

## **Interview with Com:Plot's Patricia Martinez**

It all started with CITA, a civil association dedicated to investigating use of public spaces. The group has organized a variety of activities, but one was an international architectural forum, each year called Com:Plot. In the beginning different architects from around the world were invited to share their concept of how to construct a city.

Every year the theme changed, in particular 2009 the format was more open; we thought it was important to include sociologists, journalists, urbanists, psychologists, philosophers – because after all, cities are constructed by everyone, and everyone has their own interpretation.

The invitees included Edgar Sandoval, transportation specialist from Bogotá, who is now working on the subject of mobility in South Africa, which is now preparing for the World Cup. Others included Josep Bohigas, from Catalán, the son of the famous Barcelona urbanist Oriol Bohigas, who has developed a fresh and original approach to architecture that less to do with building monumental structures and has more to do with reinterpreting the use of public space. Also Olga Segovia, de Santiago de Chile, also a specialist in public spaces and citizen participation.

So we were able to achieve this through the Com:Plot Forum, to bring perspectives on what's happening in other parts of the world with respect to city planning, how they see it in Chile for example, and how they've confronted the problems; because in Latin America, the disagreements about urban planning are very similar: expansion, political questions and all the rest.

So from the Com:Plot Forum, an initiative was born called Caminapor Guadalajara, A Walk Through Guadalajara. Now we're planning the third Camina in February, to celebrate the anniversary of the city of Guadalajara, but what this project does is trace a route through the metropolitan area of Guadalajara, and for two days, we walk that route, from 9 a.m. to about 5 p.m. It's open to everyone, from children to seniors.

The idea is that we go along discovering the city: how it's growing, what's happening, how it smells, how it feels at different times of the day... It's not the same to walk in the morning as in the afternoon, for example. So we go, experiencing the city with all our senses. It's more than a recognition of what occurs within our urban borders, it also proposes other ideas like the recuperation of public spaces.

The way it works is that people during the walk select a place to do an intervention to recuperate that public space. So for example, one of the walkers found himself at Las Pintas Lake. This lake is very contaminated; it's become part of the city, although it used to be a rural area, and it's become polluted. So the team drew silhouettes illustrating possible uses for the lake if it weren't contaminated. There were figures of children playing around the lake; a child getting into the water, as if to swim; there was someone fishing. In reality, none of this can happen. So it's like a criticism of what should be, but isn't.

Then there's the case of the kids who made public bus stop shelters where people were waiting for the bus in the hot sun, with no shelter, and they put them together with recycled wooden pallets.

So this was the idea of the last Caminapor Guadalajara. Now we're planning the third one.

Q. How many people participated in the first one?

A. About 70 people. The second one, about 100, and there were about 20 interventions. This time we're trying to compact the route into one day so that more people can participate.

Q. What have you learned from the Caminatas?

A. One of the most important results has been learning what can be done by taking initiative; how people themselves, without the government giving money, can take over public space. There are green spaces that are well taken care of but no thanks to the government; it's because people are taking care of it. And we've seen zones that are very poor but where the people value it, and the space is community space, so the people treat it like an extension of their own homes.

In the last caminata, it was great to see the effort that we put into land that seems like it belongs to nobody, but in reality it belongs to all of us. There was the group that made a playground for children out of old tires, and the group that made the bus shelters from recycled wood.

This has left us with a better sense of the power of community, and that this type of collaboration is necessary for the transformation of a city.

Q. Have you seen any changes resulting from the Caminatas?

A. People have been more interested in the subject of public space and other groups have come to the fore like Ciudad Para Todos (City for All). They were the ones who created El ParqueNómada (Nomad Park). They went to the Polanco neighborhood, for instance, on a Sunday, when all the spaces usually used for parking were free. So they divided up the space and brought in potted plants and umbrellas for shade; they painted figures on the streets for the children to play. At the intersections they painted crosswalks, and on the sidewalks they put a red carpet for the pedestrians. They said to the pedestrians, "This red carpet is to dignify your passage," and people reacted like, "Wow, how strange." But then they'd say, "Why don't they come back?"

So they came back for 3 weeks until finally Ciudad Para Todos didn't need to come back in order for the neighbors to create their own itinerant park.

Q. What do you hope to see from the third Caminata?

A. We're just barely working on the meeting – we'll have the theme decided by next week, and we'll know how many kilometers etc. but the idea is this: not to lose the

opportunity to discover your city by walking. It's not the same going through by the freeways by car as by walking, discovering face-to-face. We want to sensitize more people.