

Co-Designing Health as a Social Community Centre: The Case of a 'Doctors of the World Project' in Brussels

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Abstract : The co-design process recently run by the trans-disciplinary urban laboratory Metrolab Brussels for outlining the architecture of a future integrated health centre in Brussels (Belgium) has highlighted that a buffer place open to the local community is the appropriate cornerstone around which organizing a space where diverse professionals and patients are together. In the context of the migrants 'crisis' in Europe, the growing number of vulnerable people in Brussels and the increasing complexity of the health and welfare systems, the NGO Doctors of the World (DoW) has launched a project funded by The European Regional Development Fund, and aiming to create a new community centre combining social and health services in a poor but changing neighborhood of Brussels. Willing not to make a 'ghetto' of this new integrated service, the NGO looks at hosting different publics in order to make the poorest, marginal and most vulnerable people access to a regular kind of service. As a trans-disciplinary urban research group, Metrolab has been involved in the process of co-designing the architecture of the future centre with a set of various health professionals, social workers, and patients' representatives. Metrolab drawn on the participants' practice experiences and knowledge of hosting different kinds of publics and professions in a same structure in order to imagine what rooms should fit into the centre, what atmosphere they should convey, how should they be interrelated and organized, and, concurrently, how the building should fit into the urban frame of its neighborhood. The result is that, in order for an integrated health centre framed in the landscape of a disadvantaged neighborhood to function, it has to work as social community centre offering accessibility and conviviality to diverse social groups. This paper outlines the methodology that Metrolab used to design and conduct, in close collaboration with DoW, a series of 3 workshops. Through sketching and paper modeling, the methodology made participants talk about their experience by projecting them into a situation. It included a combination of individual and collective work in order to sharp participants' eyes on architectural forms, explicit their thoughts and experience through inter-subjectivity and imagine solutions to the challenges they raised. Such a collaborative method encompasses several challenges about patients' participation and representation, replicability of the conditions of success and the plurality of the research findings communication formats. This paper underlines how this participatory process has contributed to build knowledge on the few-documented topic of the architecture of community health centres. More importantly, the contribution builds on this participatory process to discuss the importance of adapting the architecture of the new integrated health centre to the changing population of Brussels and to the issues of its specific neighborhood.

Keywords : co-design, health, social innovation, urban lab

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