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Incremental change in project

Briefly, after the solicitation of Didier Rebois, we wanted to develop the subject of incremental change, which seems to be able to feed the current European reflection on adaptability. The following text is not a theme proposal, but rather a state of ongoing discussions in our architectural office RiO.

We questioned ourselves a lot on this notion of incremental change, and what it could bring to the project because it seemed to us to echo rather current questions about the urban project:

- How to approach the issue of change in an uncertain world, and a future difficult to predict? The repetition of the economic crisis, or the acceleration of technological progress which establishes a quasi-permanent state of crisis, support this interrogation.

- How to promote and animate the change of a space, in a context where the public actor is weak and can no longer regulate everything? Indeed, the crisis of public authorities particularly in terms of funding requires to question their margins of maneuver, and by extension, those of the urban architect.

Incremental change is not an answer to these questions, but rather another reference system, another way of seeing things, which allows to take the problem differently. It assumes that in a complex system (the city in this case), the change is never the result of an overall intention, going from a point A to a point B, and that may be imposed or planned.

The incremental approach considers that any major change is in fact the product of a chaining of minor events, of marginal changes. Each of these micro-bends changes the context, and thus the nature of the change that will follow. The change is a phenomenon of continuous updating, the purpose of which is largely unknown to us.

This inspired us ultimately more humble position, in which the actor who claims to work on changing (the urban architect in our case) can no longer claim to foresee or control change globally. This asks us about our role, as this vision of change can also appear as the end of all ambition for the project because it assumes that nothing is predictable long term.

We believe that the incremental approach does not deprive us of the possibility of action, but redefines our place. It just reminds us that we are weak actors, deeply reliant on an environment action, of which we have limited understanding. The project is inseparable of complex processes that we can not control and of which we are unable to predict the causal mechanisms.

If we are weak players, so we must act accordingly. This is what Michel de Certeau characterized as the transition from strategy to tactics:

"I call "strategy" the calculation of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject of will and power is isolable from an " environment ". I call on the contrary "tactical" a calculation that cannot rely on an own, not on a border that distinguishes the other as a visible totality. The tactic has as place than that of another. It insinuates inside it, fragmentarily, without grasping it in its entirety, without being able to hold it off. It has no base where capitalizing its advantages, preparing its expansions, and securing independence relative to circumstances. "(The Invention of daily).

The modalities of such an approach, tactical rather than strategic, remain to be defined. This is perhaps also the issue of the project. From our side, we have for now pulled a number of questions:

1. If we consider that change is a continuous and autonomous process, it will be the territorial actors, current or future, that will bear and enliven it :

> How to work on spatial configurations that do not correspond to frozen images, but that initiate games of actors, and perpetuate them? How the project will allow to set in motion the inhabitants, economic actors, political actors around spaces without prejudging of the meaning they will build?

2. If the project cannot claim to know the finality of change, it should allow that an incremental approach be established and perpetuated:

> How can the project spare leeways and leave areas of uncertainty? How can he leave certain things non-formulated and undetermined that will be said later, and mainly known by others?

3. How to make acceptable and communicable a project that claims to be built around the uncertainty? How does this central presence of uncertainty allow to deviate from an urban planning of "products"?