

THE ROLE OF THE ARCHITECT ON THE SITE

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- the extent of his involvement on the  
layout

of the architect

Thinking back of ~~my role~~ the role ~~I had~~ on the layout process  
necessary to be  
and on the assistance I provided to the families I start debating  
with myself if the attitude I had adopted was the most appropriate  
one. After I had explained the rules to the families and what  
they had to do, I left them take the initial step in the layout.  
~~Every now and then~~ I would go every now and then,  
and especially after some critical steps, like the definition  
of the boundaries between the common land and the house, or  
after the layout of the volumes of the house and so on and  
discuss with them, see whether or not they had a problem,  
suggest some modification if necessary, and try to focus their  
attention to the things they had to consider seriously so that  
they would come up with a successful layout plan.

However, my involvement in the layout of the houses varied from  
house to house, depending on whether or not the specific  
family would look for my assistance and ask for it, or whether  
or not I would <sup>assess</sup> that there was a specific problem. Nevertheless,  
although I suggested things to the families I never pushed them  
~~towards~~ to do the things I would consider more appropriate for  
that specific case. There was discussion, some stakes on the  
ground to make clear my suggestion and to show what would be  
appropriate. Anyway, in cases ~~in~~ where they were ignored, I did  
not make any particular effort to persuade them, unless <sup>something</sup> ~~there~~  
to take  
was ~~a taking~~ place that would have a damaging effect to the  
whole cluster. Still I am not completely certain ~~that~~ whether  
however,  
or not that was the right attitude; it had some positive effects,  
since what ~~came~~ <sup>was coming</sup> out of the layout process was sincere, thoughtful,  
it had some freshness and spontaneity, and I did not want to

spoil it. And probably the small improvements that could <sup>have</sup> been done, if I was to be more persistent, ~~we~~ could have taken away some of ~~this~~ these very positive features.

What I want to point at is that the involvement of the architect in a layout process, in which the families have the responsibility of completing the layout of their individual house, is not a simple matter. The limits of the intervention of the architect in what the family is doing and limits of the freedom of the family to do what they wish is a very complicate matter.

There are two major aspects of this situation that have to be recognized and understood by both parties:

- a. that the fact that the family itself is designing their own house does not come from a romantic or humanistic attitude; it is a need, especially for the making of a large number of houses, where the design of n different houses, adapted to their particular context and needs is almost unattainable by an architecture office. Not only because it is inefficient, but mainly because n different houses coming out of the pencils of one or two or even three architects will have a contrived feeling of differentiation. And today, the need to avoid the mistake of building impersonal and identical houses ~~in~~ for different families, and to create sterile and poor in quality residential areas, has been experienced to a large extent and has been recognized. And still there is a high demand for new housing in large numbers, which have to avoid the mistakes of the past. The involvement of the families in the design, or more precisely, the making of the layout of the houses by the families themselves helps to resolve this problem, and contributes to the feasibility of making human and personal in feeling residential areas. Therefore,

the participation of the family in the layout of their ~~XXXXX~~ house does not simply fulfill their individual wishes for a house adapted specifically to their needs and dreams. It goes beyond individuality; it contributes to a collective good, to the making of an environment which is human and loved by the people to live it, and experience it as a whole. The collective benefits, more than the individual gains, is the major reason that qualifies so highly the involvement of the families in the layout of their houses. Because, it is not that the individual houses will be ~~XXXX~~ better, but that the whole will be even much better.

This aspect of the participation of the families in the layout process has to be understood and appreciated by all the participants in the process, since it demands for a highly collaborative attitude, as much ~~between~~ among the families, as between the families and the architects. Each individual family, while laying out their house, does not simply work for itself, but for the better of the whole.

- b. The architect, from the other side, has to respect the individuality of each family, their intuition on how to go about making some things, and to ~~respect~~ respond with an open mind to their suggestions and proposals. In many cases, people with no architectural background have a more straightforward way to deal with design, more simple and solid, which is a very important quality.

The sharing of these two aspects by all the participants in the layout process will immediately make clear the responsibilities of everybody and the limits of the freedom of their actions.

These thoughts raise a much more fundamental subject: what is exactly the ultimate purpose of user participation, which has been misused so often, and has taken extreme dimensions ~~of~~ in enhancing individuality and overemphasizing the psychological aspects of it. Because, it is the collective that matters and ~~that~~ participates through the actions of the individuals.

There was a complexity in the relationships between the families and us and among the families as well, manifested during the design process, which were unexpected, and in some way we were not fully aware of them.

First of all, at some critical points during the process the families an attitude that was guided more by individualistic concerns than by the collective objectives.