The project Under Construction in Quito, Ecuador is about a form of “social economy” and its implications for people and the environment they inhabit. Despite contemporary global urbanization and its attendant economizing, there are still rural areas today where barter is the main mode of exchange. The project draws on this tradition and proposes bartering as a practice in an urban context for the refurbishment of the historical center of the city – a process carried out by people without sufficient monetary means. Here, bartering replaces typical capital investment with a direct form of exchange between two parties. For example, the owner of an abandoned house in need of restoration and tenants without monetary means but willing to exchange their labor as a form of rent.

Removing rather than adding: The main resource is abandoned space: dark, uncomfortable and dysfunctional. Exchanges, remove, and empty to re-occupy. Building system = demolition.

Recycling rather than throwing and buying: Separate all material that is considered useful for new elements, basically timber and furniture. The remainder is 10% soil (material used in almost all houses in the historic center of Quito) and 90% common construction debris. The union of these materials results in a garden (soil) on a drainage system (common debris). Construction systems = the mud basic “do-it-yourself” videos downloaded from the internet.

Preserving rather than restoring: Making it easier to ensure the durability of buildings. Building system = sealed.

Breaking borders: Forging the economic model of global "development".

The jury noted that Under Construction is one of few entries in the competition that suggests a method rather than exposing a specific design proposal. The recommended approach encompasses the use of a near-extinct form of trade to rescue threatened historical centers. Additionally, the strategy involves the reuse and recycling of existing materials. Therefore, it is not possible either, that after the result will be a Disneyland city for tourist routes. The project is not against tourism: it is clear that tourism produces the same phenomenon for the vulnerable side and the physical environment they inhabit. Despite concerns about what people don’t like in the city the question arose: “What if this barter strategy of intervention becomes popular?”

The project is designed based on existing resources. The project office will be complemented by four spaces rehabilitated

Under Construction

Restoring an urban historical center, Quito, Ecuador

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Sustainability concept
What this project proposes is not new. Barter usually replaces money as the method of exchange in times of monetary crises. Although there is not a monetary crisis per se, gentrification of the historical center of Quito reproduces the same phenomenon for the vulnerable side of the population. If the planning of the city puts interest only in technical and infrastructure restorations, maybe the result will be a Disneyland city for tourist routes. The project is not against tourism; it is clear that tourism brings good things, but it is not possible either, that after 8pm, areas that used to be residential neighborhoods be deserted because no one lives there.

Under Construction focuses interest on the intangible city more than on its infrastructure. The same intangible relations gave a solution to the lack of the traditional requirement (money) for the urban reactivation. The project proposes to replace capital investments with direct exchange based on agreements between entities. A plan of economic compensation has been designed, and was proposed to the owner of one of the abandoned buildings. He accepted. Then, a constructive process that re-proposed to the owner of one of the abandoned buildings. He accepted. Then, a constructive process that re-proposed to the owner of one of the abandoned buildings. He accepted. Then, a constructive process that re-proposed to the owner of one of the abandoned buildings. He accepted. Then, a constructive process that re-proposed to the owner of one of the abandoned buildings. He accepted. Then, a constructive process that re-proposed to the owner of one of the abandoned buildings. He accepted. Then, a constructive process that...