

“To be useful, helpful, of assistance to someone:”
 The ‘In Service Of’ studio conducts a reflection on the architectural project as a form of public service. ‘In Service Of: Marseille’ explores the myriad ways architecture and design can serve and assist activist communities engaged in spatial struggles in Marseille.

In Service of: Marseille

Studio BA6 (Malterre-Barthes), Studio MA2 (Malterre-Barthes)
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In Service of: Marseille
 Fall 2023 Design Studio

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“The uncanny that disturbs the critical going on above it, the professional going on without it, the uncanny that one can sense in prophecy, the strangely known moment, the gathering content, of a cadence, and the uncanny that one can sense in cooperation, the secret once called solidarity.”

Ruth Wilson Gilmore, in Stefano Harney, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*, ed. Fred Moten, Fugitive Planning & Black Study (New York, Port Watson: Minor Compositions, 2013), 42.

Architecture and design are powerful tools to conjure, materialize and unlock horizons. But who has access to and can afford design? ‘In Service of: ...’ is a studio series that seeks to redress uneven access to design and to planning literacy by the majority. To do so, it places architecture as a tool at the service of a place, a population, a narrative, in order to benefit the common good. In this class, we will seek to deploy architecture processes “with values and interests different from those of capital.”

In that sense, ‘In Service Of: ...’ conducts a reflection on architecture as a form of public service. Seeking to ‘detoxifying narratives’ around architecture and urban design, there shall be no claim of righteousness, but instead an attempt to learn and unlearn from the sites and the people encountered. Architects can no longer claim to be “the bearers of a compass” or of any absolute truth, and ‘expertise’ is a highly contentious term.

Through a comprehensive exploration of the forces (i.e., social, legal, political, economic, cultural, environmental) that generate and control space at first, and then diving into the selected contentious sites, the studio seeks to gain a deeper understanding of the reciprocal relationship between architecture and community, recognizing the potential for design to foster social cohesion, enhance well-being, and contribute to the overall betterment of society. The studio will also conduct a reflection on its own format, to question architecture attachment to solutionism, the expectation to ‘fix problems’ and other tropes that have conducted to socially and spatially unjust developments, such as the massive Euroméditerranée project in Marseille. It also seeks to produce works that have utility for active local groups engaged in struggles against gentrification, state violence and expropriation strategies, and unsafe housing to name a few of the questions faced by inhabitants of Marseille.

By focusing on the idea of being useful without romanticizing the task, this design studio seeks to articulate an agenda for a self-critical architecture with a heightened sense of responsibility and a commitment to creating spaces that truly serve the needs of the people.

[1] Pedro Fiori Arantes, *The Rent of Form: Architecture and Labor in the Digital Age*, ed. Adriana Kauffmann et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), 152.



[A] Rue de Lyon, Marseille. On a large area that used to be industrial, demolition waste generated by the extensive ‘urban renewal’ project Euroméditerranée is piled up to be disposed of, 2023.

[B] “Here we build a connected neighborhood. Wi-Fi free for all, a tablet per apartment, which will allow one to control their own energy consumption”

This revolutionary urban concept becomes a link between the North and center of the city. This innovative Allard area will be the pilot of a much larger development across 700,000m² of floor area called ‘ZAC littoral’ and more generally on the whole extension of Euroméd II which is an area that will eventually accommodate more than 30,000 inhabitants in the heart of Marseille.

People of Marseille must take ownership of this project because it is the city of tomorrow because it will be connected, because architecturally it is beautiful, because it integrates the energy transition, and because it is proud to be the reference in terms of city development.

Smartseille, an eco-neighborhood of the future, living in the present.” EIFFAGE, Cyril Chauvin, ARTKOM, Eiffage, “FILM Smartseille,” Video file, 2015.

[C] “The renewal operation, named the ‘ZAC littoral’ must complete its development within five years. The project, promoted by the French government, has set a very ambitious goal. It will host 34,000 inhabitants in 14,000 new apartments.

Are the goals and ambitions of the project pragmatic and realistic? What will happen when so many new inhabitants arrive to the project area? They have chosen the area, and established a floor area ratio (COS)

of 2.5 and they arbitrarily obtained the number of 30,000 new inhabitants. There are challenges to be confronted: it is a floodable zone with a lot of pollution. Moreover, it is the site of the Marché aux Puces, which has a fragile economy. The question is the equilibrium between the market and existing context, and its connection with the new development characterized by an enormous amount of built square meters.

Mathias Bourrissoux, Arènes, interview by MAS Urban Design, Marseille, France, March 20, 2019.

[D] “An approach to reuse of materials and soil from construction sites: This zone enables the reuse of concrete and soil from the site’s construction sites with a view to the circular economy.

Concrete is stored, crushed, sorted, and sorted for re-use on construction sites, and soil is stored and reused.” Euroméditerranée, Construction Updates, First construction on the site of the Fabriques project), Rue Allard 13015 Marseille, 2020.