

LEEDS DESIGN ACTIVISM FESTIVAL

PROBLEM ADDRESSED



Supporting grass roots organisations, Salvador da Bahia, Brazil.

In June 2009 Dr. Alexandre Apsan Fediani and Naomi Shinkins presented the ASF-UK 'building communities, Salvador da Bahia, Brazil' workshop at the practitioners' conference of the Leeds design activism festival. The practitioners' conference was created to 'give voice to designers, artists, architects, students, performers, activists, observers and users of socially and/or environmentally committed creative practices.'

The ASF-UK presentation was one of 16 exhibits from both UK based and international practitioners. The key aim of the event was to encourage the exchange of experiences and knowledge between practitioners of design activism and facilitate the sharing of knowledge and understanding of practical engagement in design activism.

GOAL ACHIEVED

Mapping and participatory planning strategies have been used as a mechanism to enhance the responsiveness of urban development projects in the global south. This approach has been increasingly criticised as it de-politicises the housing question by using participatory strategies merely as a tool for reducing costs of development interventions. Therefore alternative approaches have been aimed at radicalising the process of engagement with communities, by supporting grass-roots organisations and enhancing their bargaining power and autonomy from state and non-governmental organisations.

Date: 2009
Location: Leeds
ASF Team: N. Shinkins & A. Frediani
Partners: Leeds Metropolitan University
Donors: Leeds Metropolitan University & time donated by ASF team
Project type: Exhibition & Event

METHODOLOGY OF WORK

The presentation reviewed a process of engagement between Architecture Sans Frontières-UK, and an urban social movement from Salvador da Bahia, Brazil, Movimento dos Sem Teto da Bahia (MSTB). The nature of the engagement was based on the two week workshop, 'building communities, Salvador da Bahia, Brazil 2009', delivered to international development practitioners and students, where the outputs were aimed at supporting the work of MSTB and contributing to their struggle to acquire a dignified house in the increasingly contested urban areas of Salvador da Bahia. The workshop focused on the consolidation process of Escada, an occupation of the movement of 400 households in an area of 24,000 sqm. After studying local institutional arrangements, housing aspirations and community characteristics, the international participants and local residents started to develop tools which the community could take forward to plan their neighbourhood. The lessons learnt from this experience, as argued by MSTB, are that radical participatory strategies are needed to perceive the community plan and the house as a process of mobilisation and generating collective action, and not merely as a physical output. Meanwhile, a strong and centralized leadership of a social movement can encroach on individuals' freedom to engage in the process of participation, thus tools need to overcome such internal power relations if it is to be inclusive to all voices in the community.

FUTURE PERSPECTIVE

This was a one off presentation and it was a useful networking tool. It is an annual event and ASF-UK can use it as a future networking and advertising tool for other ASF-UK projects.

