

CARACAS-CASE / and the culture of the informal city

Interdisciplinary urban studies and/or interventions in Caracas, Venezuela

(the country with highest segment of urban population (92%) (1) in Latin America)

Point of departure

In this international and interdisciplinary project the National Foundation for Art and Culture of the Federal Republic of Germany is the sponsor of a research program of the Caracas Urban Think Tank that will give the impulse for concrete constructed urban interventions in the rhizome like growing Barrios (2) of Caracas.

Caracas serves hereby as a prototypical Case study of the current critical situation of the Latin American Metropolis, and offers in that respect a field for exploration whose results can be transferred to comparable situations in other countries of the region.

The point of departure of this thesis is, that developments in the Hispano-American Metropolis depend today profoundly on informal influences. The effects are particularly in times of economic crises so strong that even parts of the formal city get caught in their wake. In the past Barrios have neither been registered in city maps nor has anybody seriously taken interest in their form, their improvised production methods and their culture.

To break the taboo of the emerging informal city is for many in the public administrations impossible after they ignored the situation for too long although they had been aware of their presence.

To confront the growing and present subject is therefore an international call to intervene when it is time to call the things by their name and to contribute to the city as the principal expression of our civilization.

The economic thinking patterns are in many cases indifferent to the formal city. However, when developers and general contractors try to create with the cheapest materials housing developments, they attempt to achieve a maximum profit. The rational planned suburban developments are uninhabitable and culture –less, in many cases even the inhabitants of the Barrios reject them as stigmatizing.

The Barrios are by no means perfect environments but in their totality they presents itself today as a Barrio / Superstructure with a high degree of self organization.

Mission and objectives

In this international and interdisciplinary project a team of ten young committed specialists and professionals will have the opportunity to develop under the direction of the CCS-TT along with representatives of the Barrios and the municipality and in coordination with the city government theoretical and practical contributions to the development of the urban culture of Caracas.

The processes and patterns of the creative dynamics inside the Barrios could deliver tangible suggestions to produce in the framework of the project with the National Foundation for Art and Culture a „Retroactive building code“, which could profoundly change the vision in legislating future developments in all scales and have an effect for other Latin American cities, by sharing this experience and extending the sphere of influence to future planing strategies.

The project attempts in it's interdisciplinary approach to find an answer to the paradigm, how the informal Latin American cities grow by destroying their traditional organisation-systems und how they organize themselves in an apparent chaos by means of informal interventions. Today's question is, if these improvised steadily growing cities are not the genuine presentation of urban culture, and confront us with the emergence of a new estetic a new-vernacular.

(1) Weltbank, CAMEBA Project 2001

(2) Informelle Stadt, Armenviertel.

Authors / Organisation

The auto-organisation und production bypassing jurisdiction has resulted in an impressive democratic building which possibly presents a better answer to the urban problems tahn the official strategies of the city administartion where able to offer. Traditional academic knowledge has to be left aside to

enter in a world which confronts us with practical built solutions to one of the big urban challenges, executed results that should no longer be ignored. To live in the same city no longer means to share the same urban environments.

Executing body

Caracas Urban Think Tank:
Alfredo Brillenbourg, Caracas
Hubert Klumpner, Caracas

The responsible body for the conceptional and organisational production are:} in Venezuela :

Caracas Urban Think Tank / CCS-TT, Directors; Alfredo Brillenbourg and Hubert Klumpner, who work as architects and urban designers in Caracas in the CCS-TT and run a postgraduate course at the Universidad Central de Caracas and a design studio at the Universidad Simón Bolívar to the topic of the city.

Possible Strategic Partners

- > Alcaldía Metropolitana, Caracas / Secretary for Urban development, Leopoldo Provenzali
- > Fundación Vollmer, Caracas / Director, Sophia Vollmer
- > La Farge, Cementos La Vega / President Venezuela, Angel Graterol
- > AMHABITAT / Director Federico Villanueva
- > Universidad Central de Venezuela, UCV / Dean, Azier Calvo
- > Harvard University, GSAD Monica Ponce de Leon

Project components

The Project includes a spectrum of different activities and is composed out of five components:

- 1. Research-grants**
- 2. Urban Interventions**
- 3. Exhibition**
- 4. Publication**
- 5. International Interdisciplinary Seminar**

- 1. Research-grants:**

Research grants, specifically tailored for this project, will be made available to architects, urban designers, artists, anthropologists, geographers, economists, lawyers, photographers, web designers and writers.

The objective is to activate in Caracas a working process – the engagement will reach from analysis to the design and the planning of projects, creation of Photo essays and the production of texts.

The research grant will be given for an period of 6 months. Participants will be selected by the advisory board of the Project, which will be composed by partners from Berlin and Caracas and by representatives of the German National Fund for Art and Culture on the basis of their applications.

- 2. Urban Interventions:**

(cultural and technical Infrastructures) in one or various Brrios of Caracas. Which are exemplary for the development of the Latin American Metropolis.

- 3. Exhibition:**

The activities on the spot will be documented by the grantees and presented in their general cultural, social, and political context. The different results of the research and project development will be documented to form part of the exhibition. The development and production of the Exhibition Concept will be from the initial phase part of the work of the grantees.

- 4. Publication:**

Documentation with texts, images, essays etc. that best illustrates the results of the work of the grantees.

5. International Interdisciplinary Seminar:

The seminar should contribute to install an international forum which is intended to create and exchange a basis about the knowledge and the theory about the Barrios. Situations could be discussed and possible scenarios could be developed.