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Reframing services and processes in architectural design

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Abstract

Contemporary complexities demand a different approach on how design activities should be practised, theorised and taught. However, most of the architectural creation processes remain based on the disciplinary rational and intellectual knowledge and techniques, where architects prescribe solutions for people and spaces. This article suggests design procedures to agency a redefinition in the field of Architecture with a rhizomatic alliance with Service Design. Literature review shows the matter of space lacks extensive research in Service Design whereas architectural professional practices with traditional disciplinary tools are no longer sufficient to properly respond to contemporary challenges. Interdisciplinary entanglements are explored and open a path for more active, open, collaborative and emphatic design practices, able to benefit both fields and possibly reframe their services and practices.

Keywords: architectural practice, design services, space, interdisciplinary experience

Introduction

The challenges faced by contemporary society demand a shift on how plurality and complexity are addressed in the areas of architecture and design. The current landscape for design and architecture challenges us to explore new opportunities and to embrace innovative methods, including re-thinking our own role as designers.

Specifically the role of architects face the challenge of revisiting its beliefs and practices, because contemporary undetermined design situations escape from the canons of technical rationality and traditional professional competencies: "architectural knowledge runs the risk of being trapped in its own nostalgia, far from

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the complexity of society, incapable of becoming an evolutionary knowledge" (Montaner, 2017, p.8).

The assumption that architects are trained to create spaces *for* people and their activities in the built environment, or to respond to specific issues related to space, needs to move forward and to have its meaning enlarged. Recent literature demonstrates the urge for a more sensible approach when designing spaces, since architecture mediates cultural, mental, emotional and experienced values, and provides places for relational interactions (Pallasmaa, 2017).

To think about the future of the design praxis of Architecture and Urbanism (AU) is also to explore its interdisciplinary and relational aspects. However, the architectural field has demonstrated to incorporate change to its practice in a more reluctant way than the area of Design. So, how to overcome canonical AU's design culture and continue evolving?

This article questions established design procedures with the intention to agency a redefinition in the field of Architecture and Urbanism with a rhizomatic alliance with Service Design - that might be able to benefit both fields and possibly reframe their services and practices.

An outline of the architectural design process in Brazil

The Brazilian Council of Architecture and Urbanism (CAU-BR) establishes three main steps in the ideal architectural design process (preliminary study, pre-project, executive project) that are split into other micro-steps to complete the whole design process. It is not mandatory that an architect should develop all of them for each project. Instead architects may offer their design services in various ways, depending on a series of constraints such as client's budget and/or time-schedule, the complexity of the project itself or the projects' scope. It is possible for professionals to offer a wide range of services, from viability studies to furniture design. A survey taken in 2015 and 2019 (CAU/BR and Datafolha) reveals that most of the design services Brazilian architects offer are related to urban, architectural and interior design. All those kinds of services, though, have something in common: they all deal with space issues and include a creation phase to provide expected solutions for client's needs.

The *conception phase* generally starts with a conversation between architect and client, to define a briefing for the project, then the architect (or the architecture team) work in the studio investigating different hypotheses for a reasonable solution.

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Gradually the design hypothesis gain tangibility throughout the different stages of an architectural project and its deliverables (Kowaltowski et al., 2011), to be realised at the construction site. Unfortunately, that is when most clients really understand what the design was about - since architects made most of the design decisions by themselves.

If, on the one hand, architects complain about constantly redoing their work after meeting with clients, on the other hand, clients do not feel listened to when being presented to the professional design solution. Sennet (2018) reminds us that sometimes architects can be alien observers that prescribe solutions. Despite their unquestionable technical capacity and creative abilities, professionals are not the full holders of knowledge. So why not enable other people's participation within the design decision process? This work advocates for people to be active participants rather than passive recipients of preformed information.

Montaner (2017) underlines that it is necessary to overcome disciplinary rigidity since "Architecture advances and evolves as an interdisciplinary knowledge, not as a closed and self-sufficient discipline". (Montaner, op.cit, p.8, *transl.*). The canonical approach of rationality and intellectualization over experience goes back to the first 50 years of the 20th century that was responsible for building the idea of the architect as the sole talented artist capable to decide people's future. Up until today this is a very common notion practised in architecture studios and disseminated on education in Brazil.

In addition, the prevalence of vision over the other human senses (Pallasmaa, 2011) has become a design canon for architects worldwide, resulting in contemporary architectural work that has been judged and consumed on the basis of its physical appearance, whereas: "Deep architectural experiences are actions, not objects" (Pallasmaa, 2017, p.96, *transl.*). Gehl (2013, 2018) emphasizes the human dimension of cities since they are a place of encounters, of interaction between life and space.

Although participatory design processes have been used in the field of Architecture and Urbanism since 1970's, current architectural practice, in general, has been made *for* people, and not *with* people. Sennet (2018) points out that the majority of architects and most of those practices end up being "consultations to people", and not real design *with* people. For the author, co-production enables "to make involvement important for both sides, so that, for starters, plans are generated by the trained technician and the inhabitant, with their life experience" (Sennet, 2018, p.275, *transl.*).

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Action. Interdisciplinary. Experience. Participatory. Open. These words are very present at Service Design literature. They have guided us to explore SD theories and tools within some experiences undertaken within the (Name of the University), from 2018 to 2022 that represent a brief cartography of local experiences, exploring entanglements and flows between AU and SD, towards transforming practices and processes regarding the design of spaces and services.

The spatial gap in Service Design

The once emerging discipline of Service Design can now be defined as a consolidated field (Blomkvist, Holmlid & Segelström, 2020; ServDes, 2018, Mager 2020). However, in the SD field, for almost twenty years, the matter of space was generally regarded as one of the many components of a service - despite the work of Bitner (1990) considering the importance of the physical surroundings on people at workspaces (servicescapes) in the field of Services Marketing (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2011). The matter of space being more than a touch point and considered as one of the essential components of a service demands to be addressed and deeply investigated.

At the 2018 ServDes Conference, the subject of spaces in services has been "officially" acknowledged, discussed in its intertwined relations with and from services and spaces, being considered further from simply the environment or the container where services take place (Collina et al., 2018). Although still a low explored subject so far:

> The absence of a literature review and the insignificant number of courses and experimentations on this topic highlight that in-depth and rigorous research is needed to develop models, methods and theories about S+S (Spatial+Service Design). An adoption of this approach requires better understanding of its practices, methods to assess value and methods to approach the subject matters in order to break the silos of design approaches and to add a diverse perspective. (Fassi, Galluzzo, De Rosa, 2018, p.856)

This diverse perspective may come from the entanglements and flows between Service Design and Archietcture and Urbanism. It might offer an enlarged understanding regarding Space. When it comes to the spatial dimension, architects respond by creating places and atmospheres: spaces which have special attributes given by people who experience it (Zumthor, 2006) and it involves more than physical aspects but all human senses, memory, emotions (Pallasmaa, 2018).

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Designing services together with spaces could be an opportunity for a clear collaboration with double benefits for both Architecture and Urbanism and Service Design.

A rhizomatic entanglement: AU + SD

The study of AU and SD relations may better acknowledge the current environment of tensions and unprecedented challenges, allowing a flow of negotiating paradoxes, the coexistence of diverse knowledge, constant innovation and evolution of both fields. Where Service Design may offer alternative solutions to update the architectural design praxis and services, the attention Architecture and Urbanism pays to space and its design may also grant SD with new perspectives. But how, exactly, could this contribution take place? By acknowledging the gaps demonstrated above as opportunities, following the findings of our previous research: *open, interdisciplinary, action, experience, participatory*.

Open. Sennet (2018) advocates for creating open experiences when designing: "an open city requires those who live in it to develop the capacity to deal with complexity". (op.cit., p.29, *transl.*) The notion of *open* implicates a system able to adequate the strange, the curious, the possible and the development of non-linear solutions that change whilst experiences develop. Although the author does not extend his arguments to philosophical reasoning, it is very convenient to our discussion to resume Deleuze & Guattari's (1997) notion of a rhizome and add Sennet's idea of an open practice in architectural design.

From the metaphor of a tree, Delleuze & Guattari (1997) have developed the notion of rhizome. Whereas a tree stands for filiation, closed into certainty and with a linear development, the rhizome is an alliance, since it has no beginning or ending, it is always located in-between, inter-being, at an *intermezzo* (Delleuze & Guattari, 1997). It designates a transversal movement, in a non-linear direction, that connects any point to another. The rhizome cartographs a non-hierarchical alliance, a network of open possibilities of an associated knowledge that continues to evolve overtime. It creates a terrain for experimentation and expansion of experiences.

Intertwining both ideas, we stand for the creation of a network of possibilities and new knowledge between Architecture and Urbanism and Service Design, where there are non-hierarchical contributions and both fields continue to evolve. Instead of expecting to create a merged and closed discipline, we stand for expanding innovation to better respond and embrace contemporary complexities. A rhizomatic alliance driven by empathy, multiple voices, active encounters and experimentation.

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Interdisciplinary. In practice, space and service are inseparable instances, so it is necessary to overcome disciplinary limits to respond to growing design complexities. The Service Design approach develops projects with people in all the phases but the spatial dimension; in general, it is taken as a container or a touch point when designing services. It has a supporting role, it is not a protagonist.

The integration of architectural expertise could benefit the SD field from the architectural approach regarding spaces as an important tangible evidence that plays a decisive role in the design of a service, when considered at the genesis of the service itself. This interdisciplinarity opens opportunities favourable to experimentation, open to external influences in a rhizomatic alliance for innovation in both fields.

SD tools and practices are able to install an emphasis to *Action* in AU. Ideation phase methods provide a series of tools to co-design with people and generate insights by doing. Moreover, it is important to state that for SD *all* stakeholders have a say during co-design sessions, which makes it more open to diversity and to plural contributions, allowing really holistic design solutions. As explained by Stickdorn et. al. (2020, p.165, *transl.*), "A good mix of ideation methods reduces the risk of potential bias while encouraging the diverse talents of collaborators". The Prototyping phase offers possibilities for testing solutions, services and systems, and correcting directions if necessary (iterative process). Architects also prototype their design solutions, using physical and/or digital models, for instance. Nonetheless, Sennet (2018) mentions that the best models offer the possibility for people to experience the designed space as if they were walking in it, not from a bird's eye view.

The notions of *Experience* in Architecture and Urbanism and Service Design are multiple and somewhat different. While Montaner (2017) considers a social emphasis to be architecture's mission - contributing to the construction of new relations between people -, Pallasmaa (2018) focuses on phenomenological, relational and mediating aspects, emphasizing the omni-experience to our senses that architecture provides, an "embodied existential experience" (op.cit, p.112).

Stickdorn & Schneider (2014) define *experience* as what we get when we use a service and remember it afterwards, because of how they make us feel. Beyond offering a pleasant service experience, experiences contribute to create and express our identities.

When it comes to the notion of *experience*, boundaries are blurred between AU and SD: "In its entirety, architecture emerges from iterative and embodied actions, in a synthetic and iterative process" (Pallasmaa, 2018, p.102, *transl.*).

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Participatory. In order to face the gap between constructed spaces and lived spaces, Sennet (2018) suggests creating bonds by doing when specialists consult people about a specific project. Instead of just listening to the community and then designing by themselves (top-down solution), the author has developed an extensive experience in designing *with* people. According to him, co-production involves both sides (designers and people) and becomes relevant for everyone involved. However, since people's repertoire of design is limited to what is familiar and traditional, there is another challenge to overcome: "The asymmetry between making a project with good design and the experience of the residents needs to be resolved somehow". (Sennet, 2018, p.281, *transl.*).

Final Considerations

This article explored the possibilities of an interdisciplinary rhizomatic alliance between Architecture and Urbanism (AU) and Service Design (SD), taking into account contemporary challenges and disciplinary gaps of both fields. It aimed to contribute with the discussions about disciplinary renovation in AU and offer a possible direction to frame new practices when considering designing spaces and services *together, along with people.* It might be a first step and add some contribution into the evolving themes of the Service Design field, whilst integrating space as an inception component of a service.

Undoubtedly, further research is necessary to constitute a body of reliable references and data for such an open project. Therefore, this work leaves room for a joint and open knowledge construction and invites to future exchange and collaboration, enabling a fold between the Architecture and Urbanism and Service Design fields.

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