

## Re-framing Partnerships

Extract from the pre-event for *Panel 6: Design for Partnerships for Change*

The pre-event for [Panel 6: Design for Partnerships for Change](#) of the UIA World Congress 2023 CPH Science Track took place during the 12<sup>th</sup> Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art in the afternoon of 10 June 2022 at the Academy of Arts at Hanseatenweg. The event unfolded as a conversation and was the second of three conversations over three days, which inhabited Sandi Hilal and Alessandro Petti's installation *Ente Di Decolonizzazione* (Entity of Decolonization) – BORGIO.

Participants sat on the floor in approximately a circle. This way of sitting also facilitated the initial round of thoughts to be spoken out loud. Participants took the word one by one, passing the word from one to the next in the circle. They either responded to, or made emphasis on, what was said before, or they made new propositions. As the conversation moved on, a free flow took over based on further ideas, thoughts, comments to be introduced or added in the conversation. The pre-event was preceded by the conversation the day before, and continued with another one the day after. Throughout the conversation it was possible to follow two main discussions around **abstraction of knowledge** and **collaboration in practice**.

Here we bring a text written by Panel Chairs Merve Bedir and Sandi Hilal based on transcripts of the conversation.

### The problem of Abstraction

During the conversation, one of the main issues around modernization was raised as alienation. Alienation of the individual to their surroundings, community, environment, by defining a role and position to the individual while their surroundings are designed and constructed anew. If we want to break the patterns of modern thought, such as the idea of the grid, the feeling of comfort, the experience of being on the right track, alienation is an important issue to deal with. How do we avoid alienating from society and environment? Then, this question can be furthered in the context of a conference; i.e. how can a conference be a place of avoiding alienation and redefining knowledge production as an essential and concrete part of daily life? A conference where participants consider coming into conversation with each other rather than only thinking of scientific presentations could be an approach. This way a conference may make its essential purpose, a conversation, possible. Another approach may be to bring emotions and vulnerability to the formation of knowledge, and by doing this changing the tone of the conversation, and acknowledging subjectivity, which could eventually lead to making possibilities visible and available without becoming a missionary of them. Neutrality is one of the ways of abstraction and holds strongly on alienation.

Another comment was about gatekeeping on knowledge. Gatekeeping at a conference would include accessibility of language and vocabulary, accessibility and plurality of references and methods, without disciplinary hierarchies. What is discipline? What are quotations for? Who is a peer? In this sense, chairs of sessions are the gatekeepers in conferences, and they are responsible for making sure that a safe space is created for knowledge to be shared widely among all participants. Accessibility of knowledge is disabled by making it a universal absolute. This narrative needs to be changed: Tell a different story other than what is in the mainstream circulation. Go to the roots. Change the terms of the conversation. Telling other narratives, looking for and sharing other ways of knowing will allow other processes of worldmaking. Modernity makes a one and only, abstract world by the ideas of neutrality and conceptualizing knowledge. Then, why do we have to be neutral?

Why can't we engage with generating knowledge for finding other ways of being in the world?

A larger comment and expectation from conferences today was that they plant seeds that will disperse and make sure that the conversation continues.

### **The question of Practice**

The question of practice raises from a need to acknowledge those practices that bring back everyday life experiences, different paths and forms of knowledge production, and storytelling that inform our understanding of design. Through this, we re-frame main spatial concepts such as design, communities, commons, and participation, among others, and thus call for new partnerships, as an active way to rethink and transform the disciplinary and discursive practice of architecture.

Some considerations around the practice focus on autonomy. Keeping the autonomy of practice while working with institutions, making sure that practices are able to continue managing themselves in all circumstances. Thinking such also requires a discussion on money and economy, its distribution and organisation. Another consideration is on collaborations. Crucially important is to form collaborations across different practices and not remain fixed in certain positions but open up to the formation of partnerships. While doing this, choosing generosity over ego, choosing collaborations at the level of emotions remain essential. The conference can emphasize and bring forward such practices, collaborations, and their contracts.

Another point of discussion in the pre-event was about re-interpreting the institution. The possibility of reusing and misusing them, and letting them perform in different ways. Making sure that practices don't depend on institutions more than institutions depend on them. There was a proposal on how to re-organise institutions, by working on the expectations, reusing and repurposing them instead of eliminating and erasing: Think of repurposing as creating a virus that is also contagious and let it into the modernist structure of the institution.

The final point was about thinking of what we do and why we do it. If we know why we do what we want to do, then how comes naturally, and this responds to many questions on methodology, in terms of research and practice. The conference should essentially address this as one of its main points of conversation.

*[Panel 6: Design for Partnerships for Change](#)* focuses on de-framing and re-framing ideas on agency, community, participation, commons, design, and rethinking on land, based on plural understandings of communities beyond the care -giver and -receiver, participation beyond the asymmetrical relationship between "organizers" and the participating communities, commons as spaces created by the interaction of people, design as challenging dominant structures by strengthening people-centered space making, agency as the decision-making power and the proximities that different communities have amongst each other, and thinking on just transitions of land.