



## Open classrooms for new educational spaces

Santiago Cirugeda. Recetas Urbanas

Hello, it's our turn. We are Urban Recipes, I am Santi Cirugeda and in front of me is Alice Attout working, rushing at this moment that we are going to speak upon the invitation of MUSAC, of Kristine Guzmán, about this Coronavirus that will accompany us for a longer time...

Well, we are an architecture studio although of course we are also involved in the world of art, culture, education and other varied topics. But for what concerns us right now, we do not want to speak rhetorically about the current situation because there is already a lot of talk about it, but we do want to talk about our tools both as a technical team, as citizens and as a family group, all of whom have suffered the lockdown.

It's funny how Recetas Urbanas has been working for 20 years, and some solutions that we have proposed years ago are perfectly compatible with the current moment. In fact, one of the great struggles we want to talk about, which is education and uncertainty as parents —we are not sure if schools are going to open, or how they are going to open— so many families must feel this uncertainty. But well, yes, we have curiously proposed another freer, more open educational model that the Spanish law still does not contemplate. It is curious that there has been a struggle for many years in Spain to have a model that is much closer to nature, much more open, much more mobile, and that it is now in demand in the public sphere—in public schools—as well and in private schools, that though they are a minority, they have given clues. We have been proposing for a long time a Foreign School in London, where it is legalized, where all the boys and girls could be more in the outdoors, but it is an alternative that (cannot happen) until the regulations and the law are changed in Spain, that would allow a much more school.

What is happening here is that a series of schools, parents' associations and school principals have called us, worried that they need more space and that they will rely on schoolyards, on covered spaces, on solutions that are not so novel because we have always demanded that they exist. Because there are places in schoolyards that have needed meeting places, to be covered, to protect themselves from the sun like here in Andalusia, or from the rain. These are places where would be very relevant now to be able to teach, to lower the student body ratio a bit, and Alice and I are rushing drawing to legalize a school that can be opened in September but of course, these are things that we will not be able to know right now but it will be necessary to raise in future confinements: the future problems that schools need more space.



It is curious that there are already built spaces which is the most interesting thing, and one of the things that we are discussing these days also with an exhibition that we have in Baltic, Newcastle and another that we currently have in London, and it is true that cultural spaces, artistic, art centers, may have a responsibility if they assume it. The hundreds of thousands of square meters that are built of cultural centers in Spain that were closed during the lockdown, if well thought out and well organized, could be considered as a support in the equipped square meters for the purpose of education. Even in social issues of refuge, of certain population groups.

It is curious that social centers that are more directed to the care and attention of groups of people who live on the street, with drug problems, anxiety, loneliness, etc., have also closed, because we are not prepared for something so abnormal. But perhaps right now it is necessary to ask and it is a question that is also asked to MUSAC. I know the Matadero, La Laboral, MUSAC and they are very large art centers that could specifically accommodate if a school cannot open or is missing two classrooms. Why can't it be done in the MUSAC hall, for example? Or why can't it be done in the exterior? It has restrooms and security, etc. etc. I think it is a debate that is raging around and it is: what role can cultural institutions have within these possible lockdowns or new dimensions that these spaces need? They won't open much because they don't have those extra spaces and what better place than a cultural center to have those places of education, and I'm only talking about schools and universities.

The issue of housing also worries us a lot. Alice and I are lucky to have a house, not our own, but a house with a terrace and we have been able to enjoy a little of that air. But above all, the social housing that in recent years have lost meters, have lost balconies, and I don't even want to think about how many crowded, confined families have been able to coexist, without having a place to relax, breathe fresh air, escape, get out a bit. Measures against that, it really makes me laugh because they sent me on Twitter... someone was commenting on some drawings of an Englishman from the last century who spoke of Robinson who made prosthetics on facades. They were very beautiful hand drawings, very illusory with swimming pools hanging on the facades, with tennis courts, as places for outdoor leisure and he said "how good the housing projects would have been if they had these". This is impossible, someone even commented, "I suppose Santiago Cirugeda is giving a solution" but the most that we got here was to make a swing for our daughter and a little castle because we have a room that can be redone.

But of course, thinking about this possible new confinement in homes that have few spaces, people have already organized themselves. We have seen people on rooftops accumulate, have parties, relax. But it is true that we have also seen the police sanctioning for it. Perhaps it is because there is no regulation, there is no prior preparation. But perhaps we will have to have a plan just as there is an evacuation plan in all buildings, in schools or houses with regards to fire prevention; thus we will have to have a new plan to make use of those roofs, as it has been done. Citizens are really

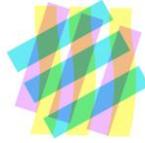


looking for solutions but as they have been improvised and not endorsed by the public, they have been sanctioned.

Even childcare for family conciliation has been very, very complicated and it will continue to be complicated [but still...]. We discussed yesterday, and if the exterior part of the entryways of these social housing can be narrowed down and per family a quadrant is organized to go outside. Just as it had been allowed in some phases of the lockdown to allot more terrace space to bars so that they can be more profitable and do not close, why not in another approach? We can say, this building, what capacities does it have? Well-organized rooftops could be a place where those social housing, which are highly developed in many cases, could be more fine-tuned to a possible lockdown. I see it clearly. The main gate opens and there is a small fence where no one from the street passes, but only those from the building who live there and in an organized way, take their chairs out into the fresh air, they can have a sandwich, have a few beers, be with the family... There are times when they are only the family group, there are other moments that are ten people or twenty, that changes. But I believe that there are solutions that must be written, that the operation must be considered both in homes and in schools. Even more poetically or more decisively. As a technician, we can propose how a balcony can be mounted in homes where there are no balconies. We have always made many prostheses and well, it would be an economic effort but for me, in this case my energy makes me a little restless and more radical to say, why don't we make another prescription to make more balconies that are safe, stable or cheap so people can sit in a chair looking at infinity, right?

Clearly, this is what is going to happen to us right now. We are going to have to see that the fear that the disease generates a little, which is obvious, and the fear that has been generated from the state's communication networks, obviously limits freedoms. We will see in what way freedom can be less limited. And as I said, citizenship that is providing solutions, as it has always provided, must act together, but in this case they have to be approved by the state because otherwise they will be fined. There are many solutions and I think they have to be given now.

We are working on schools, seeing where there can be more classrooms, more areas of... in Malaga, in Gracia they might be looking for places to continue teaching because that family group or those students cannot really stay confined just because, because of education, because of social relationships... (spaces have been proposed) even on top of the lunchhall, in the schoolyard, on the soccer field... we will have to find intermediate places. But as I said, in the face of this emergency, I think that a fundamental basis is that since we are within a cultural center like MUSAC, we must rethink how to use its spaces in other moments of lockdown or in the upcoming reopening of schools.

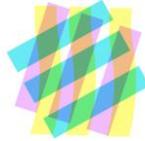


In Gotheburg we made an open classroom that I think is magnificent, very intelligent. Also with resources. A classroom where public schools can request to go [to that open classroom], which has only two walls. And that it is in a port but then there is another in a park. And these are new installations that the City Council of Gotheburg and other cities proposed a long time ago —not because of the coronavirus— so that people, students would leave that class that is orthogonal, with a window, a door and something else, and they can have a rational experience on the road, on the journey and after that places that are not normally within your school. Well, these open classrooms, in many cases, can be the cultural centers themselves, which are usually very beautiful, very expensive to build, very well equipped, with bathrooms, security... and it is a question that I ask.

In fact, we are going to study a couple of cases of cultural centers where the vocation of the management [of these cultural centers] is "we are going to give support." It is because there are actually hundreds of thousands of square meters that are closed, have been closed or are partially open. It all involves seeing at what time, what regulations are in place at that time, what standards of conduct or health measures... obviously these are technical issues that can be applied and should be applied.

And also, finally, and speaking of our training as a technician (I'm sure I'm forgetting something because Alice is looking at me with a slightly strange face, but no, she says no, she smiles at me). Well, it is a conciliation as well and it has happened to us between the world of architecture and art with the issue of social workers and people who are in the third sector. It is curious that the projects that we have done from architecture or art are often discarded and when you try to propose something involving these people as pedagogues, social psychologists, they look at it with suspicion. As the architecture and art teams have touched these issues very lightly. Culturally it is very cool to be a social architect or to do participatory art or social and critical art and it has happened for many years but it is more and more in critical vogue.

Well now, I mean, since these are the languages that we handle, how do we involve these professionals? Actually, the technical specifications that we have tried to do lately, that we are going to continue proposing, not only the figure of the architect, the surveyor, the designer, but actually saying that it is necessary to work with certain communities, social professionals who have the tools to do what. It has always been said that architects are capable of doing many things. That is arrogant, an enormous stupidity. So yesterday talking to someone who is also a double, an architect but works with friends in communities with a high risk of exclusion, that there is mistrust. I think that we must once again propose —when we look at the design of architecture, the design of educational spaces, of cultural spaces—, to work with professionals who really know what the needs of those communities are. I do not want to talk because I do not want to remember the misfortunes of how certain groups of marginal population have been locked down, with terrifying conditions... people who live on the street, with



problems of drug addiction, alcoholism and of course, the regulations are not worth the same [...] You have to ask all those people: what have been your problems during the lockdown? These groups of people who have worked with the most vulnerable population. And from these data, from interviews that we are also doing, get keys to be able to intervene.

As I say, the first ones who have rushed to call us have been schools, school principals, mothers, fathers who are anxious (to know) how adaptation will evolve from kindergarten to high school, even university. That is why I say that it is time to work together quickly, yes, urgent, but many entities. And that the state, apart from what it has had to do to limit freedom of movement with lockdown in pursuit of a sanitary improvement or sanitary control, it is now necessary to rethink listening to the experiences of everyone and therefore make improvements.

And the usual thing will happen: there are times when they will listen, other times they will not listen. If you listen and there are resources and you reach some pacts, agreements, housing regulations, school and cultural center regulations, everything will be precious. But I can't quite believe it. What has always happened to us in Recetas Urbanas will happen. That we have done projects accompanied by the public administration and we have done some that are against, invisible or illegal. And this is going to happen again. There will be legal situations that will try to be respectful of health, but as there are no regulations, we are going to have a problem.

But as I say, this will be a message of joy and optimism but we still have a lot to work on but hey, let's end this, let's keep on working and it's time for beer, right? So thank you, we are here, Recetas Urbanas, for any query our website, our usual email and we will try to collaborate as much as possible.

Thanks and a kiss.