URBAN CAPABILITIES AND CITIZENSHIP

At the beginning of this new century, it has become evident that the recent scientific and technological progress has been a predominant factor in the gradual acquisition of new communication capacities, and thus in new ways of attaining information and knowledge. Never before has it been possible for the everyday citizen to obtain information with such ease, in such quantities and so up-to-date.

Despite this appreciation, one cannot ignore the fact that these new technological achievements have also been responsible for the mass diffusion of a small set of habits and behaviors that, when spread all over the world, compromise the sustainability of the entire human/natural ecosystem. At a first glance, regardless of the cultural and ideological variety that still characterizes different regions of the planet, the sudden technological increase in the fields of information and communication has not especially promoted new interrelations between those pluralities; instead, it has been determining the adoption of similar models of growth, rooted in the same model of development.

The democratization of individual access to these new powerful communication facilities, on a planetary scale, have granted infinite power to those people/countries/governments which control the media: the exponential enlargement of their audience improves the political/social significance of those new global stakeholders, and favors their ability/need/fate to spread their own models. The consequent homogenization of the habits, customs, concerns and desires of citizens worldwide has led many western cities to move away from their particular contexts, and to go along with a development model that, although not their own, was convincingly presented to them as such.

It was in the scope of this process of alienation/adaptation/adhesion that globalization assumed its most contradictory aspect: despite the pointed consequences, it can also be argued that generalized access to the new technologies of information and communication tends to result in a new way to approach the world – more aware of the complex intricacy of the planet; or it can also be alleged that the capacity of these new technological devices for connecting people with similar concerns improves their ability to articulate their demands and to apply political pressure to achieve improvements in urban governance.

This Obra Nasce aims to consider this contradiction from the standpoint of the architectural practice, questioning how far this global alienating model is now sharing space with a new holistic conscience, empowered by the new information and communication technologies and deeply informed in an emergent process of social and economical shift.

Focusing on recent architectural approaches and methodologies, it is proposed to question how the architectural discipline is reflecting these transformations; how far the individual citizen is recovering an important role in its scientific focus and justification, and how architecture can expand the capabilities of communities to achieve the things they really need, value and aspire to.