

**“REDUCING DESIGN: DOING VIRTUALLY NOTHING AS A CITY- MAKING  
STRATEGY IN 21ST-CENTURY ARCHITECTURE”**

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**ABSTRACT:-**

This paper discusses a recent style strategy to traumatize urban areas. In twenty first century design, it's attainable to acknowledge the existence of many comes that consist in doing nearly nothing, completing solely borderline modifications to their sites of intervention. In contemporary design, this approach is taken into account helpful typically to respect the environment and typically to boost them through the littlest and tiniest actions. Doing nearly nothing may be a strategy that may unfold in many ways. It can mean opting for inaction and thus not modifying a place at all, or designing a temporary project intended to occupy it only for a limited period of time, or conjointly completing a very little however permanent intervention. Depending on the circumstances, it's AN approach that may facilitate design protective an area, reclaiming it or reactivating its latent qualities. This strategy can be implemented both through a single intervention on a specific place or through a network of coordinated projects in different locations. The purpose of the paper is to gift this approach within the context of 21st-century urban design, through cases studied from the last 20 years.

**KEYWORDS:-**

City-making Almost nothing Inaction Smallness Temporary interventions Urban acupuncture

**Introduction:-**

In architecture, quantity is a matter of utmost importance. Architecture constantly deals with numbers; at some point, the dimensional, technical, and economic aspects of a project are all subjected to numerical quantification. However, quantity is essential to architecture in a subtle way (Wigley, 2005). Regardless of the function, site, or context of building design, the quest for what in Italian is called giusta Misura (or right measure),

that is, the condition of what is neither too much nor too minimal, is necessary. The discourse regarding quantity in architecture refers not only to numerical values but also to an intangible quality, which concerns the formal properties of an intervention and the relevance of changes in a given place. Giusta Misura may characterize a form where everything is in its right place and nothing can be added or subtracted without compromising the harmony of the entire system, as in Alberti's definition of beauty (Alberti, 1988). However, giusta misura can also characterize an intervention by implementing necessary and appropriate adjustments to a place. In this sense, every project is an attempt to avoid two equal and opposite mistakes: overdoing and falling short.

Throughout the history of architecture, various interpretations associated giusta misura with "less" (Aureli, 2013); the right measure has frequently been pursued by removing rather than adding elements. For example, the minimum was a key concept in the previous century. Some of the most important architects of the 20th century had a predilection for the most simple, abstract, and light buildings. This style can be appreciated in modern and recent projects. Critics occasionally use the expression almost nothing to refer to buildings by Mies van de Rohe, which appear to be empty boxes composed only of light and air, such as the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin (Mertins, 2011) (Figure 1). Almost nothing is an expression derived from the wide repertoire of aphorisms of Mies (Savi and Montaner, 1996). Similar to his most famous phrase, that is, less is more, this aphorism evokes an architecture composed only of a few elements and simple formal arrangements. In the context of modern architecture, a minimum is often considered the shortest path to construct elegant, beautiful buildings



Figure 1 Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin.

However, another understanding of minimum that modern architecture did not pursue often can be recognized. In a literal sense, doing the minimum can also mean leaving a place almost intact and unaltered by an architectural intervention, thereby confirming the state of things or proposing an only minimal modification. This concept is a totally different type of minimum and almost nothing, which are in the opposite direction of the usual approaches of modern architecture. The latter often resort to the strategy of *tabula rasa* (Tournikiotis, 1999), which involves erasing everything and doing something new in its place rather than the patiently waiting for the regeneration of what already exists. In 21st-century architecture, recognizing the existence of numerous projects comprising limited actions is possible. Projects that involve doing almost nothing is considered to be a plausible strategy; these projects are sometimes useful for respecting and improving surroundings and activating their hidden qualities through the smallest actions.

## **2. Reducing architecture:-**

Almost nothing may appear to be a straightforward phrase requiring minimal or no explanation. However, despite its apparent simplicity, this phrase is slightly ambiguous and can be used in different ways. In architecture, identifying various types of “nothing,” which describes a specific absence, emptiness, or silence, is possible (Quetglas, 1999). For example, the “nothing” that Mies referred to was the void. On numerous occasions, Mies designed buildings where space appeared to flow freely with no obstacle in be-

tween. He mostly relied on a limited number of elements (often very thin) and transparent, invisible walls to create such a design. Mies also developed a precise strategy to design the void, which can be appreciated in 21st-century buildings, such as Sanaa's Rolex Learning Center (Figure 2). Another type of "nothing" concerns the skin of the building. In contemporary projects, the envelope is a blank, continuous space unrelied by any decoration or variation. In such cases, the external surface of the building is emptied rather than its internal space. An example of this case can be observed in the public market recently built by Nieto and Sobejano in Madrid (Figure 3). Void spaces and blank envelopes are both "nothing" that concerns the formal and spatial characteristics of a building, which is radically simplified through operations that affect its interior and exterior. The "nothing" discussed in this paper is of a different type because it directly emphasizes the relational characteristic of architecture, that is, the way an intervention modifies its surroundings. Unlike the other ones, this almost nothing aims at reducing architecture and results in projects that modify precisely (almost) nothing of the place where they are. Such an approach is not to be intended as a pessimistic attitude, showing no confidence in the capacity of architecture to change a place for the better. Instead, considering that doing the minimum may be the best option in some cases, this approach is a way of providing utmost importance to the specific site conditions. Although some places demand major changes, others require only a few modifications provided that they are clever and well designed. In the phrase almost nothing, the word "almost" is crucial; doing the minimum requires doing no less than the necessary, or the intervention will finally be simply insignificant.



Figure 2 Rolex Learning Center, Lausanne.



Figure 3 Barceló Market, Madrid.

Therefore, doing almost nothing is an approach that brings together various concepts proposed by critics and architects in recent years. On the one hand, all collected paradigms claim the potential of smart, small interventions. Numerous authors maintain that manufacturing few however intelligent changes during a given website will have sweeping helpful effects on the environment. Some of these authors relate this approach to the city, argument that specific urban conditions area unit best self-addressed through effective micro-scale ways (Chi, 2003, Lydon and García, 2015). Other authors counsel that this approach doesn't have to be compelled to be joined to a selected discourse state of affairs (Kuma, 2015, Lepik, 2010). On the other hand, underlying such a reductive strategy is also a contemporary tendency toward a positive appreciation of everyday, ordinary surroundings (Walker, 2010). Moreover, ordinary surroundings are believed to occasionally possess qualities that extend from their eventual modest appearance; for example, places, where locals feel comfortable, are likely to be improved through minor than major actions.

Doing almost nothing is not an entirely novel strategy, and minimal interventions always have a place in the history of architecture. The 20th-century masters occasionally relied on this approach. Between 1947 and 1978, Aldo Van Eyck designed and built hundreds of children playgrounds in the city of Amsterdam (De Roode and Lefaivre, 2002). These playgrounds were temporary and simple and involved only a few, minimum operations over vacant lots (Figure 4). The idea behind such an approach was to occupy these lots until a lasting transformation could be performed. Therefore, an active role in city life was provided to places that otherwise would remain unused. Even if minimal interventions are not a prerogative of present-day architecture, these interventions are implemented more often today than in the past. Minimal interventions can actually be placed among the most relevant design strategies of the 21st century. Discussing these interventions implies dealing with an important ongoing shift in understanding the role and purposes of architecture. Minimal interventions in the urban realm are often effectively applied to contemporary architecture.



Figure 4 Playground at Laurierstraat, Amsterdam.

This paper proposes an approach in the context of 21st-century urban architecture through cases studied from the last two decades. The following section of the paper, which addresses the specific application of this strategy, is divided into four subsections for this purpose. Section 3.1 introduces the contemporary circumstances that contribute to the increasing importance of this approach. Section 3.2 discusses the ways of doing almost nothing in the city, distinguishing between inaction, minimization, and the realization of ephemeral interventions. Section 3.3 presents the situations in which minimal interventions are often implemented, distinguishing among conservation, rehabilitation, and reuse, that is, between cases in which doing almost nothing helps protect, reclaim,

and reactivate the latent qualities of a place. Section 3.4 discusses the tactics of almost nothing, which can be conducted via precise operations in a specific place or through a network of coordinated interventions in different locations sharing similar problems.

### **3. Doing almost nothing as a city-making approach**

#### **3.1. Rethinking architecture:-**

In the past century, numerous cities underwent socioeconomic and formal transformations that profoundly changed their nature (Clark, 1998). Given the unprecedented demographic growth and evolution of the production systems, the rate in 20th-century cities expanded to that never seen before in history. In various countries all over the world, the numbers of people living in urban environments and the urbanization rate have dramatically and continuously increased (Burdett and Sudjic, 2007). Major urbanistic and architectural operations must be implemented to deal with such a huge phenomenon, and modern cities must be built primarily through macro-interventions to accommodate new urban masses. Today, most of the areas built in the last decades have reached a solid, stable configuration. Consequently, these areas are often seen as something accomplished and finished, and interventions are conducted by repairing more than reshaping (García Germán, 2012). In some cases, repairing may even simply involve a limited and circumscribed set of actions.

The perception of the system of urban voids is also undergoing a similar change. Several contemporary cities are hypertrophic organisms that require elimination rather than the addition of elements. Regardless of their condition and spatial quality, urban voids currently play an important role in balancing and stabilizing the city as a whole. In the last century, these voids were mainly regarded as places to build. Today, these voids are often treated as constitutive elements of the city and essential for precise functioning because they are empty (Gunwoo, 2016). These findings strongly affect the role of architecture in the construction, alteration, and maintenance of the urban organism. Modern architects often had to design macro-structural interventions and work with the territorial scale as required by socioeconomic and historical circumstances. Today, cir-



cumstances have changed, and reality often forces architecture to a large modesty by adopting a different set of strategies. Architects capable of grand gestures are still present, particularly in the emerging cities of Asia and the Middle East. However, another professional figure is becoming increasingly important, that is, an architect who can regenerate a place by realizing few and careful operations. This architect rediscovers the human being as the real protagonist of architecture, using it as the measure for his/her interventions.

A convincing defence of the opportunity to rethink the role of the architect in accordance with present conditions is presented in an example from n'UNDO (2017), a collective dedicated to research and professional practice. The architecture proposed by n'UNDO is based on subtraction and renunciation and articulates into four operations: no construction, minimization, reuse, and dismantling. The point of n'UNDO is not to suggest such operations as appropriate for all occasions. n'UNDO rather argues the importance of these operations for contemporary design, explaining why architecture should frequently consider these operations as useful tools. No construction is a call not to over-exploit the territory and avoid the production of unnecessary elements. Minimization is the most reasonable strategy when the place appears to dismiss the need for major modifications. Reuse is an option to consider whenever the potentialities of what already exists can be activated through careful work of reclaiming. Dismantling is an action that should be conducted frequently to eliminate constructions whose presence is detrimental to the site.

These operations rediscover the utility of a traditional approach that has been emphasized in the background of 20th-century architecture. Various strategies, namely, no construction, minimization, reuse, and dismantling, have deeply contributed to the development of ancient cities. Similarly, these operations can play an important role in the current cities, that is, helping architecture to build a strong connection between urban space and its inhabitants. These operations are relevant for contemporary architecture because they imply a change of attitude toward the urban system, which can only benefit from these operations. The novelty of this approach lies in the idea that the real pro-

tagonist of design should be the place and locals and not the architectural object only. If the protagonist is the architectural object, then relying on such strategies, which include construction or minimization, is slightly reasonable. By contrast, when the purpose is to achieve the best possible intervention for a specific place and community, even such radical operations may occasionally prove to be proper options. In this sense, reducing architecture is simply intended as a gentle approach toward places; doing the minimum in the right way can help accomplish numerous achievements.

### **3.2. Inaction, minimization, and ephemeral interventions:-**

Doing almost nothing is a flexible strategy that can unfold in numerous ways in accordance with the circumstances and site characteristics. In its most radical application, this approach can result in inaction and the decision to leave the site as it was before the intervention. A good example of such an approach comes from work by Lacaton and Vassal in Bordeaux (Figure 5). The City Council asked them to design a project for Place Léon Aucoc, a minimal square outside the city center, with a view to its embellishment. Having studied the site and its local community and conducting all the necessary analyses that often lead to a project, Lacaton and Vassal proposed to do nothing. They explained that Place Léon Aucoc needs no modifications. This decision was not due to their inability to imagine any possible transformation of the square but was rather the logical conclusion of their own reading, resulting in inaction as the best choice. Two distinct types of considerations prompted Lacaton and Vassal to act this way. The first one came from careful, open-minded observation of the site. The square, without being monumental, was charming. People appreciated this site because it was a quiet and peaceful place where the community felt at home. On the basis of their observation, neither in its conformation nor in its relationship with the locals appeared to require important changes. The second consideration concerned a general questioning of the concept of embellishment. Embellishment often comprises the execution of epidermal operations, such as the replacement of the groundcover or the substitution of some elements of urban furniture; these operations have the difficult task to turn an unattractive place into a beautiful one. However, none of these operations would make sense in

a site such as Place Léon Aucoc, whose most outstanding qualities came precisely from its authenticity and lack of sophistication (Lacaton and Vassal, 2003). By doing nothing with this project, Lacaton and Vassal actually did something. They claimed for the qualities of every day yet attractive places that provide the conditions for a pleasant social life and simultaneously called for an understanding of architecture beyond construction; they argued that in some cases, although rarely, not the building can be an alternative (Lacaton, 2003).



Figure 5 León Aucocsquare, Bordeaux.

In the context of present-day architecture, doing almost nothing often implies performing some modifications to the intervention site. Various contemporary projects attempt to minimize their presence, conducting only the necessary changes to activate the potentialities of the place. This method was the approach of an un built project by Cedric Price for an empty lot in New York in front of the Hudson River (Figure 6). Designed for a competition organized by the Canadian Center for Architecture, Price's project planned to leave the site almost unaltered (Isozaki, 2003). Unlike the other participants whom all proposed filling the lot with large buildings, Price suggested to leave it empty and assign

it for public use. He only planned to perform four minimum actions: build a light infrastructure to cross and observe the lot, place lights to indicate its presence even from a distance, undertake reasonable demolitions to facilitate air circulation, and realize a small extension of an existing congress centre. In several respects, Price's project was similar in approach to that of Lacaton and Vassal's intervention in Place León Aucoc. In both cases, a careful reading of the site revealed qualities that could not be appreciated through mere superficial observation. Most of the participants saw nothing more than an anonymous lot to fill, whereas Price saw a place that with few changes could play a key role in the city despite being vacant. According to Price, the lot, which is empty and close to the river, could act as a green lung to drain fresh air into Manhattan. Preserving the nature of this lot as a free space mostly devoid of constructions was important to realize the goal of Price.

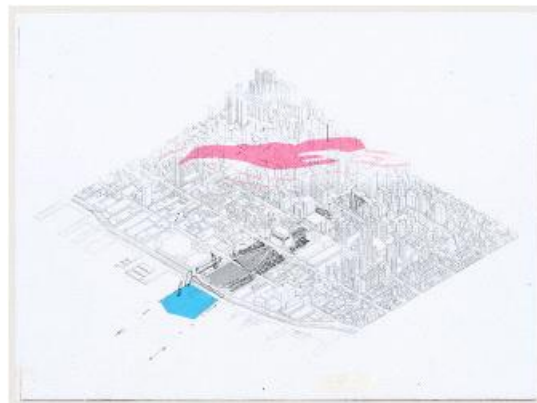


Figure 6 Project for the Hudson River, New York.

A third possible way of doing almost nothing is to design a temporary intervention intended to occupy a lot only for a limited period. In this approach, time is a central factor. In up to date design, impermanence is usually understood as a helpful style tool as a result of it helps contend with things that might not be effectively addressed through permanent interventions (Tardiveau and Mallo, 2014, Lydon and García, 2015). On the one hand, the lack of resources occasionally does not allow for long-term solutions for all places in a city that would need them; temporary interventions permit reclaiming of

tons that may rather be destined to long vacancy and dereliction (Bishop and Williams, 2012). On the other hand, given their ephemeral nature, temporary interventions require a low level of planning, enable fast development, and are cost-effective, thereby allowing to address situations that require the quickest response (Asato, 2018). As discussed in this paper, some recent projects may be associated to the almost nothing strategy because they not only implement a few small modifications to the intervention site but also plan to restore it to its previous configuration in a relatively short period. An example of this approach comes from the experience of *estonoesunsolar* (which is not a lot), an urban regeneration program conducted in Zaragoza by Patrizia Di Monte and Ignacio Grávalos. Over the years, *estonoesunsolar* has allowed the regeneration of dozens of vacant and abandoned city lots via minimal and ephemeral interventions (Di Monte and Grávalos, 2009). The general tone of the program may be illustrated through two examples: one realized in Calle San Blas 94 (Figure 7) and the other in Calle de las Armas (Figure 8). The former involved the transformation of an empty lot in a small botanical garden. This transformation was achieved mainly through two operations. The first operation was the collocation of a green carpet composed of wooden pallets filled up with distinct types of seedlings in the center of the lot. The second operation involved the construction of a light structure designed to house hanging plants. The intervention in Calle de las Armas similarly converted a vacant lot in an urban orchard. In one corner of the lot, Di Monte and Grávalos placed two metal containers painted green, which could serve as classrooms for activities related to gardening. This approach is grounded in the idea that the city functions as a living organism; therefore, the problems of one part affect the entire system. Caring for the smallest and apparently irrelevant lots means caring for the entire city. Albeit temporarily, reclaiming abandoned spaces can thus be a major action in terms of urban health.



figure 7 Estonoesunsolar, Calle San Blas 94, Zaragoza.



Figure 8 Estonoesunsolar, Huerto en Calle de las Armas, Zaragoza.

### **3.3. Conservation, rehabilitation, and reuse:-**

Contemporary architecture relies on the strategy of doing almost nothing in different types of urban situations. Depending on circumstances, this approach is proven to be useful in protecting, reclaiming, or not leaving a place unused. Three major tasks can be identified in the current implementation of this strategy, namely, conservation, rehabilitation, and reuse. In the context of this paper, conservation is defined as the preservation of a place that does not require remarkable changes; rehabilitation as the transformation of its nature and role even through minimal operations, and reuse as the recovery of an abandoned urban location to return it to social life. Conservation, rehabilitation, and reuse are not to be intended as mutually exclusive tasks. A project may occasionally be mainly aimed at one of these tasks or simultaneously indicate more than one. Lacaton and Vassal's intervention in Bordeaux and Price's project for Manhattan share the same intention to protect the respective places from unnecessary alterations. In both cases, the decision of doing the minimum or nothing is accompanied by a recognition of the visible qualities of the site, such as the quiet elegance of Place León Aucoc, or relational, such as the role of the urban lung that could be played from the lot where Price works. Conservation is an important goal in both cases. However, in Price's project, recognizing the intention to restore and reclaim an abandoned place is also possible.

Several contemporary projects share a similar approach, addressing their intervention sites with a view to the conservation of their main qualities and the reactivation of their urban role. Urban spaces that are problematic or neglected can be restored through a few yet precise actions. The Chinese studio Zao Standardarchitecture has recently built a series of public micro-architectures in Beijing's Hutongs, ancient neighborhoods often demolished to provide space to the modern city. Zao developed a strategy involving the regeneration of some of their courtyards by inserting collective facilities to counteract the tabula rasa and demonstrate that Hutongs could play an important role even in 21st-century Beijing; this strategy aimed to attract people living outside and provide a reason to stay for those still living in the site (Bayndrian, 2018). One of the studio's projects,



namely, Microtuner (Figure 9), is located in a courtyard characterized by the presence of an old ash tree. Zao built a 9 m<sup>2</sup> children's library and a 6 m<sup>2</sup> mini-art space that the children could also use to climb trees, thereby converting this area into a place of interaction between the locals, mainly elderly people, and the kids of a nearby school. In this case, such as in Price's project for Manhattan, doing almost nothing is an attitude that allows protecting and reclaiming a place and finding a balance between the need not to lose any of its most important qualities and the need to perform changes that can improve its condition.



Figure 9 Microyuan'er, Beijing. Zao standard architecture.

Conservation is not a primary objective of almost nothing strategies, which serves the capability to present themselves as meaningful spatial settings instead of dealing with places that have lost or never had. This phenomenon is the case of the interventions of estonoesunsolar, which mainly operates in vacant lots in a state of neglect: their rehabilitation and reuse are the main goals of the program. The experience of Campo de la Cebada in Madrid provides a similar example of the regeneration of an urban spot through tiny and temporary actions (Figure 10). Campo de la Cebada is the name of a lot situated in the heart of the city. In 2006, the City Council decided to demolish the

building that stood in this lot to realize a sports complex in its place. However, when the economic crisis struck, the construction of a new building had to be stopped after the demolition of the old one. Therefore, the lot was converted into an unattractive empty space opened in the very center of Madrid. Since then, the site had undergone a process of reclamation conducted by a collective of neighbors (El Campo de la Cebada, 2011). The lot was restored through minimal operations, thereby allowing the conversion of an unwelcoming place in one of the liveliest spots in the city. Some of these operations affected a lot of boundaries. A low metal wall with white and blue colors was built along the perimeter whose inner faces were painted by street artists. Other operations concerned the design of urban furniture. The lot was filled with ephemeral objects of different sizes and formal complexities: flowerpots, benches, wooden pavilions, and canopies, whose mobile nature allowed the easy change in space organization.



Figure 10 Campo de la cebada, Madrid. El campo de la cebada.

Reclaiming a site through minimal operations is a free design option in some cases. Architects can implement further action if they want to, but they believe that doing less is appropriate; this condition is the case of Price's project on Hudson River. By contrast, the decision of doing the minimum occasionally finds its main justification in the necessity to address a situation of scarcity. In such cases, the decision is not really an option because no real alternative is available. The decision is rather a way not to yield to difficult circumstances and attempts to realize the changes that the place requires. A good example of this attitude is the Community Lantern built by TYIN in Klong Toey district in Bangkok (Figure 11). The tyin's intervention was realized in collaboration with the local community by using simple technology and cheap materials (TYIN, 2013). A vacant lot, whose only quality was to be an empty space in a dense urban context, is converted by TYIN into a playground for children through a few small and reversible modifications. These modifications included the installation of two hoops for basketball; the construction of a wooden pavilion to provide the children with a place to sit, climb, and play; and the collocation of lights in the pavilion to illuminate the site at night. Klong Toey Community Lantern recalls an ancient approach to urban spaces, that is, through operations conducted by the locals. Nowadays, several cities have complex and vast systems that require strong top-down governance to properly function. Consequently, bottom-up interventions are rare in these cities; local inhabitants may have the opportunity to operate in the spaces of their own city directly only in particular circumstances. Although good reasons are available for this situation, according to De Carlo (1972), involving future users of space is sometimes a good strategy for creating spaces that are a representation of them and their aspirations. Interventions, such as that of TYIN, attempt to humanize the city starting from its inhabitants, becoming catalysts capable of capturing and releasing the potential urban vitality of even unhappy places.



Figure 11 Klong Toey Community Lantern, Bangkok. TYIN.

### 3.4. Urban acupuncture and coordination:-

Dealing with urban spaces through minimal operations, whether temporary or permanent and driven by the absence or presence of scarcity, is an approach that falls within the paradigm of urban acupuncture. This approach can be considered a specific application of this paradigm, which may also involve operations that cannot be associated with the strategy of doing almost nothing. The expression urban acupuncture, which was coined in the 1980s in the context of Barcelona's urban renewal, describes a particular way of understanding the city and its actors (Solà Morales, 2008). Acupuncture involves working on some points of the skin to heal the entire body; similarly, urban acupuncture addresses the entire city by conducting punctual interventions in strategic places. By considering the city as an interconnected system whose parts depend on each other, urban acupuncture in sensitive locations involves the realization of operations with effects that are beyond the place of intervention. In a few years, the expression had spread and was used by authors, such as Jaime Lerner (2003), to indicate all

small-scale actions capable of converting a city into a suitable place to live in. Urban acupuncture concerns the city as a whole by considering domestic and open spaces and its collective and private sphere. However, this strategy is effectively applied by contemporary architecture in the public realm (Casanova and Hernández, 2014). A growing number of projects currently adopt the holistic approach of urban acupuncture in public spaces, seeking to benefit the entire city through interventions in its collective areas.

Two major tactics can be identified in public acupuncture: isolation and coordination. Public acupuncture is an approach that may unfold through a single intervention or a coordinated network of projects conducted in various locations. Similar tactics are valid for acupuncture interventions comprising minimal operations. These tactics occasionally work only in a given place, similar to the cases of Klong Toey Community Lantern and Campo de la Cebada. Sometimes, these tactics are part of a broad set of interventions. Coordination is often crucial in the implementation of this strategy because it amplifies the effects of individual works. Numerous small interventions eventually function as a single major one if properly coordinated, allowing either to regenerate large urban areas or address a problem common to various parts of the city. Coordinated urban acupuncture often operates in the same city. This condition is the case of the estonoe sun solar program, which works on the system of urban voids of Zaragoza, and of Microyuan'er, which is only one of several projects by Zao located in the Hutongs of Beijing. However, urban acupuncture occasionally works in various cities simultaneously; in this case, coordination serves to address a problematic situation shared by places of different surroundings successfully. In this respect, two good examples are the Espacios de Paz (Spaces of Peace) and Home for All programs.

Espacios de Paz was a program held in 2014 and 2015 aimed at regenerating public spaces in Venezuelan cities. Both editions resulted in the reclamation of five lots located across the country. These lots were situated in contexts lacking quality public spaces and variously affected by crime, violence, and high school dropout rates. Meanwhile, a single office, namely, Pico Estudio, handled the overall coordination of the program, and

different architects designed the projects. Common logic was found behind the works as observed in the selection of the sites and the nature of interventions, which are simple and small. However, coordination was especially evident in the general procedures, where participation played an important role: all the projects were the result of a six-week workshop open to locals (Griborio, 2015). In the Petaré neighborhood in Caracas, Pico Estudio and Todo por la Praxis (together with the community) converted an abandoned house into a public facility (Figure 12) (Todo por la Praxis, 2014). The roof of the building was transformed into an open-air basketball court accessible by an external staircase. The envelope underwent several changes: the base was painted in bright colors; in the middle floor where the house used to be, the brick wall was replaced with glass panels; and a light metal structure was placed around this floor and the court, supporting a wire mesh. Another intervention in Caracas in Pinto Salinas involved the construction of a civic center in an empty and previously unused lot. Herein, Oficina Lúdica and PKMN Architectures rehabilitated an existing small building and space all around (Figure 13) (Enormestudio, 2014). The design strategies were similar to those applied in Petaré's intervention. The outer walls of the building were painted brightly. In front of the building, the lot was filled with a modular metal platform covered with wooden planks. A canopy composed of a modular structure was also placed on this platform and designed to act as a source of the shadow. Behind Espacios de Paz, deep confidence can be recognized in the capability of architecture to improve, if not the entire society, at least the life of a specific community. In this program, problematic social situations were addressed through the specific tools of architecture considering that the creation of lacking spaces for a social life can be a major action. The idea is that an intelligent and carefully planned intervention in contexts can trigger wide social change.



Figure 12 Espacios de Paz, Petaré, Caracas. Pico estudio, Todo por la Praxis.



Figure 13 Espacios de Paz, Pinto Salinas, Caracas. Oficina lúdica.

Home for All, a program started by Toyo Ito in 2011 as a response to Tohoku earthquake and tsunami, followed a similar approach. The purpose of this program was to contrast the general lack of public facilities in the camps built after the disaster by realizing small pavilions that could serve as civic centers (Ito, 2013). Therefore, considering that public life is not a luxury but a sheer necessity in such circumstances, the program sought to improve the condition of the earthquake victims. Public buildings do not create public life but can act as catalysts by providing a space where social activities can occur. From 2011–2015, Home for All was able to build 14 pavilions in the camps all over the Tohoku region. All these pavilions were temporary, small, and simple partly because deadlines and resources did not permit otherwise. This condition can be attributed to the call of sobriety in such situations. Toyo Ito was not the only architect involved in the program. The participation of Kazujo Sejima, Ryue Nishizawa, Sou Fujimoto, and Kumi-ko Inui was also noted. Each architect, alone or collaborating with others, designed one or more pavilions with the participation of local communities.

The pavilions in Rikuzentakata (Figure 14) and in Miyato Island (Figure 15) (Figure 16) provided good examples of the interventions of Home for All. The other interventions were ephemeral and deliberately low key. The pavilion in Rikuzentakata, which was designed by Kumiko Inui, Sou Fujimoto, Akihisa Hirata, and Toyo Ito, comprised two independent formal structures. The center of the pavilion was a white box composed of several stacked volumes rotated with respect to each other. A wooden structure comprising trunks from trees taken down by the tsunami leaned against this central core (Worrell, 2013). The reuse of available materials is always a reasonable approach and has a clear symbolic meaning. Building a civic center from the remains of the tsunami alluded to the desire of the community to not surrender to the disaster and start all over again. The pavilions in Miyato Island were designed by Kazujo Sejima and Ryue Nishizawa. The first one, which was situated in the interior part of the island, comprised an elliptical metal roof sustained by 13 thin steel pillars, covering a semi-outdoor space and a living room open to public use. The second one, which was on the beach of Tsukihama, was a wood and steel portico facing the sea (Nishizawa and Sejima, 2015). A common room designed to offer people a place to stay, cook, and spend time together was placed un-



der a wavy and corrugated roof. Home for All constitutes a special case of public space acupuncture. Urban acupuncture often identifies one or more sensitive points in the city and proceeds to reclamation. On the contrary, in the case of Home for All, acupuncture focused on the construction of these sensitive points. The final goal of the program was to perform small interventions to create public space, responding to a situation that had led to its disappearance.



Figure 14 Home for all, Rikuzentakata. Fujimoto, Hirata, Inui, Ito.



Figure 15 Home for all, Miyato island.



Figure 16 Home for all, Tsukihama beach.

#### **4. Conclusions:-**

Architecture is a discipline wherein circumstances play a major role. No design strategy works in each situation. The decision on what to do and how much to do can only be effective if it is based on a careful analysis of the intervention site. Doing more is sometimes more necessary than doing less. Doing the minimum or almost nothing may also be occasionally proven to be necessary. In this sense, considering the possibility of minimum intervention is simply a demonstration of intelligence and common sense. This finding is evident in the urban realm, which is not only a collection of buildings but rather a relational space where social life and social meanings are key factors. A city is created not only by raising buildings but also by caring for those spaces where life appears to flow peacefully.

Doing almost nothing can mean several things, from opting for inaction to realizing ephemeral transformations, to performing small interventions. This strategy introduces possibilities for design, proving especially useful in situations where usual procedures do not work properly. In the present practice, this strategy provides an alternative to a tabula rasa. Although starting from zero may be the best option, in some cases, this approach may only lead to unnecessary changes that have no beneficial effect on the city. Demonstrating the possibility of regenerating a place with few yet accurate operations shows the potential of an alternative way to deal with the city, which involves protecting spaces that appear fine and reactivating others without disrupting them.

While providing an alternative to tabula rasa, this strategy offers a way of operating in situations where scarcity or problematic circumstances prevent major changes and doing the minimum is the only option. In such cases, doing almost nothing is the most proactive approach. Thus, a complex situation can be addressed actively by attempting to perform an intervention that can benefit the surroundings and locals despite all the difficulties. Doing almost nothing is therefore not a passive attitude and only involves observing a place and remaining inactive. Observation plays an important role in this strategy but also demands considerable tactical and creative thinking. Far from being simple, observation is an approach that requires vision and remarkable spatial skills.

Jane Jacobs (1958) stated that designing a dream city is easy, whereas rebuilding a living one requires imagination.

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