

CIDADES PELA RETOMA

[CITIES FOR RECOVERY]

Presentation at the 'Crisis Regimes and Emerging Social Movements in Cities of Southern Europe' workshop, Athens, Greece, 7-10 February 2013

Introduction

Cidades pela Retoma (Cities for Recovery) is an informal platform of researchers and activists based in several Portuguese cities. By 2011, the increasing political, social and economic crisis in Portugal and Europe made clear that re-adaptation and change was underway, and cities were the privileged site to witness these processes.

We started from a very simple question: how can cities and their communities deal productively with times of crisis and transition? Trying to address this issue, the group assumes that civil society will be able to organise itself at local scales to reflect and act about its collective future, when confronted with changing paradigms and the emergency of a crisis with deep impacts on people's lives. This is happening under the form of urban social movements, with different structures and aims. It also acknowledges that despite the incipient, fragile and ephemeral nature of many urban social movements, their resilience and consistency justify greater attention, proximity and engagement from research and policy actors. Finally, it thrives on the potential of our cities to promote new forms of economic, social and spatial development, accepting that this demands the mobilisation and alignment of the available energies (civic, productive, knowledge, social and economic actors) as well as the definition of new collective arenas (real and virtual) of encounter, reflection and action.

Arguments

The mission and approach of Cidades pela Retoma are justified by two important arguments. First, the local scale of interventions and the growing autonomy of urban actors suggest that the common ground of civic actions is not always corporative or ideological, but material- the city, neighbourhood or street are often the spatially consistent focus of collective concerns. Second, the proliferation and differentiation of increasingly individualised points of view and practical actions in urban contexts shows the need to filter, organise and support them technically and culturally. Cidades pela Retoma emerged therefore as a collective platform dedicated to promote and discuss the role of cities and their communities in times of economic and social transition. Its mission is to observe and disseminate urban practices and knowledge and to build bridges between active social movements; it aims to improve participation in cities and reflect about the future of citizenship.

Roles, Projects and Outcomes

The group plays two roles, related to its arguments and motivations: on one hand, it tries to be a *bridge* – a tool to enable greater exchange and cooperation between social movements. On the other hand, it acts as a *loudspeaker* – a platform for survey and dissemination of collective practices and knowledge. Both roles are embodied by a specific project, each aiming for a specific outcome. The projects are at different developmental stages and will follow specific timelines. Both are works in progress, subject to fine-tuning and change.

The notion of 'bridge' leads to the Global City 2.0 Network, a global map, database and discussion forum of urban social movements; the desired outcome is the Cities Civic Think Tank, a repository of technical and scientific knowledge about cities and urban practices. The idea of 'loudspeaker' is clear in the Low-cost & High-value Urban Initiatives project, a publication that will put together our survey of effective and valuable community projects. Here, the desired outcome will be a Local Agenda for Recovery – the mobilisation and discussion of community-led projects with visible effects in the local economy.

The Global City 2.0 Network is an attempt to map and connect urban civic groups worldwide in order to create a global platform for exchange, learning and interaction. The project website was developed pro-bono by *Ponto C*, from Aveiro, under the European Year for Volunteering 2011 initiative. Urban social movements anywhere in the world can tag their organisation on the map, enter their website and contact information, and write down their mission and activities. At a later stage, they will be able to enter into direct contact among each other, share experiences and agree on common struggles and projects. Global City 2.0 represents a path to develop an alternative medium to support and catalyse global interdependencies and collaborations beyond the bureaucratic and exclusivist pipelines of markets, corporations and public authorities. The network is now online and in the process of collecting information and mobilising participation from groups and institutions around the world.

'Low-cost & High-value urban initiatives' is a project aiming to document the efforts of local communities and social and economic actors in the search for creative solutions to develop local economies. It will consist of a series of instalments, gathering different stories of success in different places, put together in a single publication. For each story, an account will be given about the time and place of the project, the people involved, and how and why it unfolded. The project intends to identify low-cost and high-value initiatives, led by local communities, which address concrete problems and develop local potentials in relevant fields. These actions should be locally based, quick to implement and directed to the public.

Conclusion

In summary, *Cidades pela Retoma* is neither a social movement with direct intervention in particular causes nor a merely academic effort towards generic discussion. It is a builder of bridges between other movements and a loudspeaker for other people's practices – its aim is to support and enable both.

The platform is currently facing important decisions about its future – how to keep it dynamic and up to date, what formal structure it should follow, and what sources of funding are available to pursue our projects. Engagement and participation from the people and groups to whom these tools are designed for is therefore very important to keep *Cidades pela Retoma* relevant.

www.globalcitynetwork.org

www.facebook.com/CidadespelaRetoma