

Practicing care through architecture: participatory research as a tool to subvert power relations

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The paper questions to what extent architectural research can act as tool to subvert power relations and to enable the critique of capitalism that, according to Meiksins Wood “requires a constantly renewed critique of the analytic instruments designed to understand it” (1995:4). In the final chapter of “Critique of Architecture”, Spencer interviewed by Kosec states that architecture is the central and foundational education, surveillance and discipline arena” (2021:229) for the new human mind, that unquestionably acknowledges the rules of the neoliberal market as the natural substrate in which to operate. The paper aims to address this question by articulating a critical reflection on the recent participatory research project “Architectures of Care”, through which practices of social and environmental care have been mapped across three self-organised communities in Italy, Turkey and the UK. Attention will be paid to the challenges imposed by practicing research through participatory methods, engaging participants as co-researchers, and to the controversial role of the “neutral researcher”. The project “Architectures of Care” provides hints to discuss if architecture can produce caring environments. It also allows a reflection on the value of engaging self-organised communities into our research agenda, as these are seen as non-commodified means to subvert power relations, establish networks of care and enable radical forms of social emancipation (Bollier, 2021).

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Architectures of
Care Collective,
Visual narrative
of Comunità
delle Piagge,
Florence, 2023.

