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SHIPYARD OF SOLIDARITY: Artists-activists co-creation of public knowledge concerning cultural heritage of the former Gdansk Shipyard

The main theme of this article is the frequent lack of adequate and effective public dialogue and participation within the schemes of the contemporary urban planning practices referred as neoliberal hegemony of urbanization (Brenner and Theodore, 2005, Miles, 2004, Fezer, 2010). On the other side we can observe artists-led cultural methodologies, seen as an independent and alternative engagement with the creative processes of the urbanization through participative methods of public pedagogy integrally connected to larger social movements (Evans and Shaw, 2004; Kester 2004, Sholette, 2005, Mouffe, 2008, Lacy, 2010).

This article aims to contribute the established methodology of urban planning through enhancing understanding values of the critical, activist art practices, which challenge the dominant views and practices of a hegemonic city by integrating socio-spatial reflections in interdisciplinary ways

associated with urban development planning and more importantly enabling their deeper engagement in the processes of urbanisation.

The empirical context of this study is the urban regeneration planning process of the former Gdansk Shipyard area (in Poland) as the example of the neoliberal hegemony of urbanization related to the problem of the expert-led business driven formal process with the exclusion of former shipbuilders and the general public from the participation in this process.

In this article I argue, that in current turn towards wider public participation in the creative processes of the urban planning and urbanization, the innovative ways of thinking, together with specific tactics, practical methods, techniques and tools used by critical artists and activists could be shared and effectively utilised by urban planners, architects and designers.

Keywords:
urban planning; cultural heritage; public participation; engaged art; public pedagogy

INTRODUCTION

The general theme of my research is the theory and practice of urban planning and regeneration aimed at sustainable improvement of built environment as well as social and economic well-being, quality of life and the overall quality of public realm (Evans and Show, 2004).

The main problem of this study is the usual lack of adequate and effective public dialogue and participation within the schemes of the contemporary urban planning practices referred as *neoliberal hegemony of urbanization* (Brenner and Theodore, 2005, Miles, 2004, Fezer, 2010). Hegemony refers here to the system of political control based on the formation of consent through coercive power relations between government, market and civil society (Gramsci, 1971). Through such hegemonic practices cities become “key arenas in a primarily market-driven globalisation process” that in order to control urban development combine an economization of culture and social relations with “the de-politicisation of the city by private companies and neoliberal government policies” (Fezer, 2010, p.01). According to Miles (2004, p.228) it results in the erosion of the public sphere by private, commercial interests based on the idea that urban planning is non-dialogical as the inevitability of a globalised economy imposed with a “mask of necessity,” that “abolishes reflective commentary” and suppresses alternatives.

On the other side, as the reaction to the oppression of *neoliberal hegemony of urbanization* we can observe artists-led cultural methodologies, seen as an independent and alternative engagement with the creative processes of the urbanization through participative methods of public pedagogy integrally connected to larger social movements (Evans and Shaw, 2004; Kester 2004, Sholette, 2005, Mouffe, 2008, Lacy, 2010). Such alternative forms of critical engagement with the city are more commonly referred to as *urban interventionism*. Many of these *interventions* are organized and facilitated by self-directed artists operating in public spaces circumvent the commissioning processes of the gallery/museum, public art agencies and

official regeneration strategies, working instead under their own volition. Critical art *interventions* raise specific political challenges, questioning how social relations and the spatialities of the urban everyday are shaped and organised. These challenges to how we construct, imagine, implement and organise the city raise questions about the institutional tendencies of art discourse and of urban and spatial theory (Pinder, 2008, Loftus, 2009). These critical actions challenge the accepted rules and social codes governing behaviour and the conditions of subservience and compliance in a society of control. To this end, urban interventionism might be thought of as a practice that reclaims our urban futures from the domination of commodity and state apparatuses to present an alternative set of social relations in a re-articulation of needs and desires. Such practices are not just developing new social relations, spatial interactions and political subjectivities, but are also uncovering new contexts, sites and situations that look beyond the social and spatial practices of the planned and procedural city to the prototyping of alternative urbanisms.

The empirical context of this study is the urban regeneration planning process of the former Gdansk Shipyard area (in Poland) as the example of the *neoliberal hegemony of urbanization* related to the problem of the expert-led business driven formal planning with the exclusion of former shipbuilders and the general public from the participation in this process. Gdansk Shipyard is the unique and important place in the world as the cradle of the Solidarity's birth in August 1980 – the largest democratic social movement in the human history, based on free, open dialogue and self-government which peacefully won democratic freedom for Poland and the Central Europe (Goodwyn, 1992). It is also the place, where Polish shipbuilding industry was born after the IIWW, as an important element of the Industrial Era – the only time in the human history that Europe has given an inspiration and lead to the whole world. Paradoxically, 20 years after the Solidarity's birth, the half of the Shipyard's site was sold to US-owned private investment funds, operated by the Polish

company, Synergia 99 and – so to say – turned from a *democratic agora* to a *neoliberal market*. A new business-driven land-use plan, approved in 2004 by the Gdansk city's authorities without any public consultation, contributed to systemic heritage destruction, dressed in a discourse of progress - developing a “modern” waterfront district called the Young City.

The article presents the product of the initial stage of this alternative (parallel) artists-activists planning process as the publicly shared knowledge concerning cultural heritage values and issues within a context of the former Gdansk Shipyard regeneration. It offers analysis how it has differed from the expert knowledge applied by the municipality in the formal land-use planning as well as present how those different understandings of the cultural heritage issues resulted in the substantial redirection of the overall public policy (including application to place the historical Gdansk Shipyard on the UNESCO World Heritage List). It specifically reflects on what methods and techniques as well as their combinations have been mostly effective in the case of the alternative planning.

THE FAILURE OF CULTURAL HERITAGE PROTECTION IN THE FORMAL PLANNING

The business-driven land-use planning process, initiated in the year 2000 ignored issues of the public dialogue and participation as well as cultural heritage protection, contrary to the specific historical identity of this place as well as numerous advices of various experienced international experts in the urban regeneration planning, including Charles Landry. The actual and retired Shipyard workers, together with relevant public bodies and cultural institutions responsible for heritage protection (e.g. Gdansk History Museum, National Maritime Museum, etc.) as well as general public were excluded from all stages of the process (especially identification and research of the shipyard's heritage).

The new land-use plan for the post-shipyard area approved in 2004 was prepared also without a clear reference to the potentials of the profes-

ART OF SOLIDARITY

Faced with a barrier against the public participation in the formal urban planning and regeneration of the former Gdansk Shipyard area artists and activists as well as their formal and informal groups have networked and become engaged with the complex issues of cultural heritage of the shipyard. Between year 2000 and 2004 five informal and formal groups of various artists settled in the shipyard and occupied five different buildings offered them by the landowner Synergia 99 on the preferential financial conditions. This complex and active social setting of more than a 150 individuals acquired the name of the Artists' Colony expanding and transforming both inside the shipyard and outside, through various networks formed between individual artists-activists and their informal groups, as well as formal cultural and artistic institutions and the wide public (Sebastianski, 2009).

As in the case of the historical Solidarity movement, the success of artists and activists has relied on their ability to fill in established networks with a creative, political dialogue. In their numerous conversations they have reached the subtlest and impermanent aspect of the shipyard's intangible heritage – people's memories, memorabilia and untold stories in very many constellations: historical, economic, social, political, etc. The artists and activists have dialogically researched the unique cultural identity of the former shipyard and translated their findings into socially communicative artworks and actions, disseminating their knowledge to the wider public, also with a use of various modern professional and social media. Among individual artists, the most engaged with the shipyard's heritage of were photographer Michal Szlaga and the visual artist Iwona Zajac, both associated with the network of about 30 artists, occupying the building of the former telephone exchange and the inter-media artist Grzegorz Klamon, associated with the Art Institute, established in 2004 by "Wyspa" Foundation in the former building of the vocational shipbuilding school (Sebastianski in Nyka Ed. 2010).

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Fig. 6, 7, 8, 9 - Michal Szlaga: *Shipbuilders – Vanishing professions* (2003)

Fig. 10, 11 - Iwona Zajac, *Shipyard* (2004) and its on-line published documentation (2013)

Since the year 2000, Michal Szlaga has researched and photographically documented on-going changes in the shipyard's spaces. He was particularly interested in the technology of shipbuilding, unique professional know-how and skills of the shipyard workers as well as the politics of the Solidarity movement born in this place. Szlaga's "Shipbuilders – Vanishing Professions" (2003) explains the ship production process through 12 portraits of shipyard workers and their occupational spaces. Conscious of the last moments of the shipbuilding production linked with industrial



era fading away, Szlaga recorded specific aspects of craftsmanship, reflecting technological process of shipbuilding as a unique intangible cultural heritage of the shipyard (Kosmala, Sebastyanski, 2013).

Iwona Zajac recorded old shipyard workers' memoirs and individual stories about their long-term relationships with the shipyard. She collected recorded oral stories through her interviews with several retired shipbuilders – especially those who worked there for about 40 years and took part in the strikes which resulted in establishing the Solidarity movement. In 2004 she inscribed fragments of those stories on the one hundred metres long wall located outside the shipyard's premises as her artwork mural entitled *Shipyard*. This monumental mural has become a public display for the workers' voice excluded from the official post-shipyard regeneration planning process. At the beginning of 2013, the wall was demolished by the municipality, but the artist transferred documentation of the artwork into the virtual public sphere entitled *Shipyard on Air* (Kosmala, Sebastyanski, 2013).

Grzegorz Klamon has been active in the area of the former Gdansk Shipyard since the year 2000, both as an individual artist and activist as well as a president of the "Wyspa" Foundation and the Professor of the Fine Art Academy in Gdansk. Among several of his artworks related with the post-shipyard intangible cultural heritage, was his performative project Subjective Bus Line – one of Gdansk's greatest tourist attractions between 2002 and 2014, allowing thousands of visitors entering and sightseeing this publicly inaccessible place by a vintage bus as well as listening to subjective stories of their guides – retired shipyard workers. Klamon also discovered, recreated and opened to the public original Lech Walesa's workplace that was incorporated as a tourist's attraction in a bus tour. Until this project, the history of the shipyard has been formally presented mainly through the formal monuments as well as exhibitions' contents while the subjective memories of the shipbuilders have been marginalized and practically left absent from the public domain,

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Fig. 12, 13 - Grzegorz Klamon: *Subjective Bus Line* (2002-2014) and *Lech Walesa's workplace* (2010)

framed as insignificant.

The *Subjective Bus Line* project was a *kind of meeting with committed people, witnesses, participants in the history, those less well known but equally important. It aimed to extract the muted voice, the echo, impressions, whispers, reminiscent accounts, and to write them into the current situation and the space of the place. It also allowed all participants to become living witnesses of the transformation and its active subjective bearers of remembering projected into the future* (Kosmala, Sebastyanski, 2014).

When more and more buildings and other indus-



trial infrastructure were disappearing from the area of the former Shipyard the new political opposition was rising against that. As in the case of historical Solidarity movement, the constructive political dialogue has been initiated bottom-up by several visual artists from the Gdansk Shipyard Artists' Colony. Within the next few years they have presented great cultural values of the former Shipyard to general public and mobilized some city activists' groups to get politically engaged in the struggle to save and protect them. Among artists' and activists' various organizations, the most actively engaged with issues of the cultural herit-



Fig. 14 - *Dock Watchers* (2005) Cover page of the post-conference publication

age protection were: "Wyspa" Foundation, NO for the Shipyard demolition and Metropolitanka (Metropolitan Woman).

"Wyspa" Foundation established the Art Institute in 2004 to support artistic engagement in the complex planning processes of the post-shipyard transformation into a future waterfront district of Gdansk. Over the years, the Foundation engaged in interdisciplinary and participatory dialogic research of the post-shipyard contexts involving and cooperating with specialists from different fields, including artists, architects and urban planners together with historians and heritage conservators, as well as local developers, city officials, etc. Their main objective was to counteract the official political strategies that used historical heritage mainly for propaganda and political manipulation. Understanding that the context produces meaning, the artists associated with the Wyspa Art Institute have started exploring post-shipyard specificities, translating their research results into the symbolic language of art and transmitting their meanings through various forms of social relations (Kosmala, Sebstyanski, 2014). In August 2005, in association with the 25th anniversa-

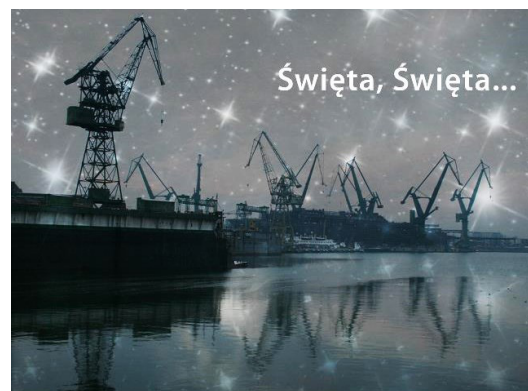
ry of the "Solidarity," the Art Institute organised the international conference and exhibition *Dock Watchers* related to the phenomenon of diverse memories related with the history of Solidarity. The event, as an alternative to the official celebrations, went beyond official representations of the Solidarity's history and forms of commemoration, attending instead to more neglected visions and deserted characters, as well as individual memories inscribed in a collective experience and oral tradition (Kosmala, Sebstyanski, 2013).

The informal networked community "NO to the Shipyard's demolition" has been created through an electronic announcement which appeared on Facebook in November 2012. It was inviting everyone interested to participate in the public process of the Gdansk Shipyard heritage protection and encouraging to act both (and usually even simultaneously) in the physical (off-line) space of the Gdansk Shipyard and the meeting room of the "Wyspa" Art Institute as well as through the virtual (on-line) space of the Internet. The group presented itself as all equal participants independent from political parties and without formal leaders. It had no ideology but the will to cooperate and act as a collective in order to control the urban regeneration process through enhancing social awareness about the shipyard's unique cultural values as well as securing the public access towards the historical sites. The activists claimed that public

participation in this process ought to be based on sharing information and knowledge as well as responsibility. To do that, the activists proposed all accessible forms of communication to reach all possible audiences (and turn them into participants): social media, radio, live streaming, posters, happenings, music and 'word of mouth'. The group "NO for the Shipyard's Destruction" quickly reached 2,000 Facebook participants, and has become an established social movement engaged in the protection of the Gdansk Shipyard heritage and initiated wider public debate (Kosmala, Sebstyanski, 2014). The activists organized a public photo-walks through the Gdansk Shipyard with a meetings in the Art Institute to discuss possible ways of protecting the shipyard's cranes. It was immediately reported on the group's Facebook page and in most of the social media as an action *Christmas, Christmas... and after Christmas* (2012).

Metropolitanka (Metropolitan Woman) has been an umbrella term bringing together a cluster of activists, academics and artists working with the Institute of Gdansk City Culture and Arteria Association in Gdansk, as well as independently, examining women's roles in protests and their overall

Fig. 15, 16 - NO for the Shipyard's Demolition: *Christmas, Christmas... and after Christmas* (2012)



visibility in the dominant historical narrative of the Gdansk Shipyard's heritage. In 2013 they organized a project called *Shipyard is a woman* which revolved around the production of historical narratives associated with Polish women activists and workers of the former Gdansk Shipyard involved in Solidarity-centred protests as well as women artists of the 'Artists' Colony' engaged with protecting the shipyard's intangible cultural heritage. They have connected in time and space recovered memories and forgotten stories of women once working in the shipyard and those involved in the August's Strike 1980 with women artists from the Artists' Colony engaged with the intangible cultural heritage protection of the Gdansk Shipyard. Informing and educating about those connections have been available through three different sight-seeing trails around the shipyard – 'P' route about women employed at the shipyard including walking around buildings associated with industrial action; 'S' route about the women in political protest

in the 1980s; and 'A' route – about women artists and art-centred activities. Metropolitanka has developed the map *Women Routes of Gdansk Shipyard*, outlining those three thematic trails, which has been available online and as a printed leaflet. Additionally, there has been an audio guide, allowing individual visitors to wander around the shipyard year-round, to enable walks as an individually embodied connection with the shipyard's women, guided by the voices which are reinserted into the sites and spaces where they once were heard. Since the beginning of the project in 2012, over 3000 people have participated in the guided walks. In March 2016, a mobile application that describes a trail around the premises with a smartphone or tablet was launched, alongside four podcasts about the jobs performed by women in the shipyard, describing working conditions and including a commentary on social and cultural aspects of employment at the shipyard. In addition, a digital archive containing old photographs, the

Fig.17 - Metropolitanka: Shipyard is a woman (2013) audio guide mobile application



Fig. 18 - Poster promoting charitable funding in Gdansk (2008)

project's documentation, interviews and stories of women linked to the shipyard was launched (Miller, 2016).

The artists and activists have begun diverse communication processes with the shipyard workers and their families, excluded from the official urban regeneration planning scheme. They have approached them and gained their trust through a dialogue concerning both material and immaterial aspects of the shipyard historical contexts. With that, they have also attracted public attention, gained social trust, and initiated public discourse as well as realised active and participatory interventions, aimed to prevent the shipyard's cultural heritage destruction caused by officially planned urban regeneration. In that way, artists and activists have acted as a medium, allowing this derelict space to project its own voice, concerning its cultural and historic identity to the wider public. In these dialogic processes of communication both inside the Artists' Colony and among the colonists themselves as well as outside – in contacts with authorities, business and the community – the most important aspect has been to find a *common language* which would allow for mutual understanding and hopefully agreement as far as the assessment of the current situation and potential possibilities to transform it have been concerned.

RESULTS

Over several years of active involvement, the artists and activists have managed to convince the general public about the great values of the Gdansk Shipyard's cultural heritage and errors made in the formal planning process by the experts from the Architectural and Urban Planning Department of the Technical University of Gdansk along with planners from the Gdansk Development Office and other relevant public officials. Consequently, local citizens have started to associate themselves with the post-shipyard's landscape. From 2005, the cranes have begun to appear frequently in the public visual sphere, including the banners-posters of concerts and festivals, or public charitable funds, becoming the new iconic symbol of contemporary Gdansk.

As the result, the 2012 research contracted by the municipal authorities indicated that 98% of local citizens support the formal protection of the Gdansk Shipyard heritage, and the cranes in particular (Kosmala, Sebastyanski, 2014). In 2013 and 2014, two public petitions concerning a comprehensive and effective protection of the former Gdansk Shipyard cultural heritage and each one signed by almost 5.000 people were sent subsequently to the President of the Polish Republic Polish Prime Minister and the Minister of Culture and National Heritage. A year after, Polish ICOMOS experts prepared the first complex and detailed professional study of the Gdansk Shipyard's cultural heritage and ways to preserve it. It was publicly presented in June 2015 with final recommendation to put this famous place on the UNESCO World Heritage List as the place holding both, tangible and intangible cultural heritage associated with the historical Gdansk Shipyard as well as the Solidarity movement born there.

CONCLUSIONS

As in the historical case of the Solidarity movement, the community of the Artists' Colony and activists have consequently left formal arrangements involving a sphere of official political au-

thority and business and dialogically created an alternative and political public sphere where a creative dialogue started concerning the past and the present and also, to a large extent, the future of this area. Despite some attempts of Synergia 99 and Gdansk municipal authorities to mobilize the artists, to create a homogeneous and formal organisation, the Artists' Colony and its strength have relied on diversity, pluralism, interdisciplinary nature, multiculturalism of ideas and activities as well as on their autonomy, which released the most valuable and the strongest potentials of creativity (Sebastyanski, in Nyka, Ed. 2010). The *rhizomatic networks'* structures in which artists as well as artistic and activists' groups and institutions co-operated dialogically has been heterogeneous as well as comprehensive and reflected various forms of activities that entailed creation of appropriate, timely, and effective organisational forms depending on a given situation and needs. Due to it, this complex social network has also been permanently open, flexible and mobile (and therefore also unstable). It has been changing like reality, reacting and adapting to a changing situation. As in the political *rhizome* of the Solidarity movement, the actions of the artists and activists were fully independent, which reflected the flat (non-hierarchical) organisational structure of the whole network as well as the lack of a *central command post*. The artistic freedom of the colonists and their independence of actions has depended on self-sufficiency so desired by them but also effectively secured. All this clearly echoes the principal values and a performance of the Solidarity movement born in this place more than twenty years earlier.

One of the biggest challenges for the artistic colonizers of the former Gdansk Shipyard was *discovery* and *understanding* as well as further creative enhancement of this place's specific character. Exploring historical post-shipyard spaces in co-operation with specialists in different fields; artists, architects and urban planners, sociologists, historians, heritage conservators, etc. as well as decoding and translating them into the language of artefacts has been a consciously

ethical process. The quality of research of those diverse shipyard's contexts, or rather the ability to approach a certain subtle subjective truths and their recognition, as well as creative *translation* into the language of art, has had a fundamental impact on the reliability of dialogic processes and, in consequence, on the quality of the reliable store of knowledge and social consciousness concerning the shipyard's historical and cultural values, which has been based on it, forming a solid basis for a new, effective, cultural and successful urban regeneration of the Gdansk Shipyard. Without this public store of public knowledge, the transformative process could be a continued subject of official manipulations or propaganda used by the government and business officials to set up temporary objectives and strategies that do not allow any independent cultural interpretation.

Thus, to ensure recognition of, respect for, and enhancement of the cultural heritage in society as well as keep the public informed of the dangers threatening such heritage, the artists and activists (and not public officials) have undertaken educational, awareness-raising and information programs, aimed at the general public (particularly young people) with a use of capacity-building activities for the safeguarding heritage together with non-formal means of transmitting knowledge. They also ensured and facilitated access to the accumulated documentation of intangible cultural heritage. While not integrated into the official planning programs and without any bureaucratic bodies designated or established, indeed artists and activists (and not public officials) facilitated the widest possible participation of communities, groups and, where appropriate, individuals to create, maintain and transmit the intangible cultural heritage of the Gdansk Shipyard and to involve them actively in its management, without legal, technical, administrative and financial measures which ought to be adopted by the public officials according to the professional knowledge on heritage preservation established through various international conventions, charters and declarations (UNESCO, European Commission, ICOMOS, TICCIH, etc.) – most of them ratified by Poland.

Although Poland ratified the UNESCO Convention for the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage in 2011, dominant, official and professional discourses surrounding intangible cultural heritage have been largely unrecognised even at the national policy level. In such situation, it has been mainly a networked community of artists and activists, who has raised awareness at the local, national and international levels of the importance of the Gdansk Shipyard's intangible cultural heritage and thus ensured its appreciation as well as respect among the communities, groups and individuals while simultaneously safeguarding it through its identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission as well as the revitalization of its various aspects. Thus, networked community of artists and activists, through their performing arts and public actions have recreated and transmitted to the next generation not only oral traditions and expressions, representations, artifacts as well as objects and cultural spaces of the historical Gdansk Shipyard but more importantly the knowledge and skills associated with the social practices of the Solidarity movement. This specific philosophy and practical knowledge of the Solidarity movement born in the Gdansk Shipyard, recreated and transmitted to the public sphere by the community of artists and activists concerned networked dialogic communication capable of creating public knowledge outside and parallel to the official dominating system of power and control.

This 15-year practice-led research project, explored the role of radical and critical cultural practices that establish alternative urban narratives: new ways of seeing, thinking and doing, not just for the specialists but for everyday users, enabling them to become active agents in the production of a more democratic public sphere. To better understand the value and validity of critical interventionist art practices, which challenge the hegemonic city of cultural and political elites, it was necessary to rethink urban art intervention not just from within dominant critical frames of contemporary art, but to bring them in dialogue

with socio-spatial disciplines associated with urban development.

The artists-activists' interventions explored in this article were approached as an *alternative discourse* of the city [counter-hegemonic] and experiments that are more about what social space of the city could be, that opens the imagination to the alternative possibilities and inventive ways of engaging the practice of artists in the processes of urbanisation. Many of these interventions were organized and facilitated by self-directed artists operating in public spaces circumvent the commissioning processes of the gallery/museum, public art agencies and official regeneration strategies, working instead under their own volition.

This research contributes the established methodology of urban planning through enhancing understanding values of the critical, activist art practices, which challenge the dominant views and practices of a *hegemonic city* by integrating socio-spatial reflections in interdisciplinary ways associated with urban development planning and more importantly enabling their deeper engagement in the processes of urbanisation. It attempts to interrogate the issues of critical engagement with the radical art interventionist praxis by establishing a dialogue with interdisciplinary fields that address complex cultural production and re-frame interventionist practices in the wider context of critical urban discourses that are trans-disciplinary, and engage more deeply in the processes of urbanisation. These concerns that begin to develop an alternative discourse of the city stem from the nexus of art, activism and urbanism in which the citizen experiences and employs intervention as a tool to provoke a rethinking of their role in shaping the everyday urban environment. From a position of action research and practice-based research, this means re-examining, re-enacting and re-inventing interventionist practices to further understand their individual and collective agency in challenging dominant models of urban design, architecture, spatial planning, gentrification and the privatisation of public space, which follow the urbanisation of neoliberalism..

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