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Doer architecture, as a possible method of perception

Doctoral Dissertation

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Abstract

The structure of the dissertation is built on two main theoretical sections, with an additional unit, the master project which gathers my empirical experiences in the field.

In the first chapter I focus on the relations among architecture and socially engaged architecture and their wider context. By examining some aspects of the social, economic and political environment, the dissertation aims to present and understand the differences between architecture and socially engaged architecture.

The analyses of the wider context allowed me to define the position of architecture and socially engaged architecture in the cultural sphere. I introduce the concept of “doer architecture” in the field of socially engaged architecture and its connections to the “new social movements”.

I define “doer architecture” as a “new social movement” and analyze the phenomenon’s most relevant aspects and possibilities through the examination of some examples. Taking into consideration its strengths and weaknesses, and the changing cultural, environmental context, I highlight its potential and its possible future roles.

The second chapter focuses on the internal mechanisms of “doer architecture”. It is mainly interpreted as a possible old/new form of perception, which can be discovered through physical labor, building and the “somatic body’s” experiences.

My interpretation of the building process is a complex system, allowing it to serve as a parallel to the building of a community and one’s self. The physical labor of building is a tool for perception and its purpose is to discover and understand the process, materials and environment of the building process, while developing a community and the individual. I have highlighted a few crucial aspects which may contribute to the understanding of its internal ways. The characteristics of participation and being present are analyzed, the desired conduct of communication, collaboration and community development is introduced, while I examine the essential attitude and personal motivations of the participants of a building process.

The dissertation aims to examine the discussed phenomena side by side rather than opposite to each other. Defining subdivisions contributes to the understanding of their goals, values, differences and similarities, strength and weaknesses.

The dissertation’s theoretical proposals are connected to reality by the personal experiences presented in my master project. The “doer architectural” projects of the past ten years serve as a starting point and true source for my theoretical ideas and conclusions.

Theses

1. In order to understand socially engaged architecture in the 21st century we must examine and understand its wider social, economic and political context.
2. As socially engaged architecture's tasks and intentions cannot be described thoroughly by the traditional vocabulary of architecture, it is necessary to integrate some definitions of sociology.
3. The concept of "new social movements" are applicable to some aspects of socially engaged architecture. I define socially engaged practices as "doer architecture" in cases when the characteristics of the new social movements can be recognised. This way these architectural projects' connections to architecture, socially engaged architecture and the wider cultural environment become interpretable.
4. The "doer architectural" practices allow us to (re)discover forms of perception that are based on being present, the "somatic body", physical labor, thus the building process.
5. Besides building houses, the "doer architectural" projects build community and a sense of self. These are in constant interrelationship, developing inseparably.
6. "Doer architecture" is a potential methodology of perception, and its theoretical and practical aspects are worth further research.