A QUESTION TO GRAFT

After the presentation of the studio *GRAFT* we asked all of the three partners the same single question. The result is astonishing because their individual answers actually emphases the richness of the studios' creative charge and some interesting new perspectives.

In your work we can find numerous examples of the outstanding communication between the community and you as the authors. Could you please explain to us the following: Is the city of tomorrow actually a city that is built either based on the communication and the choice of its inhabitants or is it based on ideas and the work of architects, urban planners and other professionals that are usually involved in the planning process? What percentage of the decision making can be given to the future inhabitants?

Wolfram Putz: In my opinion it is hard to predict or guess a percentage, however, we also can see of course how it is done within the cities that we are working in. For example in Berlin we can definitely see that people like to engage more into the process of urban planning. Berlin has the extreme luck, that since the unification many redevelopment opportunities came up, such as the closure of an airport in the middle of the city. And during the 1st year, we used the typical 19–20th century top-down approach and it failed. It was basically not

accepted. So, today there is a mixture of different instruments that top-down officials try to use to either appease citizens – meaning that it is a fake participant process, or there is now this growing attempt to create *real* citizen participant processes, so people become a real democratic decision making body within government and its institutions. We think as architects that psychology and democratic value of people having a *say* in decision making process is great. The problem is not everyone that participates has the same knowledge,

GRAFT: Wolfram Putz, Gregor Hoheisel, Thomas Willemeit, Lars Krueckeberg
Source: Studio GRAFT

as let's say, an architect receives in school. So it is a balancing act between a pure democratic decision making process and the proverbial oligarchy-like powers that architects used to have in these processes. We can see that the public opinion of new technologies moves in cycles, from the state of public euphoria to the state of universal distrust of government officials since the NSA incident, so we are in a kind of a flux moment right now considering this situation, and it is impossible to predict how it will settle in the end. But we like this approach much more than the monotony of the former top-down decision making process.

Lars Krueckeberg: The question is difficult because, in Berlin for example, we see this kind of thing a lot. People are taking projects into their own hands and are taking the role of the planers for granted, practically deciding to plan and build for themselves. Several families are getting together, pool their resources, purchase a site, hire an architect and build the house of their dreams. They basically cut off the real-estate agents and the developer of course, saving a lot of money. Therefore, the overall costs are cheaper *and* projects are made in the way that future tenants intended it to be. We see this happening more and more. However, this is of course a very small percentage of what is happening in the world, being only Western Europe and Berlin. China officials, in an attempt to boost their economy, want more of their people to live in the cities, so they now have a problem of, in a next decade or so, moving more than 250 million people from rural areas into cities. These cities have to be built. Think about it, this is an entire population of USA being relocated within China into new cities. Is this viable? No. Is it natural? No. But, they will still do it, meaning it will be a completely top-down project that will probably create *horrible, horrible* burden scenarios. There are for instance cities in South

America like Rio or Mexico City, that are growing incredibly fast and you could say it is a bottom-up approach since nobody is planning these developments — people do it by their own, with all the problems that result from it. So, in my opinion, from an Euro-centric perspective there is hope of achieving full communication during projects in the future; the rest of the world — not so much.

Thomas Willemeit: Well, if you ask about percentages, maybe it is ok to say that it will be a 50/50 mixture in the end. If we look at cities not only as planned environments or built solely with the freedom of expression, but as a mixture of both, we might come very close to what would be a good basis for building cities. If we do not understand cities simply as planned environments that everyone needs to 'fit' into, but see them more as a kind of user interface that you as a unit can use and explore how your personal interest can be realized through it – we may become a part of it. This will enable you to explore your own dreams and allow you to gain what you personally want to gain from a city you live in. To use a very drastic example: What is the difference between the idea of communism and the idea of an iPhone? The idea of communism was to create a better world, and they did it in a way that some people got together and discussed how that better world will be defined, and then everyone will just need to 'fit' into this new better world they made. The idea of an I-phone was to make a tool and pack it with as many applications and helpful tools as possible, creating a perfect omni-tool that has infinite ways of helping you, *enabling you* to do all the things you long for. It is a completely different approach, not using age-old methods of fear and control but enabling people to find just how much control they actually need to do these kinds of projects with maximum efficiency.

Interview: Mirjana Uzelac Filipendin

Platoon Kunsthalle Berlin (Source: GRAFT)

Tor 149 Berlin (Source: GRAFT)