THE SELFMADe CITY
or how can the inhabitants take part in the development of their own cities?

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Architects and urbanists are no longer the only ones being able to shape the city, to forecast the different activities a neighbourhood can support. The people living there have actually also their word to say, maybe due to the fact that they are the first users of the space. During the last few decades, several initiatives have raised all over the world in order to create the city by the city dwellers.

A first step toward this might be the involvement of the architects students. Not yet genuinely architects, they have the possibility of setting initiatives without the shackles of the real life obligations, and still having in mind what are the uses and futures of the city... In a way it may be kind of utopic, but it serves as a laboratory of ideas.

Bellastock, a story of experimental architecture

Created in 2006 within L’Ecole d’Architecture de Belleville, one of the architecture schools in Paris, Bellastock is a platform of architectural research whose activity mainly relies on an annual festival’s organisation, reuniting hundreds of architecture students.

From the past years, this association has been diversifying its activities, by working with the whole actors involved in territory’s an city’s fitting out projects. Today this association supports the development and monitoring of innovating architectural projects. Bellastock’s motto is turned towards the creation of original, economic and ecological alternatives to the act of building. Sharing, circulation of ideas, organisation of proceedings, lectures, meetings...

Prototype «La Glaneuse», an urban light are ways of taking care of the accessibility and the spreading of knowledge, so that the great majority of people is to be aware. They also set different construction workshops, opened to everybody, which lead to the creation of public’s utility prototypes.

« La Glaneuse » is an exemple of realisation made during these workshops; it is a urban light with a very low consumption bulb light, and whose materials are all issued from re-employment of industrial materials.
To get deeper in the understanding of material’s cycles in the construction, Bellastock has opened experimentation laboratories, named ACTLAB, in order to participate in the joint management of projects. Currently, ACTLAB attends a project of a fluvial eco-neighbourhood in l’Île-Saint-Denis, in the suburbs of Paris.

The main question they treat there is the re-employment of materials from the demolition of the previous storehouse « Printemps ».

The idea is to create a tool for construction professionals in order to integrate reemployed materials since the conception. It is also an in situ experimentation, whose aim is to concept prototypes of urban furniture intended to public spaces.-

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But the most striking part of Bellastock resides in the festival’s creation. Each year a new theme linked with the reusing of materials is found, and serves as a basis for the setting of an ephemere city for 3 days. Each group of participants is invited to conceive, construct at the life-sized scale and live in its project.

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At the beginning from 2006 to 2008, wood and plastic were mainly used, but then proper themes were found: « The pallet city » in 2009, « The sandy shop » in 2010, « The city in one blow » in 2011, « The great misappropriation » in 2012, and « Green washing » in 2013.

Bellastock’s festival has now spread in different countries, always with the same goal of ecological reusing of materials.

Written and photographic sources:
http://www.bellastock.com/
http://bellastock-design.tumblr.com/
http://actlab.tumblr.com/
What is it?
The festival Bellastock began in Paris in 2006 and arrived at Spain a few years ago. It is an experimental architecture festival in which students, architects, and researchers get together in order to experience an ephemeral city for three days. Recycled materials, stocks, and all the product that participants can pick up are use to build by themselves their own designs. MADstock, do it yourself!

Who they are?
MADstock was born like an association of architecture students and recent graduates from the Technical School of Architecture of Madrid to join forces in order to expand the knowledge acquired during the career. To achieve this, they decide to implement their ideas and designs, working in a real scale. In every member of this association you can feel the desire to experiment, self-construct and create and shape their own ideas themselves.

THIS FESTIVAL IS OPENED TO ALL THE PEOPLE THAT WANT TO PARTICIPATE
Where and when does it take place?
Madrid celebrates during the month of Jun (15-18th), the Madstock festival. For three days, students of the Polytechnic University of Madrid and architects propose a more practical and ecological architecture. This takes place in the physical education field of ETSAM college.

What is it?
It consist on the sharing of ideas and collective construction of an ephemeral city to be inhabited for a weekend by their designers. Last year, 250 people from different Spanish universities joined their efforts to build a city-based only in cardboard tubes and more than 6000 tires. Curiously, the used materials are those whose life seemed to be over, providing a second function in the development of new applications and providing solutions for the creation of common spaces.

MORE THAN 200 STUDENTS HAVE ATTENDED TO THIS FESTIVAL OF CONSTRUCTION
Solar Cooking
One of the activities carried out by the construction of furniture, is building solar ovens and cookers. For two days, people can attend to conferences and workshops that provide them with a previous knowledge about how to build it and also, about the physic and chemical procedures involved in the invention. Those conferences are offered by volunteer experts.

"There is a way to build stories in the artistic process of these tales: layers take meaning individually and enforce it jointly. The excess of these layers, the sum of them and the creation of the world which is generated from them builds a formula of fictitious tales emerging from reality. The depth or shallowness of these layers is, as for history, a way to insert dreamed or possible tales, true or invented." Rosell Meseguer

Despite these specific activities, the event is centered in reusing one single material each year. Divided into group of four or six people, materials are distributed and different parts of a small city are built. It is in this mini city where the participants will live until the end of the event. Some of the materials that are offered are for example pallets, tires, boxes, ropes...
As ephemeral architectures, after those three-days festival, participants are responsible to dismantle and collect all the materials used and take them to recycling plants.

Giving a new opportunity to what some consider waste.
LES MURS-A-PECHES
preserving an historical heritage

Montreuil is a city situated in the first suburban ring around Paris, where horticultural gardens were held from the 17th century until the late 70’s. These gardens, whose fruits production used to be really famous in the capital, didn’t kept shrinking more and more since then.

At the apogee of les Murs-à-Pêches, in the 2nd part of the XIX century, the gardens covered up to one third of the city’s surface (about 320 ha), but now only 30 ha remain. During the WW II, a first classification as cultural heritage is obtained, without it the gardens would probably have disappeared.

In the 1970, the project of a new highway and an industrial area threatens again the classified territory.

After discussion and changes in the project, only dozens of hectare will be sacrificed, cutting les Murs-à-Pêches in 2. In 2003, 8.5 hectares have been classified as ‘paysage urbain’ (urban landscapes) in order to save a part of the walls.
Above: View of a communal gardens inside the walls. Families have the possibility to make flowers, vegetables, fruits grow.

The plot structure of these gardens has been conserved through the past and still designs the landscape in strong ways: the gardens consist in long and narrow plots surrounded by 3 meters high walls made of gypsium and rubble stones. The trees are fixed on the walls with a special technique, making the gathering easier. Only a few families or association keep gardening and maintaining the gardens’ know-how.

A lot of diverse associations have raised on the last hectares: an important part of them have the aim of protecting and restorating the walls, others try to conserve the horticultural knowledge. The last associations have a more social or cultural goal. For example, a landscape festival uses to take place during the summer; an outside theatre stage has been built to serve for the performance of plays of the compagncy ‘la Girandole’; a cooperative restaurant has opened its doors in 2010…. 

« An edible landscape at the very heart of the city ». 
But the future of les Murs-à-Pêches is always in danger: the lobbying of real estate developers, for example, is to feared. In a more or less long-term, an agricultural eco-quarter should be raised. One of the projects emerging has for motto « An edible landscape at the very heart of the city ».

However, all the projects for a renewal of urban agriculture will have to avoid the trap of the idealization and to take place in a context of a global vision of society.

Above: One of the possible futures for les Murs-à-Pêches: utopia or reality?

Written and photographic sources:

http://www.montreuil.fr/environnement/les-murs-a-peches/
http://www.montreuil.fr/fileadmin/user_upload/-Files/Environnement/murs_a_peches/banlieuepaysanne_dos50.pdf
http://lafabrique.montreuil.fr/

Top left: Summer stage settled for the local theatre company. Right: restoration of the walls during the summer by young volunteers. Above: Social café. Bottom: wood structure from the Landscape Festival.
El campo de la Cebada is one of the oldest squares in Madrid, and also one of the most significant. It is located in La Latina district, near the center. It was used as a square for the first time in the XVI century, hosting the vegetable and steak market of the town.

It is in the XIX century when due to the increasing food demand of the growing population of Madrid, the architect Mariano Pereira Calvo built the Cebada’s market, based in Les Halles market in Paris. For the construction, he used modern steel and glass structures creating a vast building of irregular plan, consisting of two floors, with an area of 6,323 square meters. Inaugurated by King Alfonso XII on June 11, 1875, it was demolished in 1956, and the current market was built instead of Cebada’s one.

But the starting of hygienist trends and the disadvantages of these markets created a lot of critics about this building. Madrid had grown, and new developments imposed an improving in typology of facilities and equipment.

Therefore, the old market was demolished and the new one was set up. This new market was proposed as an innovative construction system using materials like concrete and brick and raising the six domes that characterize it today. It takes place in a new location on the square with its back leading to public space, leaving a relegated square space disjoined with the rest of the area.

In the eighties different trades started and the market’s downturn began. In the adjacent square a sports complex was built, consuming part of the remaining public space but creating some necessary and very much used sport facilities.

In the XXI century, a competition was launched to rehabilitate the market and build a new building with sporting and commercial program. Once concluded, the demolition of the sports area started, finishing with swimming pool and leaving a huge void in the city. Years later, the crisis stopped the planned work and the site was surrounded with fencing works that today are part of known intercultural space “Campo de la Cebada”.
Where is the Campo de la Cebada?

In the heart of the city of Madrid, in the square of La Cebada, right next to the market, the "Campo de la Cebada" is found.

After more than two years of inactivity due to the crisis, the government decided to lease temporarily the management of the plot to the neighborhood. Thanks to the efforts of the community, the empty space can wake up today with crowded life.

Upon reaching the site, we find a high metal fences that enclose the work perimeter. Through the holes that have been made in them we can take a look inside.

What does it involve?

El Campo de la Cebada is a project carried out by the residents of La Latina to reactivate the site, now empty, inviting people to temporarily occupy and participate on its creation with their own ideas and designs.

"A summer that never ends, a tropical island in the heart of the city, a meeting place for the neighbourhood and the experimentation. A site dedicated to hospitality, leisure and social play. All that, and all you want is City Island."

What is the City Island?

In 2010, the collective Basurama decided to take the initiative and create for "Night in White" a "island city" on the plot, it was a "temporary but lively public space to enjoy the shade of the rainforest and its lagoon "as one of its designers described. Thus, the ideas began to emerge.

The community, the collective of architects, market merchants, people coming from other neighborhoods in Madrid, ... met up to reclaim the public space this wonderful resort used to be. "El Campo de la Cebada has become an association" explains a neighbour.
When does it start?
On 18th February, 2010 el Campo opened its doors to anyone willing to participate, help and play. The organization began collecting ideas from the neighbourhood, without exceptions, all were valid, provided they were cultural, social, artistic or sport activities. The first to be implemented was the installation of an electrical network and a sports court that later was used to organize small tournaments.

How does it work?
Gradually, this initiative became known by the community of Madrid and the population began to come to share their questions, ideas and suggestions. The austere and neglected appearance of the square took a radical turn, graffiti artists and painters volunteers gathered in the Campo to give color and bathed the surroundings, giving it a new look.

It was decided to establish a workshop called "Hand made urbanism" which everyone could access, and some months later, the ephemeral furniture constructed of reused wood, cables, ropes, and all kinds of waste materials was filling the space. The Campo de la Cebada gradually gained life, and now provides all kinds of activities from tournaments, parties, meetings, concerts and even an outdoor cinema during the summer.

This space became "a meeting place for the community to discuss problem situations with respect to the neighbourhood and generate potential solutions, especially in respect to the market and the results of the new sports and central."