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AN INTRODUCTION TO “THE RIGHT TO THE CITY IN A GLOBAL WORLD”

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Context and situation of the contemporary city in the globalised world

Fifty years have gone by since Henri Lefebvre first wrote about the right to the city. His reflections on urban life return even more strongly in the present context, the century of the city par excellence. For the first time in human history the world is urban. In the era of globalisation, even the city wants to be global.

The city, the stage of social relationships, welcomes in the twenty-first century in a state of staggering turmoil and speed that show it to be a landscape full of contradictions. Because of the uncompromising acceleration of this evolution, people are relegated to the level of inhabitants of this huge built-up territory over which they have lost all control. Citizens, those who intervene in the governance of their city, *conditio sine qua non* for living there, have seen this privilege removed. City and citizen have been uncoupled.

The city of the new century is no longer a whole, but rather the sum of (*non*)places united on an indefinite continuum that even tells us which way to look, showing us only what must be seen and hiding away everything that must remain out of sight. The displacement and *invisibilisation* of some sectors of the population demonstrates that when a party is of no interest, it is expelled and sacrificed for the common good. However, no parties can be sacrificed without risking the death of the city as a whole.

The city, which throughout history has absorbed humanity's advances and changes, is the accumulation of uses and the accumulation of people, the accumulation of stories and the accumulation of events. This dynamism is based on its vital essence, which is the origin of today's public spaces. But even they have turned their back on the primeval relations that are the reason for their origins. Citizens are calling for a very different tune: the time to assimilate events and spaces, to identify them as our own and add them to the collective memory so they become part of our identity as a people.

The present monograph, *The right to the city in a global world*, focuses on a globalised world where the greatest inequalities are reflected in the city. An urban world in which more



than 15% of the population live in poverty. A global world in which historical inequalities are magnified and perpetuated, bound up with new forms of inequality. A global world in which inequality, vulnerability and urban segregation go hand in hand, regardless of where we are in the world.

The reflections and articles compiled in this issue of *kult-ur* bring to light these global urban inequalities and vulnerabilities, common to all territories, and present responses and attitudes to the questions Lefebvre posed about the meaning of the right to the city, how the concept has evolved and been enhanced with the arrival of this new millennium; about how this absence of an equal right to the city for all is evidenced and framed, and how the concept has embraced new conceptualisations and emphases.

Current reflections on the right to the city

The new century has brought in some new terms to this field, such as urbanisation, segregation, slum growth, gentrification, non-places, immigration, marginalisation, undocumented, etc., to refer to these inequalities, but also others like resilience, innovation, inclusion, gender, generations, everydayness, to referring to attitudes that reclaim this right to the city.

The right to the city is based on processes of participation and social inclusion as drivers of change, on access to the city as a collective right. Drawing on these postulates, *kult-ur* proposed on this occasion to seek out visions and attitudes that contribute to this collective construction of the right to the city for everyone, without exception.

Numerous theoretical and practical experiences reported in this issue demonstrate and illustrate the fact that the right to the city is not an individual endeavour, but a collective effort. This is demonstrated in the way many non-governmental organisations and groups, civil society, universities, and technical and administrative professionals are working to challenge these inequalities today. The articles provide examples of how, in each sphere of action, either autonomously or by generating networks and synergies, through social campaigns, by spreading good practices or by developing inclusive public policies, work is going on to reverse these inequalities and engender spaces from which to reclaim this right to the city.

Although today we accept that there are no universal or isolated postulates, the common thread running through these experiences is the reintroduction of daily life as their main pivot, a return to a vision of the city as a response to the daily needs of every person.

And while we still face the common challenge of fostering dialogue between global visions and local logics, all is not lost. We can and we must recognise the numerous possibilities that our urban environment still affords us.

Time spent waiting for better days can help us reconsider past excesses and let people's creativity return to the streets. It is in times of crisis that wits are sharpened. It is the time to



take the city and its citizens forward once again together on a new scale: that of the small things.

The city is and always will be an unfinished reality in which actors establish new directions.

Shared experiences and reflections on the right to the city

And it is this new course, where the small things set the pace, the course of good practices, or practices based on resistance as an attitude, where new alternatives and initiatives with broad, integrating perspectives emerge as drivers of change, that lies at the heart of this monograph. An opportunity to pause and reflect on how to mitigate or reverse this inequality in favour of a new urban resilience that allows us to dream of the possibility of a different, more just city. All these experiences represent this driver of change, this minimum of 20% of the population needed to bring about a paradigm shift.

The turmoil of the new century evidences the landscape of our cities as a landscape of contradictions and impediments. A landscape that engulfs us in urban marketing, causing its citizens, those who define it, to flee. It is to this urban context that Ximo González Mari takes us in the *Àgora* section, where, from a snapshot of the contemporary city, the city of consumerism, his article “*Contrapublicidad en la ciudad del consumo. Subvirtiendo el sentido en la piel del asfalto*” (Counter-publicity in the consumer city. Subverting meaning on the streets) gives us a vision of the ‘image city’ just as we perceive it in this era of information overload. A reflected image city engendered by *non-places*, a city of uncertainty. A principle of uncertainty that presents the city as an obstacle, but also gives us a glimpse of light between the cracks, the means in the margins that signify the right to appropriation, the beginnings and indications of this resistance. Evidence that the public space today still offers a spawning ground of small possibilities, a latent space in which to bring back the idea of the city.

It is a public space that sometimes pushes certain sectors of the population out to the margins, to urban exclusion, with no right to participate in their city. This is how Albert Moncusí Ferré presents public space in his article “*Espacios públicos, condición inmigrante, orden institucional y derecho a la ciudad. Reflexiones a propósito de Valencia*” (Public spaces, immigrant status, institutional order and right to the city. Reflections on Valencia), in which he shows how the institutional order and spatial reason that project power relationships onto the urban space exacerbate the violation and stigmatisation of certain invisibilised groups.

In the frame of urban politics, in the twenty-first century the right to the city from the gender perspective has been incorporated for the first time. How gender has become part of public policies, on a global and local scale, or is on the way to doing so with varying degrees of success is the subject Inés Novella Abril explores in her review “*Género y planificación urbana en la construcción de la agenda internacional para el desarrollo sostenible. De Estocolmo 1972 a Quito 2016*” (Gender and urban planning in constructing the international sus-



tainable development agenda. From Stockholm 1972 to Quito 2016), in which she follows the evolution of public policies in the area of equality; inclusive urban policies designed to achieve real equality between women and men as a driver of sustainable development for all territories that still face an infinite amount of resistance to an incorporation that would guarantee future structural change.

As well as gender, generational differences are also explored. The right to the city, revisited from the perspective of childhood, reconsiders what spaces and roles children are allowed in the city. Reflections on how children can actively participate in creating the city and their rights to it as a mechanism for experiential learning are discussed by Mora Kestelman in her article "*Hacia la (re)construcción de un hábitat inclusivo. Estrategias de apropiación para la población infantil de nuestras ciudades*" (Towards the (re)construction of an inclusive habitat. Appropriation strategies for our cities' children) and by Chema Segovia Collado in "*La vida de la infancia en la ciudad y su conflicto con el mundo adulto*" (Children's lives in the city and their conflict with the adult world). The latter takes a close look at walk-to-school projects as a current paradigm for urban interventions reclaiming children's rights from a position of difference, not inequality.

This thread from a generational perspective continues with the article "*Del cuerpo a la ciudad: repensando nuestros territorios desde la investigación colectiva con cartografía social*" (From body to city: rethinking our territories from collective research with social mapping), in which Monique Leiva presents an innovative pedagogical experience in the city of Valencia. This project consisted of perceptive mapping representing the social relationships of the city resulting from collaboration between pupils and teachers, which highlighted the importance of the process itself as a tool to introduce and qualify urban landscape – perception and representation.

In addition to the effective role of participation discussed in each of the articles presented, others report evidence of the glaring needs found in some environments with traditional or fragile fabrics.

Representative spaces are sometimes presented as mere sites in which to glorify the new architectural deities of recent history. The city has been pushed into the background to make way for the image of the city where we cannot see the wood for these huge trees. Our landscapes seem to have become unrecognisable, detached from the place, detached from people, and detached from the moment. The urban landscape cannot be only a question of aesthetics. Without content it becomes just packaging, a metropolis for tourist guides, often also surrounded by extreme poverty and social, economic and urban inequality.

There is, therefore, evidence of a need for a certain autonomy in some territories that allows partial progress towards achieving this long-awaited right to the city; testing grounds in which to develop real practices that strengthen the community. The article "*Participación ciudadana en la arquitectura y el urbanismo. El caso del barrio de La Isleta*" (Citizen par-

ticipation in architecture and urbanism. The case of La Isleta), by Vicente Díaz García, describes the way many professionals work by including citizen participation as a tool for urban mediation as a change of direction and a counterpoint to previous experiences of lost opportunities which, because citizens were not involved, have caused problems that are now difficult to resolve, situations that reflect extreme participatory poverty on both quantitative and qualitative levels.

Although the focus of the right to the city is on urban life, its dependent relationship with the agricultural sphere cannot be ignored; a rural environment with rising inequalities. One example of this city–rural duality is Brazil, one of the largest economic powers in Latin America and with one of the highest rates of inequality in the world. Thiago Sebastiano de Melo examines the *cidade-campo* relationship within this global context, raising the issue of the need for consensus and balance between the different parties in “*Cidade-Urbano versus Campo-Rural: a necessidade de políticas públicas que superem essa dicotomia para inclusão das populações pobres no Brasil*” about the public policies that might lead to a path of urban resilience with equal relationships among all parties.

The logics of rural, peri-urban and urban landscapes, in which the landscape is bound up with feelings, is the subject Sara Márquez Martín explores in “*Human building. Espacios habitables para y con las personas*” (Human building. Habitable spaces for and with people). Here she demonstrates how professional practices cannot be successfully implemented without taking into account whom they are for and with whom they are carried out, and what social impact they have on the constructed reality. She compares experiences in India, Mexico and Mozambique, environments in which urban exclusion and informality are commonplace and where technical implications require collective negotiation and a firm commitment to technological transfer.

This approach is complemented by a good practical example in “*Construcción colectiva de la ciudad. Tenencia de la tierra y regeneración urbana en los asentamientos informales de Maputo, Mozambique*” (Collective city construction. Land ownership and urban regeneration in the informal settlements of Maputo, Mozambique), a reflection of life in many African cities where the marginal peripheries are a continuum of precariousness and where, as the author Ana Cubillo Arias tells us, professional practices need to be rigorously sharpened in order to gradually improve the city, placing trust in the potential of the informal to self-produce. Measures that refer to urban acupuncture as a new scale for city creation, because life in the streets and the squares is the measure of daily social relationships.

When we act as mere passers-by in spaces of connectivity, because the city itself can be the obstacle to the development of its function as a place for relationships, the need for creativity becomes patent. One article that not only adopts this position but is also part of it is by Adriana Hernández Sánchez, Christian Enrique de la Torre Sánchez, Bernardo Aco Castañeda and César Javier Rojas Salgado, “*Bolsa del Diablo/Bolsa de Color*’, *proyecto de vinculación barrio-universidad-gobierno, para la mejora del espacio público en la Zona de*



Monumentos de la Ciudad de Puebla, calle 24 Poniente” (Bolsa del Diablo/Bolsa de Color, a project linking neighbourhood, university and government to improve public space in the Zona de Monumentos in Ciudad de Puebla, calle 24 Poniente), an exercise in reclaiming, participation and collective management that reveals how new forms of alliances for governing arise as alternatives that, while not especially formal, can have multiplier effects and generate considerable collective change. This project to reclaim and give new value to public spaces uses artistic creativity as its formal language.

Likewise, to conclude this monograph, in “*Creativity: a driver and enabler of social cohesion*”, Teresa García Alcáraz describes life in the shantytowns of Caracas, although it could equally apply to any urban reality in other territories, where creativity as a tool for working in intermediate spaces is also what helps citizens to develop their creativity.

Transversal views on the right to the city

In the *Extramurs* section of the journal, “*Ciudad educadora, desde la relación: educación, integración, ciudad y comunicación*” (City of education from the relationship between education, integration, city and communication) by Marc Pallarès Piquer, Josu Ahedo and Jordi Planella introduces a pedagogical vision to the city–school relationship, looking beyond the city as a physical support for its spaces. Intuitions on what our cities could be like are described in *La città ai bambini*, which describes the Turin of the 1970s as a model to be replicated and adopted in pursuit of a more inclusive city for everyone — postulates that echo the articles by Mora Kestelman, Chema Segovia and Monique Leiva in the main *Àgora* section.

The *Stoa* section includes visions that on the one hand speak of “*Crecimiento suburbano en ciudades pequeñas y medias de Mozambique, o cómo ser ciudadano y no desesperar en el intento*” (Suburban growth in small and medium-sized cities of Mozambique, or how to be a citizen and stay sane in the attempt), as Pilar Pérez Flores recounts in a fictional episode in which her description and theatricality transport us to life in the cities of Mozambique – or any other city in sub-Saharan Africa – and shows how the city can also be made by not making it. This section also contains an interview with artist Raphaël Zarka, whose work combining skateboarding and art invites us to question our use of the city and its museums.

Finally, the *Biblos* section brings the journal to a close with reflections by Eric Gras on Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden*, depicting the intensity of the reflections arising from the comparison of life in society and the personal life of the author on the 200th anniversary of his birth.

Just as *Walden* provides the perfect counterpoint to finish on, so does Cyrille Larpenteur’s and Nelo Vilar’s rereading of Henri Lefebvre’s *The right to the city*, the premises of which are the foundations of the present monograph.



So all that remains is to invite the reader to peruse these articles in the manner and at the pace that their interpretation and reflection affords, from beginning to end, or selecting randomly from the texts, at the pace the city allows us.

The proposal of this monograph was to bring to the table exchanged experiences from different latitudes. Inspirational attitudes full of hope that can lead into other experiences; the accumulation of experiences, all of which show us how to reclaim our right to fairer city for everyone, with no exceptions.

And finally, thanks must go to the *kult-ur* team for enabling and prioritising a modus operandi that invites voices from outside to form part of this shared months-long project; for believing in opening windows onto the world, as these pages do; for believing in those who continue to participate with their shared contributions; for trusting the anonymous peer reviewers whose contribution allows these articles to be shared even more widely ; for enabling every small gesture to accumulate, demonstrating that resistance through small actions is the collective contribution to the right to the city; for trusting that the quotidian will become an element of innovation in our times.

