A. Normative Urbanism 9
B. Informal Urbanism 83
C. Green Urbanism 145
D. Touristic Urbanism 241
E. Temporary Urbanism 301
B. Informal Urbanism: Between sanctioned and shadow orders

Moderators:
Rahul Mehrotra, Architect, Rahul Mehrotra Associates, India/USA
Yung Ho Chang, Head Department of Architecture, MIT, USA/China

B.1. Inextricably legal and illegal: A philosophical approach to the rights of urban poor
Philippe Cabane, Switzerland [85]

B.2. Empty Lots: Collective action of experimental urban occupation
Louise Marie Cardoso Ganz, Brazil [89]

B.3. Don’t Underestimate the Rice Fields
Juan Du, Hong Kong [97]

B.4. Transitory sites: Mapping Dubai’s ‘Forgotten’ Urban Public Spaces
Yasser Elsheshtawy, United Arab Emirates [103]

B.5. Network analysis as an alternative tool for understanding and intervening in informal housing: case studies from Nairobi, Kenya
Alfred Omonya, Kenya [115]

B.6. Real Time Zone
Francesco Calabrese, Filippo Dal Fiore, Seiram Krishnan, Carlo Ratti, Francisca Rejas, USA [123]

B.7. Huixquilucan: The challenge of growth
Sara Topelson de Ginibre, Mexico [131]

B.8. Tsukiji Micro Urbanism
Gretchen Wilkins, USA [139]

Empty Lots: Collective action of experimental urban occupation

Louise Marie Cardoso Ganz
Architect / Artist / Professor
Rua Peres de Souza 750, #112
Belo Horizonte, MG 30130-151, Brazil
phone: 31-32017822
correo: louise@ganz.org.br

Abstract
This project was a collective action organized by artists and architects during the year of 2001 that transformed private land into temporary public spaces. It was done in a Brazilian city with 2.5 million inhabitants. This city possesses 90,000 vacant lots corresponding to 10% of all urban jurisdiction. The urban process, built in the logic of the financial market, threatens speculation and encourages land speculation. This collective action proposed another direction to generate a network of potential spaces all over the city that can be appropriated by the neighborhoods due to their proximity. The possibility of free occupation paralyses the contemporary social life, playing an important role in property, environment, aesthetics, commerce and social arena. The active processes of intervention were done after the consultation with the population, who occupied the lots, and the workers created a network with the local population, providing their involvement.

This project was implemented as a collective action of artists and architects, in order to temporarily transform private property lots into public spaces. Each group of artists walked across the city searching for empty lots and then negotiated with their respective proprietors the temporary loan of the lots (which constituted the most difficult part of the whole process). After this, they carried out actions in the lots establishing relationships with the places and with the local population. The idea is to maintain the private property temporarily as a public cost, while the proprieter doesn’t give up for this space. In this section I’ll be referring to the occupation of private space in Brazil, the existence of empty lots in Belo Horizonte, and several programs to occupy them, acting as a resistance force against the society of control.

The land private property didn’t exist in colonial Brazil. Since the XVI century, several species were adapted for land concession to the Portuguese king, in order to have them explored. With the abolition of slavery by the end of the XIX century, the number of people who didn’t possess land increased enormously. There’s a lack of access to land by the low class population in Brazil, as a consequence of property concentration in the hands of a few, of the real estate speculation by the privileged group of proprietors, and of the absence of the created urban and social reforms. This property rate of land concentration is among the highest in the world. So, since the beginning of the XX century, this landless population has inhabited occupied residual urban spaces as hills, strips of land, shores, beaches, through land invasions, temporarily constituting a kind of spatiality to dwell and to work in. In Brazil those people as a whole correspond to 40% of the total population.

Belo Horizonte, the city where this project was carried out, was founded in 1897, at the southeast of Brazil. It has presently 2,400,181 inhabitants, 700,000 private properties, of which 10% (70,000) are empty lots. In face of this huge number of empty lots I proposed a procedure that allowed their temporary use in an area to be adapted by the neighborhoods. The existing ones are mostly punctual vestiges of the geographic initial layout, some are derelict green areas, or demolished or abandoned buildings. In the dense urban area of the downtown, the empty lots became profitable businesses as parking lots. Others, in peripheral areas, are used by the neighbors to plant corn, beans, and rice.
vegetables. Empty lots, therefore, are potential places for urban farming. If they are turned up, they can constitute large quantities of fresh, open, and green spaces. They form areas of different characteristics, almost always between walls. They have qualities as shadow, vegetation, less exposure to vehicular noise, proximity to neighbors, accessibility, and isolation in the urban tissue. If the city is of empty lots becomes incorporated by the population in their daily lives, near their houses, the city begins to be a greened by the growing of temporary open and public spaces, and by the creation of systems of neighborhood occupation.

The areas officially recognized as public places are parks, squares, and streets. In contemporary cities the parks are the recreation areas, constituting distant points, to which dwellers of different neighborhoods (distances in the weekends). The squares are in all boroughs, serving the purposes of local and daily use; however, almost become islands for the street circulation. The streets have been used in the past as an extension of houses and commerce buildings, but they are becoming more and more inadequate, except for an endless procession of walls and electric fences. Therefore, the empty lots have an evocative potential and the perception should be made of the use of, of activity, and, at the same time, the restoration of freedom and expressiveness. By the use of empty lots another dynamics is established, other behaviors appear and new local programs can be developed. They can be transformed into gardens, meeting spaces, experimentation of the nature in the inner urban soils. There we can grow milk, cattle, stretch wet clothes, plush fabrics, make washing, familiar parties and picnics, they can be used as living rooms, places for collective TV-watching, and to feed strobes. The gardens can be of vegetables, flower beds, or little strange gardens. They can constitute spaces for products exchange, places for rest or meeting, for art observation, or activities as tennis, bike riders, shop, small musical concerts, etc.

These possible programs are far from speculation, since the local population can contribute themselves, be implemented and be consequent of new ecologies and systems. I believe it is a way of resistance to the society of今天 today. There are many spaces like shopping malls, home, and deserts, where the future and the present are predetermined and controlled, more and more preventing a fair multilateral sustainability discussion. They correspond to the privatization, elitization, speeding of fair and restriction of the collective ways of urban life.

In the present project, the first experiment (2005) was carried out at four private lots, and the second (2006) on six private lots (which became a TV documentary). The lots have been temporarily changed into public spaces. I describe some of them.

Action 1 – 100m² - A 500m² lot, with walls, of an abandoned sanitation, in the central region of the city. The project consists of a plantation of 100m² of grass (action 2.1). The lot people became involved in many different ways, whether collaborating with the planting, serving as water and snails, sorting earth, creating community projects for planting flowers and vegetables, organizing barbecues and swimming pool day. The planting of the grass was the element that catalyzed the process of involvement of local people, who later began the process of occupation of the remaining 400m². The project was successful in 3 months. After that the owner of the lot decided to close it. I understood that the fear and the imaginary of losing the property was the reason. That after that I found some other vegetable planting experiences around the city that work more successfully, having good relationships between the lot and the lot proprietors. (photo 4)

Action 2 - PERI-METER - The action took place during 12 hours of a day. The lot consists of an area of about 2,000m², without wall or precise limits to set the property off from its surroundings. That freedom made allowed spontaneous appropriations by the neighborhood dwellers, who used the lot as a private and access way to a slum. The constant passages through the terrain established several informal ways. The actions performed by the group dialogued with the multi-use attributed to the lot: passage ways. The action consisted of following the people who passed through the lot in a day during 12 uninterrupted hours, "drawing" their trajectories on the ground with a mixture of water and whitewash applied directly to the soil. The marking had its beginning and its end set by the limits of the lot. The action sought to reveal, as a process of negotiation, the contour of the private property. We meant to propose a situation of estrangement, a possible questioning that could draw the attention

of the passeyer to his relationship with his surroundings, and to reflect on the notions of use and property. (photo 5)

Action 3 - THE BUILDING BLOCKS MY SIGHT - An experiment of star watching during one night. The place has several empty lots and residential buildings. So it was installed lasers, astronomic biographies and this way allowing an experience that usually takes place in non-urban zones. (photo 6)

Action 4 - TOPOGRAPHIES - Using the toponymy of the lot, with about 40% of declivity, there have been created landform with the earth people for people to lie down, read and watch the panoramic view. Groups of neighbors felt comfortable to remain in that "garden" consisted of yellow irises. (photo 7)

Action 5 - SPA - hairdresser, relax massage, manicure. Below two big ancient trees, according with the hairdresser that had its cofiine in front of it, we created a SPA, profiling the relaxing condition of this lot, located in downtown. (photo 9)

Action 6 - COMMUNITARIAN LUNCH – We invited many people that lived in the neighborhoods to make the food, bring the chairs and their eating utensils. We put a 22 m length table on an empty lot. It was a great meeting point. This had a very strong effect at people’s imagination, because after that they decided to use the lot for other communicational parties. (photo 10/13)

Action 7 - FILM EXHIBITION – We did a film exhibition at an empty lot with some demolition ruins. (photo 12/13)

Many of these actions were ephemeral, even if the original idea of the project was to create a permanent situation. But I believe that it became a kind of parameter for the people that live near these empty spaces and in the city. It is a way of multiplication of the idea and to develop the possibilities of different programs. The yielding historic differences of right to land property in Brazil, to claim private property associated to the public welfare, urban density, improper official public spaces, the uncontrolled privatization of public spaces, all are justifications that model the contemporary cities. The drastically public-private seems to be weak in front of the contemporary urban complexity. By proposing the use of private lots as spaces for collective experience, we change public-private into a new juxtaposition of experience and space.

(Author: Luiza Gomes; Bruno da Silva; Action 2-Fabiola Tachetti; Action 3-Likelil Rodrigues Borge; Action 3-Carolina H. da S. C. Costa, Luiz Murilo Madureira; Actions 4/5/6/7-Likelil / Luiza Gomes)