

R-URBAN Strategies and Tactics for Resilient Practicesⁱ

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Recently the global awareness and calls for the necessity of collective action to face the current and future challenges have become greaterⁱⁱ : global warming, depletion of fossil fuels and other natural resources, economic recession, population growth, housing and employment crisis, increased social and economic divide, geo-political conflicts, etc.

These calls have been amplified in the current economic crisis situation, and within this context, while governments and institutions seem to take too long to agree and act, many initiatives start at local scale.ⁱⁱⁱ These initiatives are nevertheless confronted with the difficulty of changing the current economic and social models of society based on globally scaled economics, which are based on increasing consumption and subsequent exclusion of those who are not able to 'consume'. How to support initiatives that oppose the current consumption models? How to construct a more socially oriented economy? How to act? What tools and what means to use in times of crisis and scarcity? How to reactivate and sustain cultures of collaboration and sharing within the current society, based on individualism and competition? How to initiate progressive practices while acting locally and small scale?

These are some questions we asked with R-Urban, a project that we have initiated with our research based practice, atelier d'architecture autogérée (aaa), as a bottom-up framework for resilient urban regeneration. After three years of research, we have proposed the project to different municipalities and local organizations in cities and towns. We conceived it as a participative strategy based on local ecological cycles which activate material (water, energy, waste, food) and immaterial flows (local skills, social economy, local culture, self-building, etc.) between key fields of activity (economy, habitat, urban agriculture) which exist or are implemented within the existing fabric of the city. *R-Urban* started to be implemented in 2011 in Colombes, a suburban town of 84,000 inhabitants near Paris, in partnership with the local municipality and a number of organizations, including a diversity of local residents. The project is meant to gradually create a network around three 'pilot units', each with complementary urban functions, bringing together emerging citizen projects. This bottom-up strategy explores the possibilities of enhancing the capacity of urban resilience by introducing a network of resident-run facilities.^{iv}

In this chapter we will describe and reflect upon the R-urban strategy and the practical experiences in Colombes. Through the case of R-Urban in Colombes we explore how self-governing can work in practice and what the role of architecture in this undertaking might be. We will analyze the different ideas, tools, value systems, lifestyles that need to be developed in order to make such an experience resilient and long lasting.

The project is currently implemented in a neighbourhood located within a typical suburban context with a mix of individual and social housing estates. Suburbia is a key territory for R-Urban: although produced within a modern idea of the city, suburbia is today one of the most crucial territories to be redeveloped and regenerated. In many large-scale post war suburbs there is social and economic deprivation, car dependency, , youth crime, etc. are only a few of the many problems of suburban towns. Nevertheless, despite of the high rate of unemployment (17% of the workforce, well above the national rate of 10.2 in 2012), Colombes has a big number of local organisations (ie. around 450) and a very active civic life.

R-Urban takes support in this civic activity and starts with launching a number of collective facilities including recycling and eco-construction, cooperative housing and urban agriculture units, which are working together to set up the first spatial and ecological agencies in the area. Their architecture showcases the different issues they address: local material recycling, local skills, energy production, food growing, etc. The first three pilot facilities – Agrocité, Ecohab, and Recyclab- are collectively run and catalyze existing activities aiming to disseminate at individual and domestic levels, introducing resilient habits and lifestyles that residents can adopt and practice themselves, such as the retrofitting of dwellings to accommodate food growing and energy production.

Agrocité is an agro-cultural unit, comprising an experimental micro-farm, community gardens, pedagogical and cultural spaces and a series of experimental devices for compost heating, rain water collection, solar energy production, aquaponic gardening, phyto-remediation. Agrocité is a hybrid structure, with components running as social enterprise (the micro-farm, the market and the cafe) and another being run by a number of users organisations (community garden, cultural and pedagogical space) and local associations.

Recyclab is a recycling and eco-construction unit which consists in a number of facilities for storage, recycling, reusing and transformation of locally salvaged materials into eco-construction elements for self building and retrofitting. A fab lab^v is set up for residents' use. Recyclab will function as a social enterprise.

Ecohab is cooperative eco-housing unit which consists in a number of partially self-built and collectively managed ecological dwellings, including a number of shared facilities and schemes (food growing, production spaces, energy and water harvesting, car sharing). The 7 dwellings will include 2 social flats and a temporary residency for students and researchers. Ecohab will run as a cooperative.

The R-Urban collective facilities will grow in number and will be managed by a cooperative land trust, which will act as an instrument to acquire space, enable development and guarantee democratic governance^{vi}.

Flows, networks and cycles of production-consumption will be formed between the collective facilities and the neighbourhood, closing chains of need and supply as locally as possible. To overcome the current crisis, we must try, as French philosopher André Gorz states 'to produce what we consume and consume what we produce'^{vii}.

R-Urban interprets this chain of production-consumption broadly, well beyond the material aspects, including cultural, cognitive, and affective dimensions. The project sets up a precedent for a participative retrofitting of metropolitan suburbs, where the relationship between the urban and the rural is reconsidered.

It tries to show what citizens can do if they change their working and living habits to collectively address the challenges of the future.

‘R’

R-Urban is an ‘R’ word. It relates directly to the three ‘R’ imperatives discussed in any ecological approach - Reduce, Reuse, Recycle - and suggest other iterations: Repair, Re-design, Re-think, etc. In addition, the term indicates explicitly that R-Urban reconnects the Urban with the Rural through new kinds of relations, more complementary and less hierarchical. The ‘R’ of R-Urban reminds also that the main goal of the strategy is ‘resilience’.

‘Resilience is a key term’ in the context of current economic crisis and resource scarcity. In contrast with ‘sustainability’, which focuses on sustaining the *status quo* of a system by controlling the balance between its inputs and outputs, without necessarily addressing the factors of change and disequilibrium, resilience speaks about how systems can adapt and thrive in changing circumstances. Resilience is a dynamic concept, which does not have a stable definition and identity outside the circumstances that produce it. In contrast to sustainability, which tends to focus on maintaining the environmental balance, resilience is adaptive and transformative, inducing change that offers huge potential to rethink assumptions and build new systems.^{viii} Although the current discourse on resilience shouldn’t be embraced uncritically, without acknowledging the sometimes naïve and idealist comparison between ‘biological systems’ and ‘social systems’ and their capacity to adapt in order to obtain ‘well-being’, the term ‘resilience’ has potential to be developed to include questions and contradictions addressed in political ecology terms^{ix}.

R-Urban, is not about ‘sustainable development’ but about societal change and political and cultural re-invention, addressing issues of social inequality, power and cultural difference. The resilience capacity of a social system implies also the preservation of specific democratic principles and cultural values, local histories and traditions, while adapting to more economic and ecological lifestyles. A city can only become resilient with the active involvement of its inhabitants. To stimulate a democratic engagement of the biggest number of citizen, we need tools, knowledge and places to test new practices and collective initiatives, and to showcase the results and benefits of a resilient transformation of the city. Here, the architects have a role to play. Rather than merely building designers, they can be initiators, negotiators, co-managers and enablers of processes and agencies.

Concentrating on spatial agencies and pilot facilities, R-Urban tries to offer these tools and spaces that will make visible the existing citizen resilient initiatives and practices. Spatial design processes contribute to express the ecological cycles in physical and tangible ways and engage inhabitants in experiences of making and doing. Democratic governance principles are as such associated to concrete hands-on actions whose

consequences are visible and measurable. More than just adaption, resilience is for R-Urban a catalyst for urban activation, innovation and creativity.

Parallely with its pilot facilities, which form a new ecological urban infrastructure, R-Urban puts in place new political and democratic tools. These tools are co-realised with other partners and concerned citizen, being transferable and multipliable. As noticed by the Marxist philosopher John Holloway in his book *Change the World without Taking Power*, the numerous movements which try to find a way to overpass the current crisis are somehow stacked in their oppositional struggles with the State understood as political instrument to conquer. Holloway considers that the fetishisation of the State or/and the Capital trap most of people within the existing power systems and stop them to act for radical change. He concludes that if we want to escape the current societal blockage we should not fight for taking the power but for alternatives to power, for dynamics of social self-determination. These dynamics must necessarily be anchored in the everyday life: ‘the movement against-and-beyond is a movement that emerges from the everyday life’.^x

Models of resilient cities: Garden City, Regional City and Transition Town

Although anchored in the everyday life and committed to radical change, R-Urban follows at the same time a certain tradition of models of resilient development that started with Howard’s Garden City and Geddes’s Regional City and continues today with Transition Town.

In 1889, Ebenezer Howard published his book *Garden Cities of To-morrow*, proposing a model of utopian city that would combine qualities of urban and rural life. The book was thought to provide a solution for the urban crisis that followed the agricultural depression in the late 19th Century, and generated a whole movement. The model proposed by Howard supposed a mechanism through which ownership would be transferred gradually from financial capitalists to inhabitants, with the idea that rent paying will translate into the maintenance of a local welfare state. The cooperative aspects of the original Garden City model were expressed not only in community gardens and communal kitchens, but also in mechanisms for space appropriation by inhabitants. These mechanisms have not been implemented in most of the urban and suburban developments that followed these ideas, which adopted only the urban form and not its social and political principles.

In a similar way, few decades later, Patrick Geddes proposed a more naturalist understanding of the city, setting up the principles of a ‘region city’ in his books *City Development* (1904) and *City in Evolution* (1915). With his biologist background, Geddes states that before starting any kind of urban planning, one should thoroughly study the natural resources at regional scale, and analyse the existing economic and social dynamics. The Regional City is defined by complex relations between climate, vegetation, animals and economic activities, which all influence men and society’s evolution. Geddes’s vision of the city gives importance to institutions and civic life, as well as to social interaction and public space. The egalitarian relation between men and women is carefully considered together with the different modes of self-managing at local scale. Across a geographic vision, the region is considered in its capacity to regenerate social and political reconstruction. Geddes had the occasion to partially apply his theoretical analysis but his vision of the Regional City has been simplified

and reduced, in a similar way with the Garden City, during its modernist applications.

More recently, Rob Hopkins published the *Transition Handbook* (2008), which became soon the reference of a whole Transition movement.^{xi} The Transition Town does not provide anymore an utopian model to be built, but proposes a guide to be followed by grassroots organisations who want to initiate dynamics of transition in their existing towns. It is not anymore a proposal for a new city but a set of rules and principles for a bottom-up adaption of existing cities. Rather than from planning, this model of development comes from permaculture. The driving dynamic is that of 'transition' within the horizon of a challenging future whose main parameters are Peak Oil and Climate Change. If, for the Garden City, the comfort and political emancipation were ways of embracing an abundant future, for the Transition Town, the idea of local resilience and solidarity are solutions for adapting to a future with scarce resources.

In contrast with these models, R-Urban is not the direct application of theory but tries to develop parallelly an exploratory practice and a theoretical analysis that constantly inform each other. R-Urban shares with Garden City the interest in combining qualities of urban and rural life in the context of existing cities and creating a better connection in terms of cycles of production and consumption. It also shares the interest in cooperative organisation and mechanisms for inhabitants to appropriate and manage space and also in the way these mechanisms translate into design solutions. But R-Urban is more interested in designing processes and cycles than forms, programmes and buildings. It does not propose a new model based on an ideal urban form, but rather deals with existing urban fabric and proposes social and political processes to negotiate adaptations and newly built structures and facilities. Alterations will result from the retrofitting of urban elements that are included in locally closed ecological cycles.

Spatial agencies will make the new organisation visible in the city. They combine existing initiatives in a coherent organisation, adding missing elements and contributing with new inputs. In contrast with the Garden City, R-Urban does not propose an ideal model of transformation but deals with the collapse of modern urban ideals and their failure in addressing the future (eg. monotonous urban fabric, obsolete tower blocks, real estate bankruptcy, segregation, social and economic exclusion, land pollution).

R-Urban picks up from the Regional City the idea of regional dynamics, but based in this case on the bottom-up initiatives of inhabitants. It considers big scale processes but also small-scale phenomena. Global concerns are addressed locally, within the current existing conditions. Their transformation is realised throughout successive phases, by investing temporarily available spaces and creating short-term uses, which can prefigure future urban developments.

R-Urban incorporates also many of the Transition Town principles. However, resilience in R-Urban is not understood as an imperative to maintain the existing but as a necessity to transform and invent new possibilities, as a driver for collective creativity. Through its pilot projects and collective facilities, R-Urban tries to make visible the solidarity networks and ecological cycles that it creates. It does not have a specific scale or size and does not operate necessarily within a 'town', but negotiate its

own scale (a block, a neighbourhood, a district, etc.) depending on the actors' participation. There are not pre-existing communities to be targeted, but new communities are formed through the project. They have to agree on their own set of rules and principles to be followed in the management of the project.

Micro-social and micro-cultural resilience

In contrast to other initiatives that deal exclusively with sustainability from a technological and environmental angle, R-Urban states the importance of a general 'change of culture', understood as a change in *the way we do things* in order to change our future. The future is culturally shaped as much as the past is and this is because culture gives us '*the capacity to aspire*', as Arjun Appadurai says.^{xii}

R-Urban proposes new collective practices that in addition to ecological footprint reduction, contribute to reinventing proximity relations based on solidarities (i.e. ways of being involved and deciding collectively, sharing spaces and grouping facilities, rules and principles of co-habitation etc.). Urban life styles in neo-liberal societies have abandoned progressively the different forms of solidarity that were perceived as inadequate or outdated. Though, these relations of reciprocity constitute the fundament of social progress. In his analysis of the connections between economy and politics (inspired by Tarde's sociology), philosopher Maurizio Lazzarato critically describes the civilisation of 'progress' as 'a constantly renewed effort to replace the reciprocal possession by the unilateral possession'.^{xiii} Or, it is exactly these relations of reciprocity and solidarity that are missing in the urban environment today. The dwelling models proposed by R-Urban aim at restoring these solidarity relations through processes that implicitly produce sociability, shared spaces, common values and affective relations.

A dwelling unit such Ecohab, which is a housing cooperative including social flats and student residencies, creates conditions for neighbours from different social backgrounds to collectively manage the energy production, waste recycling and food growing within the unit. They will also manage the common space of the ground floor having the option to conduct productive or service activities together with other people in the neighbourhood: ie providing compost and other products to Agrocité, buying and selling products from/to Recyclab, etc. This is of course an ideal scenario, which implies that the pilot units will work well together and that enough people will buy into the scheme to make it viable long term.

In reality, we are aware that certain users and potential stakeholders will hesitate to abandon their current lifestyles and get involve in such an adventure as R-Urban, notably because during the current economic crisis, it is difficult to allow radical shifts in one's professional carrier, every error being penalized, sometimes in an irreversible way. Flexible workers and self-employed without secured jobs will potentially be less involved in such experience, given they don't have much time. Nevertheless, we count on the unemployed and those who need reskilling to become key participants in the project.

Transformations have to take place at micro-scale with each individual, each subjectivity and this is how a culture of resilience is constructed. As Rob Hopkins puts it: 'Resilience is not just an outer process: it is also an inner one, of becoming more

flexible, robust and skilled'^{xiv}. The culture of resilience includes processes of reskilling, skills-sharing, building social networks, learning from others, learning from other experiences. These micro-social and micro-cultural practices are most of the time related to lifestyles and individual gestures, (ie. growing food and collecting waste, sharing a car, exchanging tools and skills with neighbours, etc) they prompt attention to details, to singularities, to the capacity of creativity and innovation that operates at the level of everyday life. R-Urban maps into detail this local capacity to invent and transform, but also in parallel, the administrative constraints that block it, proposing ways of overpassing them through renewed policies and structures.

The 'right to resilience'

R-Urban claims urban sustainability as a civic right. In this sense, R-Urban creates the conditions for this 'right to sustainability' to be exerted not only as a right to access and *consume* sustainability (provided by a Welfare State) but as a right to *produce* sustainability (allowing citizen' involvement in decision taking and action). Sustainability is on the agenda of many urban projects today but this doesn't mean that all these projects are political in their approach to the issue.

A political ecology approach, such as R-Urban, does not only assert positively and uncritically development dynamics but questions also the processes that bring about uneven urban environments and the social consequences of urban sustainability'.^{xv} People like David Harvey argue that the transformation of urban spaces is a common right rather than an individual right because collective power is necessary to reshape urban processes. ^{xvi} Harvey speaks about 'the Right to the City' as citizen's liberty to access urban resources: 'it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city'.^{xvii} In this sense, R-Urban follows Harvey and enables the exercise of this 'right' through processes of appropriation, transformation, networking, use of the city infrastructure. The difference with him is maybe in scope: it is not so much a slogan to instigate a big global movement against the financial capital which controls urban developments in the world, but a means to empower inhabitants to propose alternative projects there where they live and to foster local and trans-local networks, testing methods of self-management, self-building and self-production. Here R-Urban is maybe closer to Lefebvre's more utopian idea of 'Right to the City'. Lefebvre imagines it as a far more emancipatory project, emphasising the need to freely propose alternative possibilities for urban life. He proposes a new methodology, called 'transduction' to encourage the creation of 'experimental utopias'. Framed by the existing reality, this would 'introduce rigour in invention and knowledge in utopia', as a way of avoiding irresponsible idealism.^{xviii} Lefebvre underlines the key role of urban imaginaries in understanding, challenging and transforming the urban and opening the door to a multiplicity of representations and interventions. From this point of view, R-Urban is a 'transductive' project, both rigorous and utopian, popular and experimental. It is a bottom-up approach based on the aggregation of many individual and collective interventions that decide to function together and complementary, forming metabolic networks which stimulate circulatory changes and simultaneously determine each other. Such networks will accommodate multiplicity and valorize imagination at all levels.

However, R-Urban could be suspected to align opportunistically with the 'Big Society' principles recently proposed by the UK Tory prime minister David Cameron

to translate ‘the idea of communities taking more control, of more volunteerism, more charitable giving, of social enterprises taking on a bigger role, of people establishing public services themselves’.^{xix} The essential difference is that R-Urban does not react directly to the burst of the financial crisis and does not embrace a programme of economic resilience from which the State is absent: such a programme promotes explicitly the unpaid work to mask the disappearance of welfare structures and the massive cuts in public services. The R-Urban strategy doesn’t relegate economic responsibility to citizen because the State is not capable to assume it anymore, but claims it as a social and political right to question the Power on its role and responsibility. Municipalities, and public institutions are involved as equal partners in the strategy, assuming their roles of enablers, funders and administrators. In addition to city residents and civic organisations, public institutions (ie. city councils, regeneration offices, public land trusts, schools, cultural agencies) are invited to take part in this experimental utopia and challenge their habits. It is not only to the inhabitants to ‘change themselves by changing the city’, as claimed by Harvey, but to those currently in charge with the city, too.

As such, R-Urban is not only about grassroots innovation to meet social, economic and environmental needs, but also about a political critique and an ideological statement, which affirms the necessity of new social and economic agencies based on alternatives to the dominant socio-technical regime. Through its self-organised constituency, R-Urban gives the means to all those involve to act locally at their own scale of dwelling and opens up possibilities for actions and activities that could change their future. It affirms their ‘right to resilience’.

Democratic ways of working and dwelling

The modes of production introduced by Fordism have provoked de-subjectivised labour relations through progressive accumulation of repetitive tasks, which by their fragmentarity and repetition destroyed the long-term visions of the labour goals and results.^{xx} The ultraliberal economy induced social relations empty of symbolic and subjective charge. Under the post-Fordist labour conditions, the construction of micro-social universes is realised only in connection with the leisure domains (cinema, holidays, sports, parties and more recently all sort of events organised via social networks). This free time sociality is alienating: it is meant to fill in an existential void, while being implemented insidiously and modifying radically the collective values and behaviours.

R-Urban tries to give back the possibility of re-appropriation and re-subjectivation of labour as fundamental ontological activity, while developing links and transversalities between work and emancipatory social, cultural, political and environmental values. The diversity of activities developed by R-Urban should allow not only a new assemblage and emerging agencies but also a gradual disassembling of a system in crisis. To slowly escape from the generalized footprint of the neo-liberal economy, which excludes other forms of material and symbolic exchange, we must dismantle one by one our ties to the market system and go out of the system to make possible the change. We must to undo, to dis-assemble —*des-agencer*, as Deleuze and Guattari might say— and lean out of the neo-liberal logic in order to re-assemble new ethical, environmental and long term ecological agencies.^{xxi} This re-assemblage is a collective act based on the conviction of each participant. The R-Urban strategy relies

on 'off-market' elements that can potentially leave the system (ie. interstitial spaces, community associations, marginalized or emerging practices, etc.) and can be integrated in new agencies and collective processes of re-assemblage.

The R-Urban resilience promoted with minimal means, paradoxically allows for more social, cultural, and subjective diversity. This is similar to ecology where, as Clément noted, "the poverty of a soil [in a pedological sense] is a gage of diversity"^{xxii} The minimal economy of means implies also a space which is not over designed and has provision for a diversity of agencies and reconfigurations; it guarantees a capacity of welcoming newcomers into the project. From another point of view, this simplicity can more easily support new assemblages, as well as a necessary deterritorialisation of the process.

The accumulation of numerous small changes that will form a large-scale strategy depends on the long term involvement of individual participants and on the collective dynamics around their initiatives. R-Urban aims for an urban environment which can adapt itself to the aspirations of every city dweller. This should be constituted progressively, by welcoming the most varied range of activities proposed by all kind of residents, including activities developed in free time. In a second time, these free time activities could evolve into economic, cultural and ecological initiatives that will gradually replace the current productive and re-productive relations and will fundamentally define more democratic and more sustainable ways of working and living.

R-Urban recognises the condition of 'dweller' as political and promotes an emancipatory politics of living within populations who are usually limited in their existential choice by their social condition and the spatial, social and cultural experiences they have access to.

'The democracy—as Rancière says— is neither in the realm of communal law assigned by juridical-political texts, nor in the realm of passions. It is first and foremost the place of all these places where factuality is affected by contingency and egalitarian resolution. In this way, the street, the factory or the university can be places for such resurgence'.^{xxiii} The collective spaces initiated by R-Urban will constitute, just as in other aaa's projects, places of permanent negotiation, places of learning by doing and bottom-up reconstruction of political fundamentals of democracy: equality of representation, general interest and common good, liberty and responsibility, collective governance, etc. These places are open to reconfiguration, introducing in accordance to the involved persons, dynamics of self-management, of responsibility and a sense of initiative and negotiation. This is the basis of any democratic functioning.

In R-Urban, we try to create spaces of self-managed sociality: a sociality which is self-regulated and in permanent reconstruction. We try to create conditions for what Rancière called a "new sociality based on equality of conditions. This sociality will bring its providential solutions to the regulatory mechanism between the social and the political. What the most informed politics do not manage to do, the production of a self-regulated sociality (...), the providential movement of equalising social conditions will achieve".^{xxiv} In the long term, R-Urban could contribute to the reconnection of the political with the social through a more democratic way of dwelling.

Ecolomy of commons

R-Urban participative networks will generate a multitude of micro-social dynamics (bottom-up, local, trans-local, rural and urban, etc). Based on trust and solidarity, these participative networks should increase the capacity of action across different social and cultural milieus and structure in time a new long-term social pact. In his seminal book *Freefall*, Joseph Stiglitz explains the roots of the current economic crisis and notices that ‘even within a market economy, trust is the oil that makes a society function’.^{xxv} Destabilised by egocentric behaviours, the social trust need to be reconstructed collectively and on a daily basis. The ‘oil that makes a society function’ needs regeneration and needs to infiltrate the practices of everyday life.

In this sense we need to replace the obsessive ‘purchasing power’, the drive for selling and consuming, by the desire to self-produce locally, to reuse and recycle, to preserve and transmit, to share services and mutualise space through collective management. R-Urban proposes a change of mentality and social and economic vision, which will preserve at the same time the attention to the other and the care for the common future.

As Stiglitz demonstrates, we need to orient ourselves towards a new political economy that will ‘reconstruct the balance between the Market and the State, between individual and collective, between man and nature, between means and goals’.^{xxvi} The current market economy should quickly evolve into an ecological economy: what we call *an ecolomy*. This is the direction to be taken if we want the economy to be adapted to different territorial scales and developed on a long-term basis under principles of solidarity and sharing. This attitude will not only change the way we manage our economy but also the way we manage our lives.

By introducing a capacity of multiple collective production (green productive spaces, active dwelling, hubs for local economy, etc.) R-Urban enables new forms of ecolomy within the existing and a whole production of commons.^{xxvii} The question of the commons is at the heart of discussions about democracy today. In some of their recent texts, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri define the commons as something which is not discovered but produced: ‘We call “biopolitical production” the current dominant model to underline the fact that it involves not only a material production in straight economic terms, but also it affects and contributes to produce all other aspects of social life: i.e. economic, cultural and political. This biopolitical production and the increased commons that it creates, support the possibility of democracy today’.^{xxviii} A sustainable democracy should be based on a long term politics of the commons but also on social solidarities understood as commons. ‘Creating value today is about networking subjectivities and capturing, diverting, appropriating what they do with the commons that they began’.^{xxix}

According to Negri, the contemporary revolutionary project is about this capturing, diverting, appropriating, reclaiming of the commons as a constituent process. It is at the same time a re-appropriation and a reinvention. This undertaking needs new categories and institutions, forms of management and governance, space and actors – an entire infrastructure that is both material and virtual.

R-Urban tries to create this new infrastructure, which is at the same time a re-appropriation and a reinvention of new forms of commons: from collective self-managed facilities to collective knowledge and skills, and forms of groups and

networks. The facilities and uses proposed by R-Urban will be shared and disseminated at different scales, constituting progressively a network open to different users, including adaptable elements and processes based on open source knowledge. The resilient city is a city of sharing, empathy and cooperation; it is a city of commons

We have learned from our previous projects (ie. Ecobox, Passage 56)^{xxx} that in order to avoid oppositional blockage and time losing, one can tactically use space that is easier to have access to. Rather than buying land, the R-Urban land trust tries to overpass the fixation on the idea of property and negotiate land for use (short term and long term) rather than for possessing. The right of use as opposed to the right to possess is an intrinsic quality of the commons. As in the previous projects, we specially focus on interstices and urban spaces which escape, even if only temporarily, from the financial speculation. This interstitial strategy involves spaces, actors, local partners, time. This is also Holloway's position who, after having analyzed different forms and initiatives to transform the society, concludes that 'the only possible way to think about radical change in society is within its interstices' and that 'the best way of operating within interstices is to organise them'.^{xxxi} This is also what R-Urban does: it organizes a series of interstices (spatial, temporal, human) and transform them into common facilities; it sets up another type of urban space (neither public, nor private) hosting reinvented collective practices and collaborative organisations: a network of interstices to reinvent the commons in metropolitan contexts.

Pioneering R-Urban

R-Urban is on the way. During the next couple of years, we will nurture the diverse economies and initiate progressive practices within the R-Urban network. We will reactivate cultures of collaboration and sharing. We have designed it as a process and infrastructure that could grow in time, being easy to appropriate and multiply. We will be testing it for a while, before leaving it to proliferate by itself. Will it be successful? For how long? These are questions to be answers in few years time. For instant it is a visionary attempt into the real towards a more democratic and bottom up process of resilience regeneration in a suburban context; a process which is designed specifically to be appropriated and followed up by others in similar contexts.

No radical change within the current society will happen without the involvement of the many. This change needs to be multiplied and disseminated rhizomatically, involving a multitude of processes of self-emancipation of persons who chose to change their current lifestyle. As suggested by Holloway, 'if we want to take seriously the idea of self-emancipation (...), we need to look at people around us – the people at work, in the street, in the supermarket – and accept their own way of being rebellious, despite of their external appearance. In a self-emancipated world, people shouldn't be taken for what they seem. They are not contained by their assigned identities, which they overpass and break into pieces, going against-and-beyond them'^{xxxii}.

R-Urban is for the people who are now at work, in the street, in the supermarket. It is to them to take it further, against-and-beyond-themselves, towards a radical change of society.

ⁱ This paper is an expanded version of a text published initially in Tyszczyk R, Smith J, Clark N, and Butcher, M. (2012) *ATLAS: Geography, Architecture and Change in an Interdependent World*, London: Black Dog Publishing. It is reprinted with permission from the editor and publisher.

ⁱⁱ One of the initial moments marking this global awareness formation was certainly the first UN conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm 1972, followed up by Nairobi (1982), Rio (1992), Johannesburg (2002) and Rio+20 (2012). During the last years, these kinds of summits have been multiplied and diversified in terms of both scope and participating actors. The Copenhagen Climate Change conference in 2009 is one of the recent examples exposing the blockage resulting from the growing conflicts and oppositional interests of the big international actors (governments, corporations, NGOs etc.) which paralyze decisions at global scale.

ⁱⁱⁱ Transition Towns, Incredible Edible, Continuous Productive Urban Landscapes (CPULs), Ecovillage networks, to name only few, are such initiatives that have started at local scale and have further developed into extended networks.

^{iv} See <http://r-urban.net>

^v A fab lab is short for fabrication laboratory, a small scale workshop with different machines and tools that enable users to produce “almost anything”, see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fablab>, accessed 26 November 2012

^{vi} See more about the R-Urban cooperative land trust on <http://r-urban.net/en/property/>

^{vii} Gorz A. (2008), *Manifeste Utopia*, Brest: Edition Parangon, p.13

^{viii} Maguire B., Cartwright S.(2010), Assessing a community’s capacity to manage change: A resilience approach to social assessment, retrieved on <http://learningforsustainability.net/susdev/resilience.php>.

^{ix} We are joining here those political ecologists who criticize the shallow understanding of politics, power and social construction promoted within the resilience rhetoric (see for example Hornborg A. (2009) *Zero-Sum World: Challenges in Conceptualizing Environmental Load Displacement and Ecologically Unequal Exchange in the World-System*. *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, 5/3-4, Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore and Washington DC: Sage publication, pp. 237-265

^x Holloway J., (2006). Un mouvement ‘contre-et-au-delà’. À propos du débat sur mon livre *Changer le monde sans prendre le pouvoir*. *Variations* 18/04, pp17-21. Retrieved from <http://theoriecritique.free.fr/pdf/v7/V7.pdf>

^{xi} Hopkins R. (2008), *The Transition Handbook: From Oil Dependency to Local Resilience*, Green Books

^{xii} Appadurai A. (2004). *The Capacity to Aspire*. V. Rao, M. Walton (Eds.), *Cultural and Public Action*, Stanford: Stanford University Press

^{xiii} Lazzarato M. (2002). *Puissance de l’invention, La psychologie économique de Gabriel Tarde contre l’économie politique*, Paris: Les Empêcheurs de penser en rond, p.354

^{xiv} Hopkins R. (2010) *What communities can Do*. Retrieved from <http://www.postcarbon.org/Reader/PCReader-Hopkins-Communities.pdf>

^{xv} Some of these ideas were developed in Clare Brass C, Bowden F., McGeevor K. *Co-designing Urban Opportunities*. Retrieved from <http://www.scibe.eu/publications/>, accessed 5 May, 2011

^{xvi} Harvey D.(2008), *The right to the City*, *New Left Review* 53/9-10. p.23

^{xvii} *ibid.*

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- ^{xviii} Lefebvre H.(1996), *Writtings on Cities*, New York: Blackwell, p. 129-30
- ^{xix} See David Cameron's speech on Big Society, 14th February 2011. Retrived from <http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/speeches-and-transcripts/2011/02/pms-speech-on-big-society-60563> accessed 2 July 2011
- ^{xx} These ideas have been developed notably in the work of Ivan Illich and Andre Gorz.
- ^{xxi} On disassembling- 'des-agencer', see Deleuze G., Guattari F (1980)., *Capitalisme et schizophrénie 2, Mille Plateaux*, 1980, Les Éditions de Minuit, p 17 e.s.
- ^{xxii} Clément, G. (2004), *Manifeste du Tiers paysage*, Paris: Sujet/Objet, p. 188.
- ^{xxiii} Rancière J (1998). *Au bord du politique*. Paris: La Fabrique -Editions, p.126
- ^{xxiv} *ibid* p. 36-37
- ^{xxv} Stiglitz J (2010), *Freefall, Free Markets and the Sinking of the Global Economy*, New York: Norton & Company Inc, 2010
- ^{xxvi} *Ibid*. p. 516
- ^{xxvii} The 'commons' traditionally defined the elements in an environmental space and natural resources – say, forests, atmosphere, rivers, pasture – of which the management and use was shared by the members of a community. They were spaces that no one could own but everyone could use. The term has now been enlarged to include all resources (whether material or virtual) that are collectively shared by a population.
- ^{xxviii} Hardt M., Negri A, *Multitude, Guerre et démocratie à l'âge de l'Empire*. Paris: La Découverte, 2004, p.9-10
- ^{xxix} J. Ravel J. and Negri A..(2008) *Inventer le Commun des Hommes. Multitudes* 31. Paris: La Différence p. 7.
- ^{xxx} The projects of ECObox (Paris 18e) and Passage 56, St. Blaise Street (Paris 20e) by aaa consist in the interim occupation by residents of interstitial spaces and temporary available plots issued from demolitions and waiting for development. These plots are transformed into self-managed spaces which host collective activities: gardening, cooking, cultural events, political debates, etc. This occupation which is meant to be temporary, is able to last in time due to the mobility of the infrastructure and the expansion of the strategy on the territory, allowing the projects to move and be reinstalled opportunistically in new locations. More on www.urbantactics.org .
- ^{xxxi} Holloway J. (2006). Un mouvement 'contre-et-au-delà'. À propos du débat sur mon livre *Changer le monde sans prendre le pouvoir*. *Variations* 18/04, p.17-21 Retrived from <http://theoriecritique.free.fr/pdf/v7/V7.pdf>
- ^{xxxii} *ibid*. p. 21