

AN OPEN GAME FOR DISSENT: TOWARDS CRITICAL TOOLS FOR COLLABORATIVE
PROCESSES OF PRODUCTION OF SPACE

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Abstract:

This paper presents the conception and application of a game designed for and played by teenagers living in a slum area in Brazil that is currently under structural intervention in a large spatial transformation project. The conception of this game is based on the experience of segregation of the city. Players have been invited to deconstruct such a proposition and encouraged to imagine other forms of occupation and enjoyment of their environment.

Rancière's account of dissent will be discussed as a counterpoint to the current participatory policies in an attempt to reveal their limitations regarding their potential. Flusser's concept of open game will also be discussed as an alternative set of critical tools for collaborative processes of production of space. The outcomes will be presented in order to discuss the capacity of games to overcome social obstacles.

beyond the current models used to analyse and produce the city. It concludes games as a conceptual framework towards an emancipatory participation.

1. Introduction

The Game of Dissent was an experiment held in May 2013 with a group of teenagers in a situation in the Agglomerado¹ Santa Lúcia. This ~~area~~² favela is currently under a spatial restructuring process promoted by the city of Belo Horizonte with funds from the federal government. In this process, the implementation of interventions as well as the definition of the participatory process is delegated to outsourced companies contracted by the municipality.

In the current context of decentralization of State's responsibility for the production of space, we propose thinking of fuzzy responsibilities beyond public-private partnership. This model undermines state's strategic responsibility for the balance between market and Architecture, when subordinated to the logic of business, becomes a commodity. The production of space as a mere opportunity to produce surplus value excludes the possibility of participation from its process and the formation of autonomous citizens able to appropriate the space. This model tends to homogenize the sensitivities, under consensual arrangements of production, the use and the appropriation of space.

Using as reference the process of the Agglomerado Santa Lúcia's restructuring process, we will approach the responsibility sharing in the context of production of space through the game. This process will be taken as the basis for a critical review that will be developed through evaluating the results presented by the Game of Dissent. Then the elements and the results will be presented. Before proceeding with the evaluation of results from the experiment, the application of the game, the current institutional framework of social participation will be problematized in face of both the meaning of dissent by Rancière (1996a; 1996b) and the concept of an open game according to Flusser (n.d.). The game results will be presented as a questioning of the process for spatial restructuring of Agglomerado Santa Lúcia. The possibility to overcome social obstacles will be presented as a possibility for an agonistic relationship between stakeholders. Creative spatial imagination, shown throughout the game by the participants and dwellers, will enable to question the participation model used in the spatial restructuring of the Agglomerado, since the current model does not allow openings to include the vernacular practices of the dwellers. The virtual nature of the game will be accessed as a possibility of participation in the participatory process, suggesting an open source participation. As a concept of meta-game is presented, by which we intend to emphasize the ability to question and expand the current thinking towards an emancipatory practice of architecture and urbanism.

2. The Game of Dissent

The game was designed in the beginning of the formulations that motivated the research. This study is part of a larger project that was applied as part of the activities of a university extension program, elaborated in response to an invitation from one of the educators of the ProJovem Urbano Reference Center for Social Assistance (CRAS), held by the city government. The objective of the proposal was to introduce the debate about the city among the teenagers of the area.

¹ Agglomerado is the term used to refer to the set of slums in the Santa Lúcia area. In this text, we will translate the term, considering it the name of the place.

² The term favela will also not be translated, since we understand that the favelas in Brazil have a specific image brought by the terms 'slum' or 'shantytown'. A better distinction between the terms is provided by Baltazar & Kapp (2007).

of Dissent was designed to be played by the ProJovem teenagers and by a group of students attending to the extension project.

2.1 The context: Agglomerado Santa Lucia and the Vila Viva program

The Agglomerado Santa Lucia³ is an area consisting of four favelas, located in the South of the city of Belo Horizonte⁴. The area is currently going through the urbanization process of the Vila Viva program, held by the city government. The program includes eradicating geological risk, sanitation, restructuring of the most important streets, housing implementation of parks and green areas. An intervention on this scale inevitably breaks bonds established between the community and its everyday space. Despite the improved conditions provided by the program, it is known that the impact of such interventions is the removals and the resettlements required for implementation these improvements.

The game application did not intend to solve any direct conflict, since the target teenagers, did not participate in the assemblies and negotiations between the city and the community. However, they did experience, along with their families a sense of violence of the removals and the resulting laceration of the social-spatial relations by the imposition of a new spatial order.

One of the interventions with the highest impact in the program is the enlargement of Main Street and the creation of a new street, called Bicão, which will connect the two avenues. The main purpose behind the creation of this street, although not announced, is to relieve the already overloaded vehicle traffic of the upper and middle class around the Agglomerado. This reformulation of the main street in order to adapt to modern standards of the formal city disregards the aggregating role played by the narrow alleys in favelas are usually the place where people meet and exchange experiences. A wide range of events and represent the plurality of spatial means of appropriation in favelas.

Many families of the Agglomerado have already been removed from their homes to the construction site of the Vila Viva. Others still live in the area with the imminent uncertainties about their very near future. Some teenagers of the group reported that their houses been "sealed" (the technical term used to indicate the houses that are to be demolished for construction work) and that a number of friends and neighbors had been removed to different destinations. Some families were relocated to housing units built by the city at the site. These units, which are built by a consortium of private companies, for a price of minimal cost and therefore of minimal area. In addition to that, as part of the tight deadlines for their design and implementation tend to be reduced in order to suit the goal set by the companies.

2.2 Elements of the game

The game has in its essence the Le Corbusier (1933) propositions published in the Athens Charter, which separates the city functions in residential, leisure, work and culture. In spite of all the criticism made over the century that followed its publication, this model remains a practical repertoire of technicians and city planners. Therefore, the argument of

³ The Agglomerado Santa Lucia is the group formed by the villages Estrela Santa Rita, Santa Lucia. It currently has about 20,000 residents and 3,848 household. Its has a population of about 20,000 residents and 3,848 household.

⁴ Belo Horizonte is the capital of Minas Gerais State. The metropolitan region of Belo Horizonte is the largest in Brazil with nearly 5.7 million inhabitants.

one of the housing structures (such as houses with bars and shops at the front); a place to study in a park; a space to rest in the sun (with manicure/pedicure signs);

As the game progressed a city was designed over the white cardboard. Creative combinations of cards, the players imagined other possible spatial assemblages. Some solutions were a clear reference to the everyday spaces of the favela, others were from the formal city repertoire, presented in creative combinations. Along the two hours the game was played, the white cardboard was filled by the spatial imagination of the players. The city which they called Bem Vinda (Welcome).

3. Participation, dissent and the open game

In an attempt to relate games to the production of city space, a look back to Situationist theory enables us to observe the effects of the consolidation of the process of production of public spaces. The regulation of free time, understood as a condition for the reproduction of its spatial equivalent in the production of specific spaces for recreational purposes. As a consequence, there is the abandonment of the street as a territory of play, of everyday life. The counterculture and the contestatory movements of the second half of the twentieth century emphasize the political importance of games as a means of resistance. The Situationist International proposed the city a territory open to playful imagination, an expanded playground that calls for the reappropriation of the streets, a strategy for what Arendt (2005) calls the resumption of the public sphere.

The very argument of the resumption of the public sphere is one of many that shape the contemporary discourse and public policies that attempt to promote social engagement. From an urban planning view, participation is called upon to balance social inequalities, as it presupposes the exercise of decision-making power. However, the institutionalisation of participatory processes tends to shift the responsibility for social mobilization. Therefore, it tends to eliminate the active role of citizens and civil society, creating an illusion of consensus that instrumentalizes the participatory process for legitimizing decisions that have actually already been made.

Participatory policies follow bureaucratic models that tend to undermine its effectiveness. The fragmentary questions posed when society is called to make decisions eliminate the possibility of a broader critical debate. On the other hand, the model of deliberative democracy that guides politics, bases its central idea on the assumption that, in a full democracy, a consensus should be reached through a process of deliberation among free and equal citizens. This model is strongly influenced by Habermas' idea of communicative rationality, presupposes symmetrical conditions for argumentation and knowledge. However, such symmetry is not always achieved and this fact is neglected in the structure of participation.

Rancière's account on dissent (1996a; 1996b) points to the structural incompatibility between communicative rationality and democracy. Accepting the dissensual nature of democracy implies reinventing forms of communication between State and civil society. If the street is presented as the main communication channel between these two instances, it is necessary to rethink the parameters for an effective communication, beyond institutional boundaries.

In Brazil, although popular participation is recognized as a key component in urban planning processes that present themselves as policies for social transformation, one must be careful to balance between the available legislation and the actual production of space. For example, the Statute of the City, the Federal Law that regulates urban policy in Brazil, has in its article 23 the principle of citizen participation and democratization of urban management. These instruments promote citizen participation in various stages of the urban planning process, such as urban planning consultations and public hearings, plebiscite, neighborhood impact studies and participatory budgeting. Although the City Statute has meant a great legal democratic achievement,

number of instruments to enable social participation and a more democratic use comes to its impact on the city's space, the emancipatory promise that dominated it is clearly lost. Looking at participatory policies, it is possible to point out what has contributed to this failure.

The first concerns the institutional context. Because they relegate the pedagogical critical debate, participatory processes become fragile and are easily captured by power. They become mere instruments to legitimize decisions made by technicians of the State, reproducing the same top-down model they are trying to fight off. The success of the informal production of space. Although they represent a significant portion of the population in cities it is estimated that an average of 25% of the population of large Brazilian cities in informal settlements the illegal condition excludes them from institutional policies in both private and public space.

After this first analysis we propose to take on dissent as a counterpoint to the current orientation of participatory policies. The game is brought to the debate on participatory ability to transcend the communicative rationality and because of its openness to change. The communicative properties of games are closer to learning through experience than through speech. Thus we will take the concept of open game proposed by Flusser (1983) for thinking about participatory processes that are capable of accepting the dissonance. Flusser considers an open game the one in which the repertoire of the thought process whose structure can be modified. In the open game the totality of possible configurations of the structure of the game can never be used up. The game can always expand its repertoire to enable increase or decrease of repertoire, and structural change [...] repertoire processing noise into game elements" (Flusser, n.d, p.3). This research argues that participatory processes in order to recover the emancipatory aspects of social participation in context, games may represent a key in shifting the emphasis from learning by experience. Open games could help stakeholders interfere in the structure of participatory thinking social participation through the lens of games may represent a strategy for the emancipatory role of participatory processes, towards overcoming the mere representative models for the production of space.

4. Results, observations and considerations

The main occurrences perceived during the application of the Game of Dissent will be presented in support for a broader discussion that goes beyond the game itself. We will take the case of the game as a reference for a critical review of the spatial restructuring process in the city of São Paulo. This review is directed to the instances of social participation and to the lack of theoretical support.

4.1 Overcoming social obstacles

Among the many features common to games, we emphasize their ability to overcome social barriers, foster antagonisms and strengthen social structures. In the application of the Game of Dissent we see how the game facilitates the relationship between the ProJovem group and the city of São Paulo. The application of the game happened at the second meeting between the two groups. The first meeting had happened two weeks before, during the course of a workshop held at the ProJovem center. In this first approach, the group of college students had been received with suspicion by the ProJovem teenagers, which made it very difficult to hold the workshop. On the other hand, at the second meeting, as soon as it was announced that the activity of the game would be held, no more sign of resistance was seen. The teams were quickly formed with participation of both groups.

groups, and within minutes they were calling themselves by their names and supporting the game preparation task.

The Game of Dissent features some of the elements described by Caillois (1990) games⁵. The Mimicri and Ag n elements are the ones of relevance to this argument. In the game (Mimicri), the Game of Dissent differs from traditional role-playing game context of Serious Games, the RPG s basic structure usually puts players in the game is quite different from their reality. When one analyses other role-playing games, these characters are usually stereotypes, which tend to become caricatural. In simulation chances in the structure of each game. In the Game of Dissent the simulation if the player is not supposed to be anyone but himself. However, in the game, he is a freethinker of the urban issues. This role that has been denied to him by the program of the Aglomerado is thus restored by the game.

4.2 Transforming antagonism into agonism

Considering the Ag n element, that represents competition, it is verified that this element plays a merely symbolic role. In close observation we realize that competition in the dynamic of the game, and its structure doesn't include any measurement, such as accumulation of points, or any breakthrough system that would achieve a certain goal, which could mean a victory over the other teams. The game is against the board or against their own luck either, which would characterize the game described by Caillois. It is precisely the lack of such structures, however, that adds a new dimension to the analysis of the game. How can one explain the competitive atmosphere during the game, if the competition was not even one of the game's premises? One interpretation is that, in the game, the players competed with themselves, as they try to overcome their own imagination. Another answer would refer to the symbolic role of the dynamics and the playful elements of the game. Dice, game board, cards and team names are references to competitive games.

In attempt to introduce the game into a political debate, we propose to establish the principles of Ag n, formulated by Caillois (1990) and the agonistic model of politics by Chantal Mouffe (2000). For this author, the depoliticisation of the antagonism is inherent to human relations, which can be expressed in many ways. She criticizes the deliberative model, as it seeks to eliminate the antagonism through the constant search for consensus. Mouffe alerts us to the hegemonic nature of every form of consensus. At a given moment considered as the natural order - jointly with the communitarianism that accompanies it - is the result of sedimented hegemonic practices (Mouffe, 2007, p. 10). Understanding that power is not an external relation of two already constituted entities, but a constitutive part of them, the consensual orientation of the current politics is a depoliticisation of society. Mouffe therefore proposes to transform the antagonistic relations into agonism. That means not facing a contrary position as an enemy. Recognizing the opponent and knowing their point of view enables a space for negotiation and establishment of mutual commitments, even if the potential conflict has not ceased.

⁵ Roger Caillois identifies four elements in games, due to their essential nature. The game at least one of the four elements can be found: Ag n (competition games), Alea (chance games), Mimicry (simulation games) and Ilinx (vertigo games)

⁶ Mouffe distinguishes between "politics" and "political". The first concerns the set of institutions that seek to organize human coexistence in scenarios often conflicting. "Politics" is the antagonism inherent in human relationships, which eventually is expressed violently.

In the Game of Dissent the agonistic model of negotiation can be translated into about identifying the antagonism between the players involved in the symbolic co the game. The actual agonism behind the Game of Dissent involves, on one hand spatial model based on rational consensus about the means of production and use other hand, the statement of other possibilities of production, appropriation and

4.3. Revealing the epistemicides of pseudo-participation

In his reasoning in defense of an epistemological diversity of the world, Santos concept of epistemicide, referring to the death of popular knowledge on behalf statements.

The spatial arrangements formulated as answers to the challenges of the Game of imaginative richness of space repertoire shown by the young people from the Lucia. The solutions are mostly very close to the creative diversity character favelas. Some answers provided by the players were houses that are also workplaces and streets thought of as a space of permanent negotiation between cars, playing meetings. In the same way, the self-produced space made by favela s dwellers t representation of their daily needs. It is a dynamic space in a state of per reflecting a continuous creative negotiation between individual needs and collec

When discussing the intervention models that are usually adopted in the favelas (government, academia and NGOs), Baltazar and Kapp (2007) point out that these by architects and urban planners, frequently ignore the dynamics and the auto favela s spaces. The opposite of autonomous logic developed by Cornelius Castori Souza (2013) as heteronomy.

"The opposite of autonomy is heteronomy: here the laws [...] that go community are imposed to some [...] by a minority, on the marks of a asymmetry, i.e. from an institutionalized separation between rulers and ru 2013, p.174)

The heteronomous mode of intervention is unable to include the vernacular production, which in the context of the favela, are much more reasonable when everyday dynamics that represent that way of life. According to Baltazar and Kap

These initiatives completely ignore the dynamic of the spaces of f self-production processes. They are indiscriminately done from top-d the same corporate logic of the legal city. If this is a problem in takes another dimension in favelas as besides leading to alienat spaces designed (and built) are minimum in cost and consequently in s flexibility at all. This leads to a recurrent process since, by beco lose any chance of political articulation and then they receive interventions with no criticism. (Baltazar & Kapp, 2007, p.3)

This alienation identified by the authors is in general terms the condition performed by the Vila Viva program. A critique of this operative mode should not exaltation of poverty or with the denial of the many possibilities of improv intervention, with the aid of the state s funding, could bring to this communit. to highlight the inefficiency of participatory processes that should enable technical planning and popular knowledge in the spatial restructuring of favelas

4.4 Towards an open source participation

Popular participation happens in a preliminary stage of the process proposed by Kapp and Baltáček, which corresponds to the elaboration of the PGE (specific global plan). In another paper, a fairly detailed discussion of all stages of the PGE, where decisions on scale and the guidelines for interventions are set out. In the structure of Vila Viva, the only stage open to community involvement. They are represented in participatory reference group that includes, among others, representative members from the dwellers of the Agglomerado. Community assembly should approve the guidelines set out, accompanied by the budget, in order to obtain the necessary resources for intervention. In this stage, all interventions become responsibility of private construction companies, not the municipal government. Therefore, both the hiring of executive projects and the implementation become responsibility of these companies. The municipal government only monitors the companies on site, to ensure the implementation of the guidelines that have been approved in community assembly. In the stages following the approval of PGE there is no openness for community involvement. We present below (Figure 2) an interpretative diagram of the main stages, their competences and degree of participatory openness in the spatial restructuring process of Vila Viva.

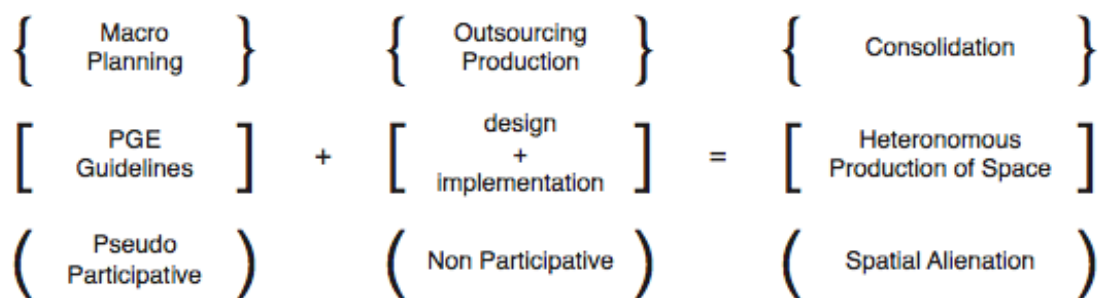


Figure 2. Interpretative summary diagram of urban restructuring stages of Vila Viva.

This participatory process tends to instrumentalize the participation due to a narrow focus in its structure. First one must consider that a discussion placed in very general terms happens in PGE, inevitably escapes the possibilities of a balanced debate between the community. Unable to understand the real dimension of the issues placed at that scale, it is led to agree with decisions that are often presented as the only possibilities for spatial inventiveness, with which they could contribute. Second, the PGE dialogue only when it is related to what must be done, and not to how it should be done, ignores what would be the greatest contributing potential of the community in the restructuring process. Discussing the processes of production, or the how to do, would transform the participatory process to the real scale of understanding of the community, which is the production of everyday space, the scale of the neighborhood relations.

Furthermore, the model of communicative/collaborative participation by which the PGE is not the most appropriate when taking into account the level of social inequality. In the initial reasoning of this paper, we argue regarding the incompatibility between the two models based on communication. In Brazilian favelas, the balance of the conditions proposed by Habermas for a decision-making based on communicative reason does not exist. So, we discuss about the risks of a communicative/collaborative planning, when under conditions of social inequality, becoming weak in the face of conservative forces of instrumentalization.

"However, the very existence of deep inequalities make the process of communicative action difficult. The communicative action can collaborate with the instrumentalization of the process."

the achievement of more autonomy, but at the same time, a certain individual and collective autonomy is a prerequisite for the community (Souza, 2013, p.150).

We propose to think of games as one of the possible tools to produce this minimum by Souza. We understand that some critical repertoire would be crucial to the relationship between the technicians of the Vila Viva program and the community representative assemblies. As a pedagogical tool designed for this first instance of spatial learning to facilitate learning by means of experience, in contrast to other processes based on direct instruction. They could therefore make it easier for the community to approach and understand the issues that will be placed under discussion, besides encouraging community engagement.

In the Dissent Game match, we witness the players in a process of taking into account the qualities of their immediate space. During the session, the teenagers compared their own experiences with similar examples known by them. Comments like: "My uncle's house is like that, the same as in my street" were often heard. At the same time, less common solutions or something new to the repertoire known by them were mentioned with exclamation, such as "such a street!", or even questioned, as in "is there a square like that?"

In addition to the previously mentioned PGE problems, Kapp and Baltazar (2012) discuss this by proposing a reflection on how participatory process tends to control space.

Autonomy is the ability of individuals and, foremost, collectivities to use their own means of action and interaction, as long as they do not restrict their freedom. Autonomous means being ruled by self-defined norms. In contrast, participation indicates that people are allowed to take part in decisions and being able to change its norms. (Kapp & Baltazar, 2012, p.1)

This reflection confronts us with the challenge of thinking about the game not only as a tool for civic-spatial learning. The greatest leap forward into an indeed emancipatory should be thought of in relation to the open game logic. An open participatory process allows the community to participate in the decision-making process with enough autonomy to not interfere with the structure of the process. To turn noise into game elements is no longer a metaphor from a philosophical abstraction, but a real possibility of opening new listening channels to the contributions of popular spatial knowledge, in order to provide adequate space to the lives of their real users.

4.5 The virtual as a possibility for dialogue and cooperation

The Game of Dissent was proposed as an alternative activity that would allow for critical reflection among young people from the Agglomerado, moving it from the personal and immediate to the virtual. A shift from the real problems into a virtual platform. For Huizinga (1955) a feature of the games in general is that they are not everyday life or real life, but an escape from real life to a temporary sphere of activity with its own orientation (p.11).

Considering the virtual nature of the games, we associate the "escape from real life" with Huizinga with the virtualization scheme proposed by Løvy (1996). In it, the displacement from (real) to the virtual consists of an "inventive return" of a given solution to the real. Therefore, virtualizing the territory through the game is an attempt to shift the platform where the problematization would become possible. On the virtual platform, an oriented dialogue to critical reflection about the changes in everyday space becomes an easier way.

Also according to Løvy (1996), the opposite movement, the return from virtual to real allows "other operations to emerge, unleashes conflicts, unlocks situations, intensifies the dynamics of collaboration" (Levy, 1996, p.6). In this regard it is interesting to think about the relationship between the Game of Dissent and reality. The game board consisted of a white spatial representation formulated during the game came from an abstract support structure. The players, oriented by the dynamics of the cards, contributed with spatial solutions. As this process occurred, we realized the effects of collaboration between the architects and the favela and the architecture students. The space represented on the board revealed the everyday space of the favelas, and it also absorbed the contributions of students to some degree, to the codes of architecture and urbanism.

The virtualization of the process of spatial design via the game turned out to be a disruption in a consolidated cycle of architectural production process, which follows the sequence: multidisciplinary team of project, design, and implementation/construction. This multidisciplinary project team, usually composed of architects, urban planners and other professionals, is the centralization of responsibility for the production of space. Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that even this multidisciplinary team is subjected to heteronomous logic of the profits of construction companies. As a counter-model to this process, we propose a new cycle, considering the virtualization through the open game both in the design and the implementation/construction phase, according to the proposed diagram in Figure 3.

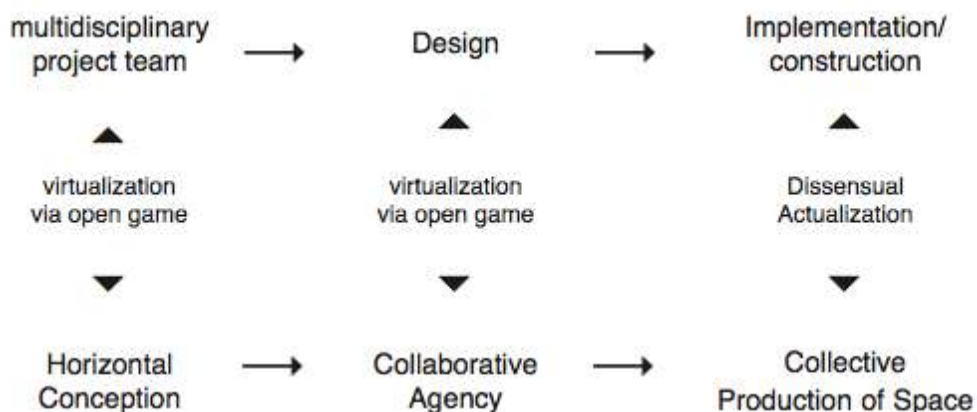


Figure 3. Propositive diagram for the collective production of space

In this other cycle a horizontal design process and a collaborative architectural process challenge the centralizing role of the multidisciplinary project team, usually justified by their specialized knowledge. This step back consisting of the collective problematization of the design process, virtualization, is what is meant here as an emancipatory participative process. The final step, dissensual actualization of space, that is, an indeed collective production of space.

5. Conclusion or the meta-game

To conclude this paper, we would like to return to the initial proposal, that the process of sharing of responsibility for the production of space through the lens of games. We will use Flusser's proposition of relating every game to a meta-game. Flusser states that "games occur in games" (Flusser, n.d., p.2) and therefore, that every game opens a co-

game (Flusser, n.d., p.3). Through these statements, we will conclude with two in different directions.

The first one refers to the emancipatory role that we claim for social participation be understood as more than decision-making process. Participating also represents autonomy, empowerment and the increase of imaginative repertoire. In the open game emancipated player is the one who is able to propose changes on the game structure, stating that "games occur in games," Flusser (n.d.) invites us to think about emancipation in a dialectic way. To play (to participate) would be a means to emancipate at the same time, emancipation would be a way to propose other games.

The second consideration arises from the statement that every game opens a competition. The experience of the Game of Dissent, described in this paper, enabled us to develop competences that allowed us to establish a critique of the urban restructuring of Agglomerado Santa Lucia and also to reflect on the structure of the current participatory consensual orientation. However, another competence was outlined in the last section. In the case of developing it in depth in this paper, we would suggest it to be based on reflections. An open source participation, as in the open games, emerges as a means to emancipation also for the fields of architecture and urban planning. When it comes to the production of space, replacing the centralizing role of the architect/planner by the collaboration of users, to break up the architectural mode of production driven by real estate market, the new conception of production of space, currently thought of as the production of space in a social sense, this would represent the opening of the architectural field to reinventing its limits and possibilities.

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