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A street for hope: new functions for the landscape of car

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Abstract

Hope Street is currently under its final construction step before public opening. Located between two Children's Hospitals, one of them considered a regional reference for cancer treatment, the street formerly named Alberto Montezuma was at first destined to receive a plan for tree planting. With the support from Fortaleza's Municipality, this initial plan turned into an opportunity to reach results beyond green amenity. By rethinking the street as a green infrastructure, it evolved to a truly innovative concept of multifunctional lane. The design methodology was very inclusive by assessing the expectation of all decision makers, but it paid close attention to the wishes of children under cancer treatment. When asked to draw the ideal street of their own, most of them had a rainbow on their sketches. The rainbow was transferred from these drawings to the street design blueprints as a symbol of balanced diversity among all possible uses and visions of a remodeled public open space. It also became the identity of a street where hope is multicolored: red for the desire to reunite the healthy and the impaired and also drivers, bikers and strollers; orange for the wish to renovate energy for the hospital staff on the duty of healing; yellow for the optimism to restore recreation on streets; green for the concern of urban forestry as a possibility of reconnection between man and nature; blue for the belief in the need of joy to recover from illness; indigo for the restoration of nature processes in stormwater management; and finally violet for an achievement of change through transdisciplinary cooperation.

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1. Re-thinking the Role of Urban Streets

The concept of Hope Street, a small project only a block length of a street in Fortaleza, Brazil, is based on the idea of a city as an ecosystem. It has grown from a request for planting of trees on the street to a truly innovative understanding about what should a street be used for. This was the result of the synergy of many minds together in inclusive design process, with special participation of the young patients of the Peter Pan Hospital. The children were the ones responsible for the best translation of the new multifunctional road: the rainbow, symbol for harmonic interaction of diversity.

The process has begun as an landscape architecture office was asked a simple task: transform the street stretch between the Albert Sabin Children Hospital and the Peter Pan Hospital in a more beautiful place. This was possible through the Program of Adoption of Public Open Spaces and Green Areas, established by the municipal administration in 2013. The street was adopted by the Civil Construction Cooperative of Ceará – Coopercon.

The first request to the architects was a simple planting plan, with possible use of the stormwater management based in green infrastructure strategies. However, the significance of that place, its location between two hospitals, in a high density low-income neighborhood and next to a small stream asked for more. With the active support of the Secretariat of Urbanism and Environment – SEUMA, what would be only a green amenity turn out to be a complete resignification of the role of urban road system, to be materialized in this street as an experimental area. Beyond its innovative contribution to water management in urban environment in Brazil (as one of the first application of green infrastructure in a public street), it is important to emphasize its pedagogical possibility, as an alternative of how and for what are the streets build.

From this perspective this project may be described as a microplanning process, as it is defined by Rosa [1]. The concept refers to attempts to redefine the urban spaces through small actions in local scale. In this particular case, it was possible through an interaction between the macro scale of the many flows (water, traffic) in the urban environment and the microscale of the sense of belonging of the many users of that street. This effort to transform the pure functional street in a true experience to its users was essential to the development of the concept. The ideas and understanding of the direct users was collect in meetings and, for the children, a drawing workshop. The many contributions were added to the theoretical questions the design team already worked with. The rich mixture gives enough support to deny the monofunctional traditional street and aim for something more: a living, diversely used, enjoyable street. A Hope Street.

2. How is Hope born?

Jane Jacobs, in her book *Life and Death of Great American Cities*, one of the most importance works on public spaces of the last century, states the importance of streets and sidewalks as the most significant public places [2]. In order to enable a health coexistence in the city, it takes a clear, yet permeable, distinction between the public and the private space. This means that the barrier between them should not prevent the inhabitants to see the street from inside. She calls it the ‘eyes upon the street’ [3]. Besides, the street itself must be full of life, continuously [4].

Both those conditions could only happen if the street presents something of interest. They are also meant to create one thing: trust. Such an immaterial aspect depends not only of projects or laws, but may be severe affected by an inadequate street design. Wisely Jacobs notes that the spontaneous, casual contacts between people at local level, results [...] is a feeling for the public identity of people, a web of public respect and trust, and a resource in time of personal or neighborhood need. And asserts: the lack of the trust as a disaster for the street (and the public safety, as well).

The Alberto Montezuma street is a classic example of such a disastrous urban space. The stretch where the project here presented is located lays between two of the largest children’s hospitals of the city: The Albert Sabin

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