



“60 × 60”: From architectural design to artistic intervention in the context of urban environmental change



Sylvain Froidevaux*

Geneva University of Art and Design (HEAD), Research-Based Master Programme CCC, Switzerland

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 3 December 2012

Received in revised form date 5 April 2013

Accepted 24 April 2013

Available online 19 June 2013

Keywords:

Architecture

Housing

Art research

Public sphere

Participation

Citizenship

ABSTRACT

60 × 60 is an artistic project in the city of Geneva asking for the participation of the residents of an urban and popular housing complex. From the first initiatives, as photography exhibitions of doormats inside the estate, to the organization of a citizen movement protesting against densification and gentrification of the area, this article shows how artistic intervention and research in the public sphere can make the residents realize that they all share something and that they therefore can take direct action on their environment.

© 2013 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Introduction

The 60 × 60 project began as an artistic and curatorial project, asking for the participation of the residents of an urban housing complex – Cité Carl-Vogt Honegger – in a popular neighbourhood in the city of Geneva.¹ The initial idea was to use the housing space as a place of artistic intervention, exhibition and debate. Our approach was particularly inspired by the experience of participatory architecture by Giancarlo de Carlo in Italy (de Carlo, 1972, 2004), and Colin Ward’s research on habitat and built environment in England (Adams & Ward, 1982; Ward, 1976). The guiding idea for this project was also inspired by the art collective Group Material from New York, and in particular their exhibition entitled *People’s choice* in the early 1980s,

or more recently, the Polish curator Joanna Warsza’s project in 2007, *Trips to the Inhabitants of the City of Brok*.²

We were also intrigued by Renée Green’s experience in 1993 when invited for an art residency in Firminy, where she inhabited an unoccupied apartment in Le Corbusier’s “cité-jardin”. I was personally interested to explore the fact that I was a resident of the housing complex. As K. Speidel said about Green’s experience, something completely new was going to happen where the “act of a critical artist and the act of life mix and merge”. The unconscious act of “residing” becomes a conscious artistic act. So, the knowledge induced by a situated artistic practice would then be inspired by the autobiographical, by anthropological research and by fiction.³

Originally, the 60 × 60 artistic collective was not subsidized. Freely, by our own initiative, we wanted to create a research and exchange platform, which would recount the development of this housing complex since its construction in the 1960s, as well as explore what those living in it had done with it. We wanted to focus on their different features of productions, on their creations, their means of expression, their interactions, and their ways of developing and investing in the private, semi-private and public space.

* Address: Rue du Village-Suisse 30, 1205 Genève, Switzerland. Tel.: +41 22 320 78 11.

E-mail address: sylvain.froidevaux@creageo.ch

¹ The 60 × 60 project was created in May 2010, by Cyril Bron (film director, social worker), Tilo Steireif (illustrator, photographer and curator), and Sylvain Froidevaux (social anthropologist and curator). In December 2010, the collective became an association conforming to Swiss civil law (civil code, article 60).

² Doug Ashford, “Group Material: Abstraction as the Onset of the Real”, in EIPCP European Institute for Progressive Policies <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0910/ashford/en/>; Laura Palmer Foundation, *Trips to the Inhabitants of the City of Brok/Brok-Open Door Documentary Theater for the Weekend* (<http://www.laura-palmer.pl/en/projects/4/trips-to-the-inhabitants-of-the-city-of-brok-brok-open-door>).

³ Klaus Speidel in ParisArt.com, see <http://www.paris-art.com/marche-art/unite-d-habitation/green-renee/5008.html>.

In the spirit of situated artistic practices, and other socially engaged art practices,⁴ we asked ourselves the following question: what effect does the presence of a group of artists in a built environment – in this case, a popular estate – have on the built environment, on the residents of the estate and on the artists themselves?

The Honegger brothers and the Carl-Vogt housing complex

Jean-Jacques, Pierre and Robert Honegger, the three brothers of the architectural firm “Honegger Brothers” have been the most productive estate builders in Geneva after the Second World War. More than 9000 apartments and studios, but also a lot of commercial buildings and factories were built during the last fifty years by “Honegger Brothers” within the town. Nevertheless, their first buildings have been carried out in Casablanca, Morocco, where they invented and tested a system of construction called “système Honegger Afrique” (HA), including the 60×60 standard, also named “norme Maroc” (Graf, 2010: 124–125).

Built in the early 1960s, the Carl-Vogt housing complex saw its first inhabitants arrive between 1962 and 1964. At that time, there was little housing in the neighbourhood. Instead, there were numerous art and crafts workshops, allotments, warehouses, factories, as well as being the place where the former slaughterhouses were situated, which closed in the 1950s. The population that settled in the Carl-Vogt housing complex was primarily Swiss. It was mostly young couples and middle or working-class families, with young children. In terms of trade, there were: skilled workers, carpenters, small shop owners, civil servants, and postmen.

The Carl-Vogt housing complex has today 445 apartments spread over five rows of tenements. It also includes workshops, boutiques, garages, and back in the day, a kindergarten and primary school. Even though it is situated in an urban centre, this architectural project was imagined in the same way as that of a suburban housing estate, meaning as something functional and self-sufficient. Taking inspiration from the 1960s, this project was seen as creating cheap, working-class housing that would address Geneva’s already growing housing crisis. In the beginning, the Honegger brothers had also envisaged creating a large, wooded park that would lead to the banks of the Arve river. But the construction of two large buildings, which are extensions of Geneva University’s Physics Department, put an end to that idea and prevented any future creation of a passageway leading to a green space (Fig. 3).

This is how we first came to be interested in the Honegger brothers’ architectural concepts, by revisiting their initial project of modular architecture and integrated habitat, in order to see how it had all evolved. The 60×60 project intended to begin from this notion of “integrated housing”,



Fig. 1. 60×60 templates.

developing from the different connections between the cultural, social, economic, aesthetic and architectural aspects of this housing complex. The project also borrowed a founding idea of the initial architectural concept: to make housing spaces (accommodation), production spaces (workshops), shops, educational and collective spaces (schools, crèches), coexist together in the same space in order to create an environment “conducive to community life”, as expressed by the architects themselves (Graf, 2010: 101).

Regarding the project’s name “ 60×60 ”, it refers to an architectural norm, and more specifically a proportion that forms the basis of Honegger’s architecture. It is a proportion that served as a construction template or standard (for each building of the housing complex, where the proportions were the same for all), and is also a unit of measurement determining the size of the rooms. (Fig. 1)

First steps

At this stage, a new question arose: How could this common and impersonal standard, endlessly repeated and multiplied, have an influence on the lives of the inhabitants? For instance, at the beginning of our project, we met a woman – a painter – who when she came to live in the Cité Carl-Vogt, some years ago, started painting on 60×60 cm canvases. However, at that time, she was completely unaware that 60×60 was the construction’s norm, and the basis of the Honegger Brothers’ architecture. Thus, as artists, we found in this standardized modular architecture, through the forms and prospects it offered, the possibility for an interesting aesthetic and conceptual game. As researchers, we asked why this architectural concept was or not conducive to community life. So, we needed to begin by taking stock of the situation: consult the archives, collect testimonials, observe, create inventories of objects and events, all the while proposing artistic interventions

⁴ We can also refer to similar projects like Jenny Brown’s work in Australia, see for example “Virtuous Alloodoxia”, Critical Thinking: Research + Art + Culture, Sydney College of the Arts Graduate School Conference (2011); and the collective of architects, artists and researchers “Stalker” in Roma, Italy (<http://www.osservatorionomade.net>). For theoretical questions, see the book *Forget Fear, How can art change politics and evoke real effects in our society?* Artur Zmijewski, Joanna Warsza (eds), 7th Berlin Biennale of Contemporary Art, KW Institute For Contemporary Art/Walter Koenig Verlag (2012).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5048316>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5048316>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)