



Beyond houses: architectural thinking and practice for climate, disaster and forced displacement crises

edited by A. Nuno Martin, Carmen Mendoza-Arroyo, Liliane Hobeica, Jorge León, Adib Hobeica, Part of the book series: The Urban Book Series (UBS), Cham, Springer Nature Switzerland, 2024, xvi + 224 pp., £149.99 (hardcover book), ISBN: 978-3-031-61402-6

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BOOK REVIEW

Beyond houses: architectural thinking and practice for climate, disaster and forced displacement crises, edited by A. Nuno Martin, Carmen Mendoza-Arroyo, Liliane Hobeica, Jorge León, Adib Hobeica, Part of the book series: The Urban Book Series (UBS), Cham, Springer Nature Switzerland, 2024, xvi + 224 pp., £149.99 (hardcover book), ISBN: 978-3-031-61402-6

Beyond Houses: Architectural Thinking and Practice for Climate, Disaster and Forced Displacement Crises is an interdisciplinary volume that asserts architecture is not merely the practice of designing physical structures, but a mode of thinking capable of responding to complex conditions such as social vulnerability, climate crisis, and forced displacement. Edited by A. Nuno Martin, Carmen Mendoza-Arroyo, Liliane Hobeica, Jorge León, and Adib Hobeica, the book brings together community-based approaches, alternative architectural strategies, and project-based fieldwork from diverse geographies to offer a new ground for rethinking architecture's role in times of crisis. This redefinition requires that architecture stretches beyond its conventional tools and epistemologies and challenges the rigid boundaries of disciplinary autonomy. This book is crafted precisely for designers and researchers who dare to approach the field through this expanded and critical lens – because solutions are not to be found solely in the act of building.

Theoretically, the book illustrates how architecture is evolving from an object-centered design mindset toward a process-oriented, relational practice. As argued by Jeremy Till in *Architecture Depends* (2009) and by Schneider and Till in *Spatial Agency* (2009), architecture is not autonomous but constantly negotiated within socio-political contexts. Donna Haraway's (1988) concept of 'situated knowledges' finds resonance in the book's emphasis on local wisdom, community memory, and women's leadership, as these reflect knowledge forms rooted in embodied, contextual, and relational experiences. Theories of spatial justice (Soja 2010), urban informality (Roy 2005), the ethics of care (Tronto 1993, 2013), and spatial precarity in post-disaster contexts (Herscher 2012, 2017) are not simply cited – they are embodied through concrete case studies. Particularly, the emphasis on community-driven spatial production as a form of both physical and social reconstruction reveals the theoretical depth of the book's intellectual scaffolding.

The book is organized around three major themes: risk reduction and post-disaster recovery, increasing inclusion through humanitarian architecture, and exploring the spatial dynamics of urban forced displacement. The contributions draw on experiences from both the Global South – such as Chile, India, and Puerto Rico – and the Global North, including Portugal, Spain, and the U.S.A. (pp. 2). Many chapters emphasize participatory strategies, self-building practices, and the use of local materials in the creation of resilient and adaptive infrastructures: 'Third, they are based on concrete cases within a specific context' (pp. 3). For example, incremental housing strategies in Bhopal, India are discussed alongside post-pandemic micro-interventions in Lisbon to highlight low-cost, high-impact design alternatives adaptable to different urban conditions.

The book also brings attention to specific and highly relevant topics such as nature-based restoration (pp. 11), solidarity networks led by women (p. 31), and the spatialization of 'non-places' (Augé 1995). The underlying thread across these chapters suggests that collaborative organization and participatory planning can help counteract the displacements – or

spatial unrootings – brought about by crises. In this regard, *Beyond Houses* foregrounds not only the right to shelter, but also the need to reestablish spatial belonging – an abstract but vital dimension of inhabitation.

Within its three-part structure, the book presents case studies from multiple regions of the world, written by scholars and practitioners from diverse disciplinary and cultural backgrounds. While this breadth introduces thematic discontinuities and variable levels of theoretical engagement, it also significantly increases the book's usability across a wide readership. As stated in the preface, the book is not aimed solely at academics but also at architects, disaster managers, urban planners, and NGO workers. In this sense, *Beyond Houses* operates as a practical resource – a kind of conceptual 'toolbox' or 'emergency kit' that can be consulted in various contexts of crisis. Each chapter offers applied ideas and reflective insights that respond to specific local conditions. Moreover, this multiplicity sends a broader ethical message: in conditions of crisis, architectural decisions cannot be singular or top-down – they must be dialogical, negotiated, and situated: 'We all share the experience of dealing with crises beyond our control. Still, we also share the responsibility of exchanging our knowledge and using the tools at our disposal to tackle the issues within reach. Communities, researchers, practitioners, and policy-makers, working in partnership within action-research initiatives, can pave the way for permanent dialog and self-criticism, which are more than ever key to inducing the social change we claim for. May this alliance enable us to straightforwardly address the roots and mostly political causes behind disasters and other types of crises?' (pp. 7)

That said, the book's 12 chapters differ in terms of theoretical depth and analytical clarity. Some are strongly rooted in scholarly literature, while others rely more heavily on descriptive or project-based narratives. This diversity highlights a general lack of theoretical cohesion across the volume. Chapters dealing with tsunami evacuation behavior or complex governance models, for instance, are more technical or quantitative and may be better suited to other disciplinary contexts. Thus, the book could have achieved greater conceptual consistency had it left certain specialized discussions for other volumes. Nevertheless, this should not overshadow the book's contributions – it simply points to an area of structural improvement. It is also worth noting that the book stems from the 8th International Conference on Building Resilience held in Lisbon in 2018 and reflects the wide-ranging work of leading scholars and practitioners in the field.

In conclusion, *Beyond Houses* powerfully asserts that architecture, in the age of compounded crises, must be reimagined beyond building. It must respond to questions of solidarity, local knowledge, inclusion, and justice. Engaging with thinkers ranging from Augé and Haraway to Roy and Simone (Augé 1995; Haraway 1988; Roy 2005; Simone 2004), and offering grounded examples from the field, this book is a multi-layered reference not only for scholars but also for those interested in the social and ethical dimensions of design. By addressing the implications of global crises not only technically, but also socially and politically, this volume stands as a thought-provoking and much-needed intervention into the future of architectural practice.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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