

ROUNDTABLE #2 (URBAN ACTION:MATERIAL AND REGENERATION)

Participants:



Julian Agyeman, Professor of Urban and Environmental Policy and Planning at Tufts University in Medford, Massachusetts, USA; the originator of the concept of «just sustainabilities», an environmental social scientist, the author of over 160 publications.



Elena Rocchi, M·Arch ETSAB Barcelona, Architect, Teaching artist, former Fellow at Taliesin The Frank Lloyd Wright School of Architecture and Current Ph.D. candidate in Theory and History of Architecture at ETSAB Barcelona. She has been a Lecturer at the Architectural School at ESARQ-UIC, Barcelona, Spain, and Thesis professor/Director of Master «Interior Design for Commercial Spaces» at Istituto Europeo di Design (IED) in Barcelona, Spain. She has been Senior Architect and Office Director of Miralles Tagliabue Associated Architects from 1995 till 2008. She gave lectures and Workshops in Spain, England, Germany, USA, France, Italy, Greece, Denmark, Mexico, South Africa, Argentina.



Alina Jeronimo, Architect, Post Master degree in Sustainable Development and Earth Architecture by CRAterre Institute, co founder of CAS (Lisbon, Portugal). She began her professional career in rehabilitation of «Post-Pombalino» buildings in Lisbon City Hall where she supervised during the construction works of wattle and daub techniques and anti-seismic structures. In Barcelona she had the opportunity to work in several architecture studios such as Ramon Sanabria, Arturo Frediani, Josep Mias and Alday y Jover.



Paulo Carneiro, Architect, Post Master Degree in Sustainable Development and Earth Architecture by CRAterre Institute, cofounder of CAS (Lisbon, Portugal). Began his professional career in Barcelona where he worked in several architecture studios: Enric Miralles / Benedetta Tagliabue (EMBT), Ramón Sanabria and Alfredo Arribas.



[Tatiana Afonina](#), art historian, researcher, the author of publications, a participant of International and All-Russian science conferences, editor-in-chief at BERLOGOS.

Tatiana Afonina:

-Within the frame of a cycle of roundtables «Sustainable cities and architecture», today we'll talk about urban actions, its material, and the process of regeneration. Can we consider urban art (in all its expressions) as a tool of transforming cities and creating social and symbolic narratives? Where it should be placed?

Paulo Carneiro:

-Urban art or similar interventions will be more durable and have more impact if needed by a specific community with a specific narrative.

Julian Agyeman:

-I think we need art, all kinds of art, to make «place» in our increasing intercultural cities. This place-making can be in any urban space including streets.

Alina Jeronimo:

-In my point of view, urban art can work as a tool to transform cities, unifying and linking communities to express their own cultural values. Urban art is mostly in contexts of degradation, abandoned or of lack of use of access and can be potentiated and expressed in several ways: buildings, murals, paintings, sculptures, green spaces, squares, streets.

Elena Rocchi:

-We need cities.

Tatiana Afonina:

-Don't we have them?

Elena Rocchi:

-Each city is process, it is not an event. It needs time. We hear a lot these days about «Place keeping», very different to me from place making. When I say that we need cities, I intend that we want our cities real. So the question is «How does «real» look like?» One strategy to try to answer might be starting to recognize what is sacred of the land and of city for a community. Art might be a way, a quick one. But it is not enough. It is a way to ask citizens to help architects for re-building the public realm. Can we ask them to make evident our society's stories and their messages? Can we compile data, memories, and ideas citizens to have of their city to learn from them and help them to improve their own ability to analyze their own urban reality? How do we leverage a civic engagement project? We need to keep cities. Memory is all. And there is a place, where everyone remembers that identity. Art there can renew the memory by doing events as rituals.

Paulo Carneiro:

-Good point here by Elena and Julian. So in this «alive city», collective memory is an important factor.

Julian Agyeman:

-Just as Elena says, each city is process, it is not an event, in the same way «place» is not fixed but fluid, related to and embedded in the socio-cultural relations of local populations, so we can expect, or demand diverse interpretations of «art» from our increasingly diverse and different cities.

Alina Jeronimo:

-Great! And how can citizens help architects re-building the cities?

Elena Rocchi:

-By inhabiting as we do every day, using the city as the frame of our personal stories now. We can make this evident with art, I believe, and manifest it.

Julian Agyeman:

-We don't help architects, we are the architects!! Guerrilla, tactical and other urbanisms are democratizing the city spaces and places.

Paulo Carneiro:

-(Smiling) Yes, citizens are all architects! And I like this vision of «making the city» as a «theater scenario»!

Elena Rocchi:

-I know I am Roman (*smiling*). I grow up, performing my city every day due to its 27 centuries of physical contents. Now that I am in the vastly nothingness of the Sonoran desert environment I understand it better, in the distance.

Tatiana Afonina:

-If all citizens are architects, should the process of art expression (any expression) be regularized somehow or it should live by its own life?

Alina Jeronimo:

-I think precisely not to have regulations in art, giving space to improvisation.

Julian Agyeman:

-Jane Jacobs' described the «sidewalk ballet», where people shape the street through a choreographed chaos. That's as true today (even truer) than 1961.

Paulo Carneiro:

-Yes, for one side there is the alive city, with guerrilla neighborhoods such as informal settlements, but in the other way there is the too much planned and designed city as a piece of a museum. Rome is quite vibrant and not too much controlled by design as we see it our days.

-Elena Rocchi:

-People generally value design and architecture in their lives, but only a small amount value designers and architects as contributors to society as citizens. This is changing. Tactical Urbanism and all series of tactics inspire and empower engaged citizens, urban designers, land use planners, architects, and policymakers all together to become key actors in the transformation of their communities. They allow seeing how our neighborhoods could be by identifying and observing existing social structures to allow them to flourish. They provide opportunity without building. But it's not enough.

Julian Agyeman:

-Tactical urbanism is working to revitalize the art of the public sidewalk ballet, which has been lost in many places throughout the world to private automobiles, suburbs, indoor malls, and restrictive laws.

No, tactical urbanism is not enough but it is a welcome disruption of expert-led, sterile planning/architecture.

Elena Rocchi:

-Yes, but it's more complex. The process is so complex, just because a city is made by various factors, a real city, I mean, not an event.

Paulo Carneiro:

-It is very complex indeed. The meaning of city to start with!

Elena Rocchi:

-It is a complex relationship between governance, community identity, material culture, and place.

As an Assistant Professor at ASU the Design School, and Interior Design programs I have had the opportunity to moderate a morning breakout on Design & Architecture at the ArtPlace 2016 Grantee Summit organized by ArtPlace America and hold in Phoenix this past April. With the contribution of two ArtPlace-funded projects, I moved my understanding and the one of others from the ethical, methodological, and epistemological approaches to community design and planning by indigenous American communities to the role of subsistence food traditions in connecting native and nonnative residents in one Alaska's most integrated cities (Re-Locate project). I have learned so much from the understanding of the same problems in different places...

Julian Agyeman:

-Food is art, food is performance. Food is not only about nutrition! Foodways are our cultural traditions related to food, autotopographies are our performances around food in the land- or cityscape.

Alina Jeronimo:

-In that sense of food production: gardens had always been the expression of art in society because they show their own time.

Today we live in an interesting moment where there is a progressive opening to a growth of vegetable gardens and natural spaces within the cities, improving quality of life.

Tatiana Afonina:

-Coming back to communities' identity, how it's shaped within a city?

Paulo Carneiro:

-Interventions in the city have to integrate communities and to be part of their narratives, rituals. Design is not independent from culture. At least should not be.

Elena Rocchi:

-The city is the shape of the identity, art is contained as the expression of our culture, I believe.

Julian Agyeman:

-A city doesn't or shouldn't have a fixed identity.

Elena Rocchi:

-To me, it would be crucial to observe more experiments of others that are happening in this difficult time of change and migration crisis of our cities. It is crucial we learn together, and observe how others learn and way of engagement with a community, how they listen, and how empathetically connect to the vitality of that community.

Paulo Carneiro:

-Julian and Elena gave an interesting point before. Cities today are developing in massive heterogeneous societies.

Julian Agyeman:

-Take Toronto, the most diverse city on the planet. What's its «identity»?

Paulo Carneiro:

-Yes, not a fixed identity: several ethnical minorities, urban tribes and philosophies... infinite!

Elena Rocchi:

-In Rome we have one clear identity; we call it «Romanity».

Paulo Carneiro:

-And romans defend that! That's something very roman!

Julian Agyeman:

-Boston is now a majority minority city but that's not the identity, projected to you, guys, who don't live here! And are the African immigrants in Rome of that opinion Elena? Are they «allowed» Romanity?

Elena Rocchi:

-It is not an opinion. It is an historical fact – Romanity, not Romantic.

Julian Agyeman:

-Who decides identity?

Elena Rocchi:

-Culture, time. Citizens agree on something and they build it into something together over time, they keep it during generations, they renew that memory and art it is part of it. We have a simple statue and we keep it in a place to remind us every day that culture we belong to.

Alina Jeronimo:

-We all still live with «Romanized» base city standards.

Paulo Carneiro:

-But how can memory be preserved in our time: with global networking, with so many migrations (forced or voluntary)?

Elena Rocchi:

-Well, now we are in a moment where the main paradigm is change.

Julian Agyeman:

-Absolutely. You are talking of very fixed ideas, not fluid ones, Elena.

Elena Rocchi:

-Ideas are fixed in fluidity. Now the problem is complex, now it is a nomadic moment.

Paulo Carneiro:

-In Europe history is fundamental to the interpretation of cities. But maybe in the USA it's not so much? Why? Is it necessary positive?

Elena Rocchi:

-Where the idea of rooting identity in movement is crucial to be observed. You are right. Look, this place where I am living now, the United States, is full of Italians. I feel really at home. I still make my Lavazza coffee here.

Julian Agyeman:

-I think history is important in both Europe and the USA. I'm just saying that places, identities, cultures are not fixed, but fluid. I'm African-British, living in the USA! I'm cosmopolitan and I love it!

Elena Rocchi:

-Sure, I'm nomad.

Paulo Carneiro:

-(*Smiling*) Of course, and in the future even more people will be changing place and country. How can we preserve memory?

Elena Rocchi:

-Within yourself.

Julian Agyeman:

-I don't hold on to any identities but live in and celebrate the richness and hybridity of mine and other people's cultures. But yes, memory is important.

Paulo Carneiro:

-Yes! I agree, I lived 10 years outside of the country I was born and when I returned, there was a shock: buildings and public spaces were different.

Elena Rocchi:

-The million of refugees in the world is showing us, the Architects, new challenges in our profession and telling us that we need to be able to find moments to share experiences «as a way to respond to a growing and diverse population, ever-shifting economic conditions, new technologies, and a changing climate» as Andres Duany says speaking of tactical Urbanism as a Short-term

Action for Long-term Change. And learn again how to learn. How do we learn to learn?
University is a good context to simulate a test.

Tatiana Afonina:

-What keeps memory in our cities? How do we «create» memory in them?

Elena Rocchi:

-We don't create memory. How did cities look like at the beginning of their existence? They were slums, growing organisms with a sort of a vibrating informality that happened in a place because of the necessity of plugging themselves into an existing natural infrastructure. And that story started to be told to others.

Alina Jeronimo:

-Intervening in communities and with communities. If communities are integrated and engaged in the processes, they will feel more responsible and will protect the interventions and with the time they will develop it by themselves and even grow it and add their own vision and memory in the city.

Paulo Carneiro:

-Yes, and usually there is a natural, «inevitable» process of «gentrification».

Julian Agyeman:

-I think we're talking in silos, as if «cultures» are separate. I want to use a quote from a paper by Bloomfield and Bianchini (2002, 6): «Cities need to develop policies which priorities funding for projects where different cultures intersect, «contaminate» each other and hybridize ... In other words, city governments should promote cross-fertilization across all cultural boundaries, between «majority» and «minorities», «dominant» and «sub» cultures, localities, classes, faiths, disciplines and genres, as the source of cultural, social, political and economic innovation». This is essential if we are to realize the intercultural city as a city of possibility not as a problem....

Cultural contamination! I love it! And I think art is a medium for cultural contamination.

Paulo Carneiro:

-It's an awesome perspective. Even in territory, cities are no more a clear central core.

Alina Jeronimo:

-As you said before – a «Guerrilla» camp.

Paulo Carneiro:

-But in those terms and in spite of vibrant informal settlements, Elena is right – cities as Rome are something special and we cannot create it.

Elena Rocchi:

-Time. We just need to give cities time.

Paulo Carneiro:

-Yes, time!

Julian Agyeman:

-We need to give people time. People are cities.

Alina Jeronimo:

-Layers of time and culture.

Paulo Carneiro:

-So people in fact just need good infrastructure...the rest grow by layers and in time.

Elena Rocchi:

-The scope of architecture is to eliminate the separation in between us, and the arising in people of consciousness of belonging to a place. Architecture is what it can do. And art facilitate the process of engagement, it helps to leverage resonances of commonalities.

We should share knowledge and grow by collaborating.

Paulo Carneiro:

-Absolutely! If people feel represented by art or architecture they will accept it, live it and transform it.

Julian Agyeman:

-My latest book is «Sharing Cities».

Alina Jeronimo:

-Julian, what is your vision in there?

Julian Agyeman:

-I've pasted the blurb from the book cover. I think it gives a good idea: «The future of humanity is urban, and the nature of urban space enables, and necessitates, sharing—of resources, goods and services, experiences. Yet traditional forms of sharing have been undermined in modern cities by social fragmentation and commercialization of the public realm. In Sharing Cities, Duncan McLaren and Julian Agyeman argue that the intersection of cities' highly networked physical space with new digital technologies and new mediated forms of sharing offers cities the opportunity to connect smart technology to justice, solidarity, and sustainability. McLaren and Agyeman explore the opportunities and risks for sustainability, solidarity, and justice in the changing nature of sharing.

McLaren and Agyeman propose a new «sharing paradigm», which goes beyond the faddish «sharing economy»—seen in such ventures as Uber and TaskRabbit—to envision models of sharing that are not always commercial but also communal, encouraging trust and collaboration. Detailed case studies of San Francisco, Seoul, Copenhagen, Medellín, Amsterdam, and Bengaluru (formerly Bangalore) contextualize the authors' discussions of collaborative consumption and production; the shared public realm, both physical and

virtual; the design of sharing to enhance equity and justice; and the prospects for scaling up the sharing paradigm through city governance. They show how sharing could shift values and norms, enable civic engagement and political activism, and rebuild a shared urban commons. Their case for sharing and solidarity offers a powerful alternative for urban futures to conventional «race-to-the-bottom» narratives of competition, enclosure, and division».

Elena Rocchi:

-Sharing is crucial. I am going to buy your book, Julian. Thanks for sharing!

Julian Agyeman:

-I'll sign it for you!

Elena Rocchi:

-Please. There is a story here of a Native American Medicine Man to a patient: «When is the last time you listened to the stories of others?» There, graffiti might be a way to share.

Paulo Carneiro:

-In that perspective urban art is sharing narratives and moments of a community and expressing it in ways that usually have no time or place for expression.

Elena Rocchi:

-Yes.

Julian Agyeman:

-Absolutely. How do we develop shared narratives of the intercultural city, where there are many stories, without privileging one narrative over another?

Paulo Carneiro:

-Breaking prejudices.

Elena Rocchi:

-So, you know, Romulus, the one who invented Rome, found a place that belongs to everyone, a part of the body of the city, liberated from the property issues.

Paulo Carneiro:

-I think this «common place» makes the city and measures its vibrancy.

Alina Jeronimo:

-But diversity in a city is very positive.

Julian Agyeman:

-Diversity is positive, yes, Alina, but how do we agree a shared narrative of the intercultural city. Show me a Mayor who has/can do this, who can weave together different stories into one unifying narrative.

Alina Jeronimo:

-Promoting people activities.

Elena Rocchi:

-We need to develop a common language. We need experiments to do this, we need time, and we need money to invest in this, money for experimenting in finding a common language.

Julian Agyeman:

-Yes.

Paulo Carneiro:

-Interesting. Are we talking about an alternative type of currency?

Elena Rocchi:

-Sure.

Julian Agyeman:

-Millennium Park in Chicago has tried to develop this unifying narrative.

Elena Rocchi:

-Yes, we need to share cities experiments.

Julian Agyeman:

-«Designed by Spanish artist Jaume Plensa, the Crown Fountain in Millennium Park is a major addition to the city's world-renowned public art collection.

The fountain consists of two 50-foot glass block towers at each end of a shallow reflecting pool. The towers project video images from a broad social spectrum of Chicago citizens, a reference to the traditional use of gargoyles in fountains, where faces of mythological beings were sculpted with open mouths to allow water, a symbol of life, to flow out.

Plensa adapted this practice by having faces of Chicago citizens projected on LED screens and having water flow through an outlet in the screen to give the illusion of water spouting from their mouths.

The collection of faces, Plensa's tribute to Chicagoans, was taken from a cross-section of 1,000 residents.

The fountain's water features operate during the year between mid-spring and mid-fall, while the images remain on view year-round».

It is both fabulous and moving to see the faces of all Chicagoans morph into each other. Cosmopolis.



Elena Rocchi:

-Jaume Plensa is amazing, he is from my other city – Barcelona, my other identity.

Paulo Carneiro:

-Tatiana, we should invite Jaume next time!

Tatiana Afonina:

-For sure!