to C).