

**Resignification of degraded public spaces in Guanajuato and in Bordeaux:
citizen reappropriation in the frame of intensive workshops
developed by Superior National School of Architecture and Landscape of Bordeaux
and the University of Guanajuato**

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Abstract:

The intensive workshops Bordeaux - Guanajuato have been developed since 2015 by mixed teams of students of the Superior National School of Architecture and Landscape of Bordeaux and the Architecture, Art and Design Division of the University of Guanajuato. Beyond the interest of constituting a cross-cultural project experience for students from different continents, these workshops involve diverse actors concerned in issues of the citizen's agenda since they are articulated with the existing international cooperation agreement between the local governments to which belong the two universities.

These workshops, two per year, take place alternately in the State of Guanajuato and in the Metropolis of Bordeaux, working on different types of obsolete spaces.

This is the case of the public spaces of intermediate cities currently not recognized by the population as spaces of the community, despite being part of their built heritage, or of the natural spaces located in the heart of small cities practically ignored by the population whose recent developments turn their backs on them.

In these workshops the urban project is conceived not only as a large-scale design action but as a trigger to contribute to the change of the perception that the inhabitants have about their public spaces in disuse and contribute to a resignification and appropriation of them as elements of identity and reinforcement of community ties.

The concept of resilience appears here as the capacity that an obsolete territory offers to generate strong social bonds thanks to a joint action of spatial conception that associates universities, institutional actors and inhabitants.

Keywords: cross-views, participatory processes, cooperation with local governments, public space design, citizen identity, environmental responsibility

The Bordeaux-Guanajuato workshops were created from 2015 within the framework of the academic cooperation agreement established between the Superior National School of Architecture and Landscape of Bordeaux (ensapBx) and the Architecture, Art and Design Division of the University of Guanajuato (DAAD -UG). This collaboration was promoted by the Metropolis of Bordeaux in partnership with the Planning Institute of the State of Guanajuato (IPLANEG), which in turn are linked together by a technical cooperation agreement that addresses, among other issues, those of culture, education superior and urbanism.

The "crossed" workshops are a pedagogical modality developed for several years by ensapBx in association with other universities, particularly in Asia and Latin America. These workshops have helped to establish close collaboration with local and regional authorities and, in many cases, have led to the signing of decentralized cooperation contracts from one territory to another, in which the university partners act as mediators.

These workshops offer students the opportunity to participate in an experience open to understanding different environments and cultures, while confronting a real project situation in these environments.

In the case of the Bordeaux-Guanajuato workshops, this experience was particularly rich, given that the collaboration between the two schools of architecture with each other, and with the respective local authorities, made it possible to address to the students from the beginning planning issues that are currently the subject of studies and specific works, both in the State of Guanajuato and in the Metropolis of Bordeaux.

Prepared by students from France and Mexico, these workshops allowed to provide the community with new ideas of urban project, thanks to innovative approaches in the design of public spaces using participatory processes. Issues such as territorial identity, proximity practices, the presence of nature, culture in the city, new modes of mobility were the subject of intense debates both during the development of the exercises and in public presentations to the inhabitants.

The most relevant cases have been the experiences carried out in the Santuario district, in the city of Leon, the economic center of the State of Guanajuato and in the municipality of Martignas-sur-Jalle, one of the 28 municipalities that are part of the Metropolis of Bordeaux

The experience of the *Sanctuario* neighborhood, Leon

The neighborhood of the *Santuario* had its origin in the nineteenth century settling in the hill of *Soledad*, behind the temple of the Sanctuary of Guadalupe, building that gives its name to the neighborhood despite the fact that it develops behind his back. In the middle of the 20th century, the *Obrera* neighborhood was created in this area, which owes its name to the presence of workers in the footwear industry, the main activity of León at that time. Like many historical areas of Mexican cities, the *Santuario* district is currently suffering from the obsolescence of its infrastructure networks, the progressive deterioration of its urban image, and an increase in insecurity as a result of the abandonment of the original housing vocation. Despite being located at the edge of the founding center of León, this neighborhood was not included in the pedestrian route (*Ruta del peaton*), the project that was defined a few years ago by the municipal government of León to revitalize the oldest areas of the city.

Figure 1. View of the *Santuario* neighborhood

Source: Carlos Gotlieb



Given its degree of deterioration, but also its great potential to provide identity to the urban center of León, this neighborhood was chosen as the theme of the work between ensapBx and DAAD-UG in the intensive workshops that took place in February 2015 and in February 2016. The objective of the work of the two schools was to conceive first of all a strategy to generate an identity that allows the valorization of this neighborhood, not only at the local level but also at the whole agglomeration scale, given the presence of a tangible and intangible heritage of relevance: singular urban typologies in a steep site (stairway-shaped streets); panoramic views to the rest of the city; natural spaces around religious buildings; local organizations interested in revitalizing their neighborhood). This strategy, object of the 2015 workshop, was defined based on a work of recognition of the site and survey of the neighbors by the students. This work made it possible to quickly define a series of possible action axes: the valorisation of an identity carrier axis, the *Hermenegildo Galeana* street, which connects the Sanctuary of Guadalupe with the highest part of the *Soledad* hill; the hierarchization of the road axes between vehicular traffic axes and pedestrian axes, the latter incorporating mechanical systems such as funiculars to improve the quality of mobility; the improvement of the commercial activity favoring its location in key public spaces of easy access; the incorporation of nature in the habitat and a series of proposals to respond to the problems of housing density.

Figure 2. Strategy to improve the *Santuario* neighborhood proposed by the students



Based on this strategy, the 2016 workshop focused on a reflection on the street *Hermenegildo Galeana*, the most representative axis of the neighborhood, which communicates directly with the historic center and stands out for its characteristic of staggered street, with the aim of valorisation of public space and the creation of community programs. This workshop was also the object of a participatory experience since the final works were presented in the middle of the street, in one of the spaces that it was proposed to improve, where a kermesse was organized, to which all the inhabitants of the neighborhood were invited. In this way, they could personally experience the concrete potential of this street as a place of coexistence. This experience also became a "trigger" because from it the neighbors decided to regularly organize new activities in this street such as exhibitions or parties and finally the municipal government incorporated this street into the agenda of the projects to be carried out. The result achieved in these two workshops is thus an example of the relevance that the institutional collaboration of two universities can have, when in contact with the inhabitants of the neighborhood, not only the elaboration of conceptual approaches for the solution of urban problems is achieved, but that in the collaborative work, we have the germ for a greater citizen action of the inhabitants of the neighborhood in the search of improving their urban and general social conditions.

Figure 3. Current status and proposed improvement of public space on *Hermenegildo Galeana* Street



Figure 4. Presentation on *Hermenegildo Galeana* street the students' projects to inhabitants



The experience of *Martignas-sur-Jalle* in the Metropolis of Bordeaux

In addition to the workshops in Guanajuato, two workshops were held in the Metropolis of Bordeaux in May 2016 and in May 2017 in *Martignas-sur-Jalle*, a municipality located at the edge of the agglomeration, which, like many communes in contact with rural areas, it has been characterized by a diffuse development with neighborhoods folded over itself and that turn their backs on their surroundings. In *Martignas* this growth also created a separation between the residential neighborhoods and the *Jalle*, the small stream that crosses the city, creating an exceptional natural micro-environment but without real links with the surrounding urban fabrics.

Figure 5. View of the visit of Jalle and its surroundings

Source: Carlos Gotlieb



Articulating with a reflection undertaken by the municipality to repair this situation and requalify the center of the city, while encouraging a real connection with the *Jalle*, the workshops aimed to reflect on the creation of new urban situations generating a new identity, capable to promote an intense dialogue between the city and its natural environment.

The first workshop, held in May 2016, consisted of the definition of a general strategy to favor the connexion of the city with the *Jalle*. In this workshop the students defined a certain number of ideas about the reconstruction of a new landscape open to new practices at various points of contact between the city and its stream.

In the second workshop, which took place in May 2017, the students deepened the proposals on a series of precise sites previously defined by the technical team appointed by the municipality to reflect on the future of the urban center and its relationship with the *Jalle*. The students were thus confronted with the double challenge of proposing new ideas based on the work of this technical team and presenting them to the community within the framework of final restitution.

The students' proposals addressed various topics such as the creation of an urban forum to improve the church's environment and the municipality's headquarters thanks to new public spaces that improve their integration with the different surrounding neighborhoods and with the *Jalle*, the design of a series of mobile devices that allow the generation of ephemeral events to reactivate the commercial activity, the appropriation of the edges of the *Jalle* thanks to light devices that enhance the natural landscape while allowing to incorporate new functions of centrality. These discussions were very fruitful as they allowed students to confront their proposals with real users, while giving the community the opportunity to have a participatory experience to freely reflect on the vision of how to improve their environment.

Figure 6. Strategy to connect the Jalle to the city center proposed by the students



Figure 7. Presentation to the inhabitants of ideas to bring Jalle closer to the city center



Conclusion

Focusing on a specific pedagogical modality and work theme - intensive workshops on the design of public spaces using a participatory approach - this work successfully fulfilled the objectives set at the beginning of the program.

Articulated with the technical cooperation established between the Metropolis of Bordeaux and the State of Guanajuato, this collaboration has strengthened the links between the schools of architecture and their respective territories, thanks to the dialogue established with local authorities and their urban planning services. This is undoubtedly a valuable element that adds a very interesting dynamic to the technical cooperation actions put in place by the two local governments.

Using a “cross regards approach”, the overall production of students who have participated in these workshops also shows that the problems faced by agglomerations in the era of globalization have many similarities despite the specificities of each particular context.

Issues such as the search for a new identity for the mutation sectors in the heart of metropolitan areas that are rapidly becoming obsolete have emerged as current issues regardless of the site studied. Here, one of the main challenges that arose in the discussions is to rely on capital, however small, present in these sectors from the cultural and physical point of view to generate new places highly committed to their environment and open to new contemporary practices. .

Another issue that has been widely studied was the project of new spaces of life in an original dialogue with nature, seeking to create new sites of high urban intensity, while adopting a very responsible attitude towards their environment.

The transcultural approach proper to these workshops has been a key element to address all these issues, also contributing to interrogate, taking distance, their own environment and their own culture. This way of approaching the comprehension of a territorial reality thanks to multiple points of view was very rich to be able to make varied responses emerge and communicate them to the different actors and inhabitants.

Thanks to these experiences, the two schools have built a common set of knowledge on issues of architecture and urbanism, as well as innovative methods to project the manufacturing of the city and the territory of tomorrow.

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