

When the crisis arrives to crisis spots

Al Borde

Colective formed by David Barragán, Pascual Gangotena, Marialuisa Borja and Esteban Benavides, Architects from the Facultad de Arquitectura Diseño y Artes (FADA) de la Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador (PUCE). Quito, Ecuador.

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Abstract

When the crisis arrives to crisis spots

Without a doubt the most used word in the worldwide media is crisis. It became popular thanks to the real state crackdown in the US and it spread without discrimination, especially in the northern hemisphere territories. Lately the world has become aware that the overall picture was hiding something: "developed economies" show the gaps of its truth. Instead of the socio-economic paradise that was expected, there is a state of panic product of a system's increasing vulnerability.

Instead it has been found in "underdeveloped countries", mechanisms to cope with life, logical and coherent. In what we used to name crisis, there is a way of life that overcomes adversity. The paradox is obvious: the apparent progress ended in crisis, and the apparent crisis now produces solutions.

Keywords: Crisis, Al Borde, Architecture, Latin America



Figure 1 – A window

Without a doubt the most used word in the media is crisis. It became popular due to the burst of the housing bubble in the United States and its domino effect spread without discrimination, especially in the northern hemisphere territories.

For those who are peripheral to the global hegemonic context it was one more item in our agenda – nothing to take away our sleep – because before the global economic crisis, we were already in crisis.

Those who comply to AL BORDE, for example, were born between the late 70's and early 80's, throughout these three decades we have had border armed conflicts, the replacement of the official currency by the U.S. dollar, fifteen presidents in eleven years and climatic disasters that have kept us in a constant state of instability.

In that same period, the so-called “first world” statistics were very encouraging; Europe and the United States became the role models: apparently, they had found the perfect formula for development.

But lately, the World has become aware that the overall picture was been hiding something: developed economies show its empty truth. Instead of the socioeconomic paradise that was expected, there is a state of panic, product of a system that is increasingly vulnerable.

Alternatively, developing countries now have logical and coherent mechanisms to cope with life. In what we call crisis, there is a way of life that overcomes adversity.

The basic human needs are the same anywhere in the World. Instability is a factor that will make the answers to the needs be different from conventional ones.

The paradox is obvious: the apparent progress ended in crisis, and the apparent crisis now produces solutions.



Figure 2 - *Vivir sencillo salva vidas!*

It is clear that as human beings, such as architects, we are products of a society in which we are involved: we respond to an environment. The reality of uncertainty lived in Ecuador, is now becoming the world's reality. It makes no sense to talk about another architecture that seeks to optimize the economic, environmental and social recourses. It is more than ever essential not to fall into a commonplace or to waste the budgets that are always scarce.

The mobilization of materials from one place to another, from one country to another, has very high costs: you need to look around first, usually the best solution is to work with what is at hand.

We need to seek efficiency: the use of a material with the environment, the construction procedures with time. So to summarize the process in fewer systems, fewer modules, fewer items will always be more efficient.

Primitive actions as “la minga”¹, applied to any context and any project show that the collective work does not add profit but it multiplies.

All these cultural expressions are principles that define our profession. Aware of there being multiple answers when solving a problem, our projective exercise begins to articulate a question that gathers many variables to be solved, the debate involving all players.

The interest in this basic context, even primitive, is to find a way from the circumstances. We do not think of architectural exercises as a deployment of creativity.

As an office we engage in projects where thinking is essential, each project is approached with the necessary tools to solve it.

In this article we thought it was important to understand the collective thinking that governs our study, facing the complex question of how to write an article with eight hands and answering the most basic, fundamental, simple and easy way as possible: conversations that allow us to discuss freely and without censorship on the subject.

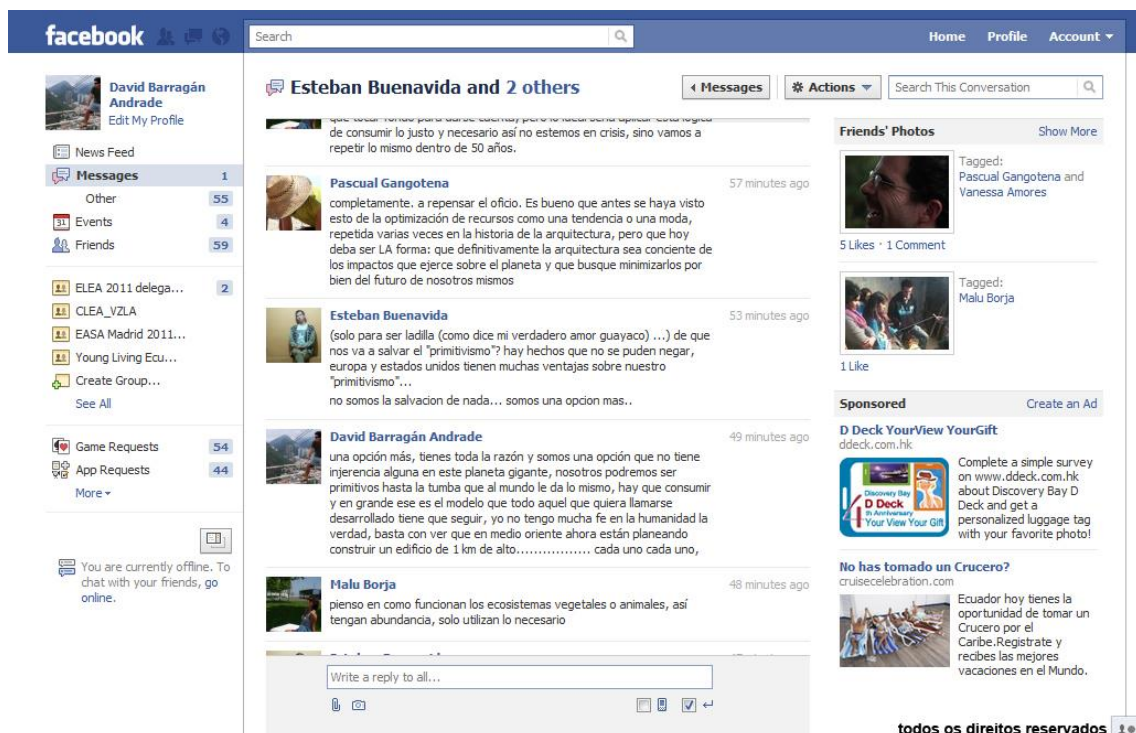


Figure 3



ALBORDE conversations and its position on the crisis:

- Global crisis is not the same as local crisis. The first, I think, is the denial of what the world chose to follow in recent decades. The second, the local one, is our usual scenario. I was born, lived and live in a country in crisis. This crisis has never been something that cuts my aspirations; on the contrary it has been and is the main driving force behind what I do now and what we do at AL BORDE. We exist for what has been our environment and that environment has been the crisis. Question: if we overcome the crisis, do we overcome AL BORDE? David: I have asked the same question and I refuse to think that if there is no crisis there is no AL BORDE. I think that at the moment we should create a self-regulation system. But the question would be: who would be interested in self-regulation when we have to think about the specific constraints of the crisis?

Esteban: Self-regulation is a utopia, is it not?

AL BORDE is a product of a reality, if reality were not the constant crisis in which we live in, AL BORDE would be different. So, somehow, AL BORDE would die if there were no crisis, but it would be reborn as something that answers to a different reality.

David: I agree, clearly self-regulation is a utopia, so in a World without crisis anything goes, and this is an example of all the excesses that we have lived in architecture in the past few years. I prefer to think of AL BORDE as a path in constant construction, as a platform for thought and action that is embedded in reality and chose to be able to mutate and evolve over time,

Pascual: I think that actually building the architecture of AL BORDE is already a way of thinking. All the projects we have done could have been designed from freedom, but we have decided to think from limitation.

If you take a project from freedom, all is fair. We decided to do it from limitation where there is an answer that is merely the logical consequence of a process that seeks to better address the question posed, but the most consistent with the constraints.

Malu: So AL BORDE is an attitude towards something, things are solved "albordesca"

- When faced with a problem, we study the different ways (in theory or in history) of how someone else solved it?

Esteban: I think that when we encounter a problem, the first thing we do is to see how someone else solved it. I think our solutions are many "other" solutions put together.

David: Of course, we see how others answer to the problems, the growth of the "Escuela Nueva Esperanza", would not be what it is, without understanding how "Agapos"² built the scaffolding, the project is an enhancement of the ingenuity of those "manes"³, it is the essence of what we do, take one more step or in this case one less step.

- The architecture affected by the global economic crisis casts doubt on the model adopted by the architects in recent years. Without a doubt, the crisis comes at an excellent moment: we were living a time of waste that has been proven to be unsustainable at all levels, even if more green tags were placed on the projects, the excessive use of resources was offensive. It's the perfect moment to rethink the profession, so it's unfortunate that no one considers this.

It is disturbing to see how large companies rather than rethinking their actions, begin to attack the emerging markets and more concerning is how the local authorities think they need that architecture, that one way or another, is an outdated model of intervention.

For a fair and sustainable consumption, only primitivism will save us.



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Figure 4 - *Con lo que hay a la mano – casi casi con lo que caiga del cielo*

Malu: I'm sure the crisis is the moment to rethink the model, maybe we need to hit rock bottom to realize it, but it would be better to apply this logic to a fair and sustainable consumption and no longer be in crisis, otherwise we will repeat this in the next 50 years.

Pascual: It is positive that the optimization of resources has been seen as a trend or a fashion repeated throughout the history of architecture, but today it should be THE way: architecture is definitely aware of the impacts exerted on the planet and seeks to minimize them for the sake of our own future.

Esteban: Just by being "ladilla"⁴ (as my true love "guayaco"⁵ said): How will "primitivism" save us? Some facts are undeniable: the global system which is now in crisis certainly has advantages over our "primitivism"...

We are not the salvation; we are only one more option.

David: One more option, you're absolutely right and we are one option that does not interfere in this giant planet, we can be primitive until we die and it won't make any difference. It is necessary



to consume more and this is the model that everyone who wants to be called developed has to follow. I don't have much faith in humanity, in fact, look how the Middle East is now planning a building 1km high.

Malu: I wonder how plant and animal ecosystems work: they have plenty and only use what they need.

Esteban: That's not true! We are an animal ecosystem.

Malu: Except for us, of course.

Pascual: And now, facing this scenario full of hope and joy, what do we do as AL BORDE architects?

15 minutes later -

Nothing, just wait for a push...

Acérquense al borde.
No podemos. Tenemos miedo.
Acérquense al borde.
No podemos. Nos caeremos!
Acérquense al borde.
Y se acercaron.
Y él los empujó.
Y volaron.

Guillaume Apollinaire, 1880-1918



Figure 5 – With the volunteers, during the construction of the Escual Nueva Esperanza

¹ Gathering of friends or neighbours to do community work

² Crew of workers specialized in building with bamboo and wood, led by Master Agapo.

³ Colloquialism that refers to a group of people

⁴ Ecuadorian coast colloquialisms that means to disturb

⁵ Colloquialism to refer to someone from Guayaquil, city on the coast of Ecuador

PHOTOS, except for the photo: *¡Con lo que hay a la mano - casi casi con lo que caiga del cielo que es!* of Esteban Cadena, the rest of the photos are property of AL BORDE