

# Portfolio

2024



Selected projects and experiences  
in design, build & education

Stephanie EL Hourany - Architect





# Summary

The following chapters highlight key milestones in my university experience and professional career, showcasing the evolution of my approach to architecture and pedagogy.

## 1. La mérique

Transitioning from trainee to trainer

## 2. Working with Santiago Cirugeda

Self-building together

## 3. Founding U/Lab

Establishing a non-profit as citizen architects

## 4. Final year project

Initiating the design build culture in academia

## 5. Working with Carin Smuts

Architecture in the fight against poverty

## 6. Compagnons Bâisseurs

A professional journey in the social housing initiatives

## 7. Diverse projects

A passion for building with a civic engagement

## 8. Tools

Powerful catalysts in the design process

## 9. Appendix

Media, publications and events

## 10. Inspirations and intellectual foundations



## About me



Architect based in France with 8+ years of professional experience in design and build projects.

Co-founder of U/Lab : urban laboratory for emerging practices in architecture.

I believe that architecture requires a deep understanding of materials, construction techniques, and socio-cultural contexts. My work aims to empower learners, stakeholders and communities to see architecture as a tool for meaningful change.

From leading the U/Lab initiative where I helped build community based installations with students in underprivileged neighborhoods, to collaborating with the renowned architect Carin Smuts building a community kitchen in Cape Town, each endeavor has shaped my hands-on approach to architecture and education.

Teaching design & build is a natural extension of my professional practice. By guiding students through the challenges of translating ideas into built realities, I hope to inspire the next generation of architects to think critically, design responsibly, and build innovatively.



# 1. La mérique

## Transitioning from trainee to trainer

volunteer / 2013 - present

Nestled in a rural area, “La mérique” brings together volunteers and students from across the country for construction workshops and training. The goal is to rehabilitate the ruins of an old village using traditional building techniques, with the site itself serving as a learning ground for education and knowledge sharing . Powered by renewable energy sources, the self-sufficient site features a community garden, solar panels as well as low-tech installations. These features transform each participatory workshop into a lesson in sustainability and resilience.

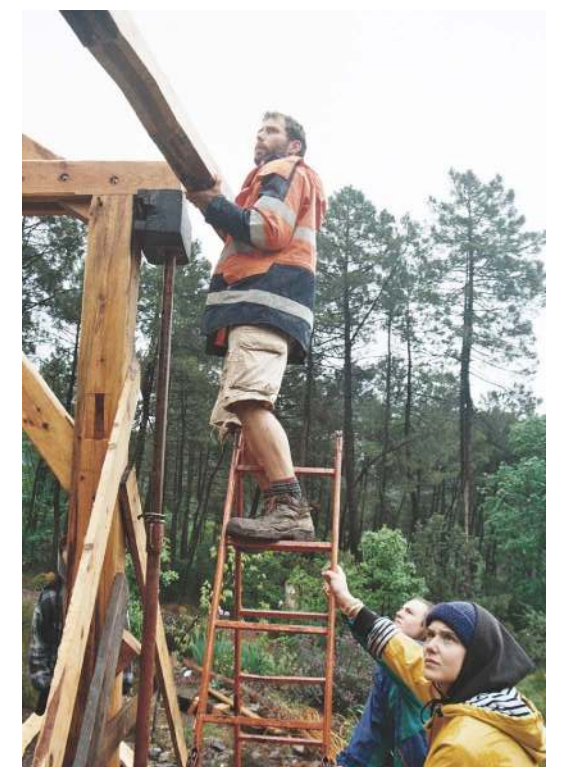
I began in “La Mérique” as an intern during my second year of architecture school and returned each year to learn new techniques alongside students and professionals (including craftsmen, carpenters, archeologists). We work with Adobe, earth & straw construction, wooden structures and traditional masonry.

Since 2021, nearly 10 years later, I have been invited to train the next generation of architecture students as part of their second year practical internships.

This place has shaped countless young architects, including myself, and has been a cornerstone in my journey as a “barefoot architect”\*.



*\* The term holds special meaning here: during the adobe earth-coating workshop, students mix the material by treading mud with their bare feet, proudly embracing the “barefoot” architect’s culture.*





# 2. Working with Santiago Cirugeda

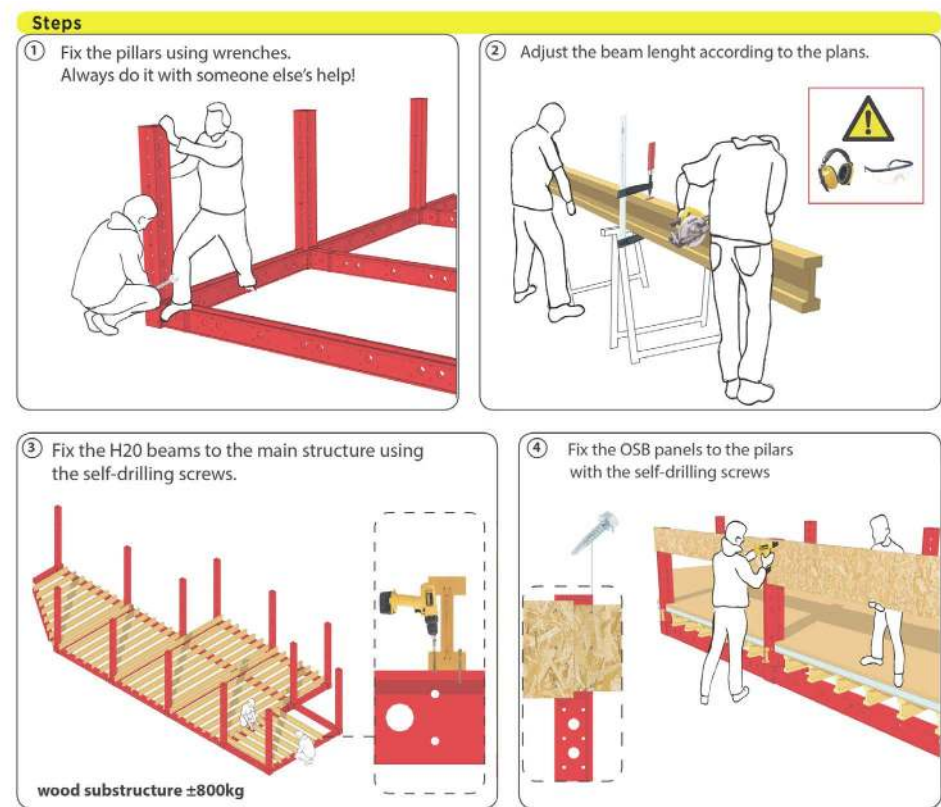
## Self-building together

Architectural intern / 2015

During my Master’s studies in Spain, I had the privilege of meeting Santiago Cirugeda, a pioneer in self-building techniques on a large scale. Under his lead, I participated in numerous community based workshops and construction projects, absorbing his approach to socially driven and technically rigorous architecture.

As Cirugeda’s assistant, I created building manuals and managed projects within a participatory process. I learned to integrate volunteers and professionals on construction sites, take calculated risks, and balance social responsibility with strict adherence to laws and regulations.

One notable project I took part in was **La Escuela Crece** (“The School Grows”), where university students in Madrid collaboratively designed and built new classrooms on their campus. This initiative encapsulates the ethos of self-building: students directly contributing to their environment while learning essential skills.



Construction manuals designed to facilitate participation in the building process



Building milestones from “La escuela crece”



### 3. Founding U/Lab

#### Establishing a non-profit as citizen architects

Co-founder and full-time project manager / 2016 - 2018

Board member and active contributor / since 2018

Motivated to create an experimental platform where architecture students could engage in community projects beyond academia, I co-founded U/Lab (Urban Laboratory) in 2016. Eight years later, it remains a vibrant non-profit organization, training architecture students as well as practising architects to expand their civic engagement through community design & build initiatives.

I was involved with U/LAB full time until 2018, and continue to serve today as a board member and an active participant. Through this platform, I have guided numerous students in undertaking a hands-on learning experience. With the group members we have a mission to spread the maker culture and develop the tools necessary to foster a committed generation of architects. Partnerships with public institutions and underprivileged communities are also integral to the laboratory's mission.

#### Major initiatives I have lead or took part in :

- Designing and building community gardens and public installations
- Participatory Construction workshops with students and volunteers
- Urban studies and advocacy planning for public institutions, often involving residencies on site by a multidisciplinary team to maximize community engagement.
- activating public spaces and facilitating community participation.
- Organizing educational events, exhibitions, and conferences addressing topics such as : emerging practices in architecture, community-centered design, building as a social act and participatory initiatives.





## 4. Final year project

### Initiating the design build culture in academia

Master's II / 2015 - 2016

As my Master's program approached its end, I felt a strong need to bridge academia and community involvement. Recognizing that my school lacked a design/build studio culture, I introduced the first such project as my final-year thesis.

Along with my partner, we designed and constructed an urban installation within six months, supported by faculty and professors.

The project involved building collaboratively and mentoring younger architecture students through workshops. The final presentation included a timeline, short film, and exhibition, earning our team of two the Master's degree.

#### Key methodology and lessons learned :

- Consulted local residents and partnered with community leaders and non-profits, using tools like mapping, visuals, and physical models.
- Collaborated with a local high school, providing students with hands-on learning opportunities through the design/build process.
- Public approvals : Negotiated with the municipality for land-use authorizations and addressed insurance and safety policies.
- Resource management : Secured funding, managed a tight budget and ensured the timely delivery of materials and tools.
- Worked with homeless former carpenters from the neighborhood, empowering them as mentors for the students and volunteers.
- Mentorship : invited renowned architects like Roger Katan and Santiago Cirugeda to advise and inspire participants.

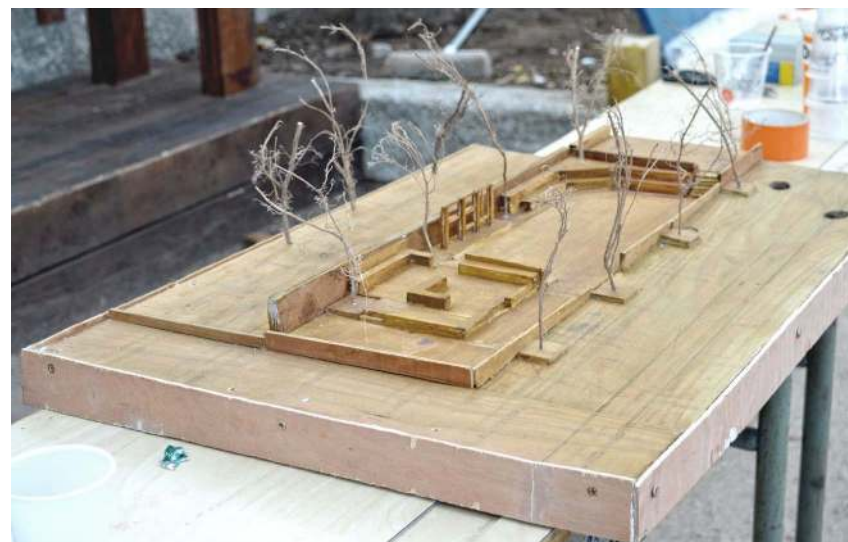


The majority of the students involved did not have prior construction experience and this project became an opportunity to demonstrate that building skills and know-how can only be acquired through the physical act of making.





Media coverage



The model as part of the design process



Final review, prototypes and exhibition

More than 80 participants were actively involved, each driven by different motives - from learning construction skills to supporting the community. Despite many challenges, the project succeeded in fostering inclusion and collaboration while instilling a sense of ownership and pride among participants.



The submitted 260 page report, titled “Architecture as a social tool”, included an evaluation of the experiment, detailed study, methodology and a figures-based analysis.

236  
Mètres  
carrés  
investis

9.000  
E U R O

10  
Ateliers

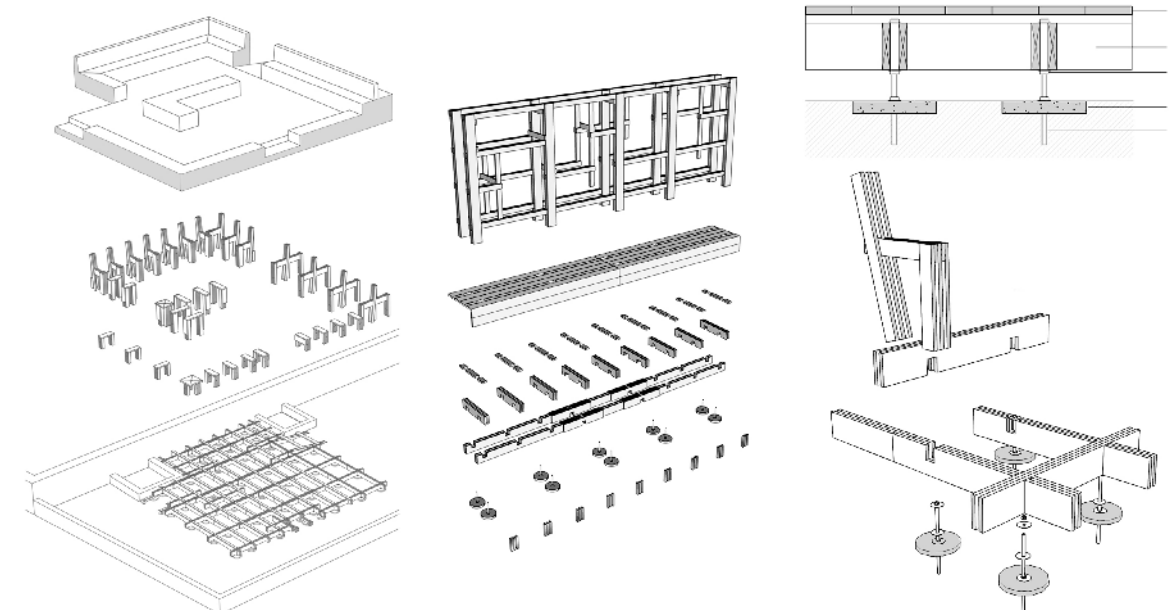
30  
Jours sur  
le site

101  
Participants

1500  
Heures de  
travail sur le  
terrain

2  
Conférences

500  
Planches de  
bois de pin



Project detailing



## 5. Working with Carin Smuts

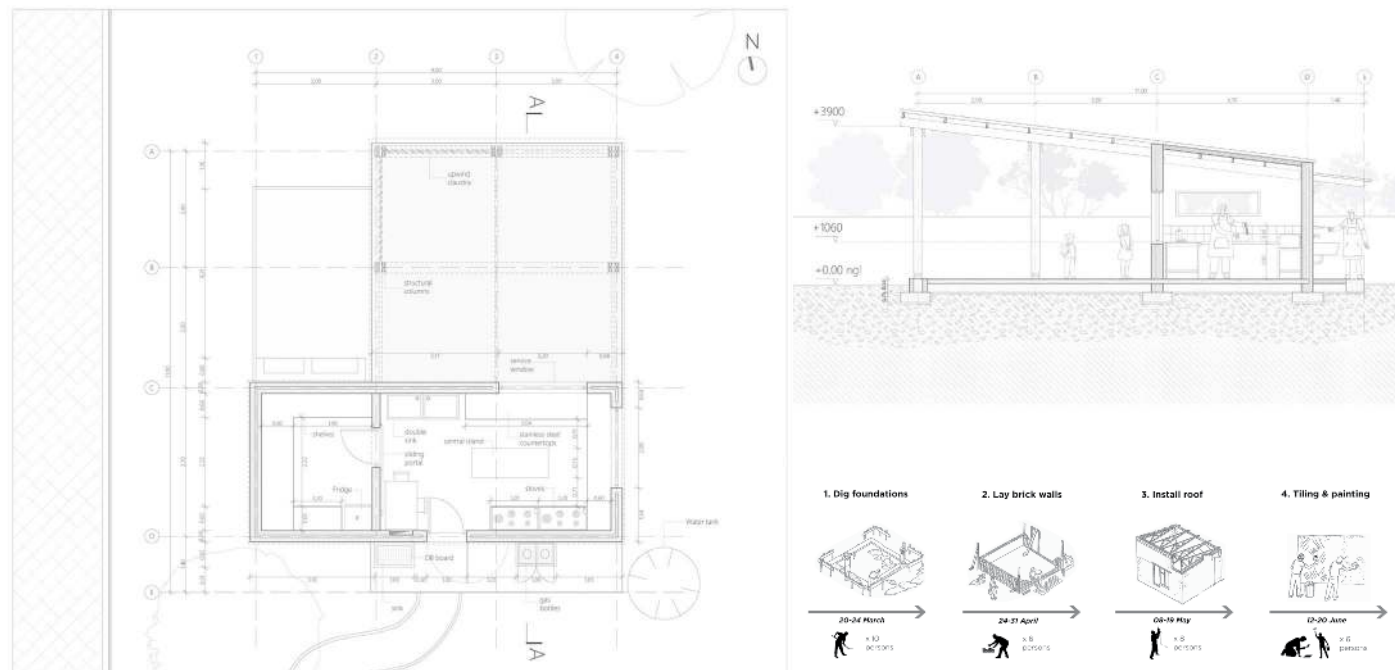
### Architecture in the fight against poverty

Assistant Architect / 2017

Smuts mentored me during my Master's studies and invited me as I graduated to design and build a community project with her in Cape Town. Together, we worked with a school in the slums to design and build a kitchen for children who often lacked access to meals at home.

#### Key contributions :

- Conducted community consultations using physical models to ensure the design reflected user needs.
- Designed sustainable, low-tech solutions after studying the local environment and techniques.
- Partnered with the university of Cape town engaging architecture students in the construction as part of their curriculum. Facilitated a collaboration with the student led non-profit "Habitat for humanity".
- Organized material sourcing by visiting recycling centers and securing donations for bricks, roofing, concrete and other essentials.
- Detailing and survey, technical plans & construction oversight.



Along with involving local labor in the building, a mosaic workshop was led by a local artist, guiding students to showcase South African craft on the building's façade.

Full project report : <https://issuu.com/stephanieelhourany/docs/rapportmissionexpertisersastephanie>



## 6. Compagnons Bâisseurs

### A professional journey in the social housing initiatives

Full-time technical project manager / 2018 - 2021  
Active board member and contributor / since 2021

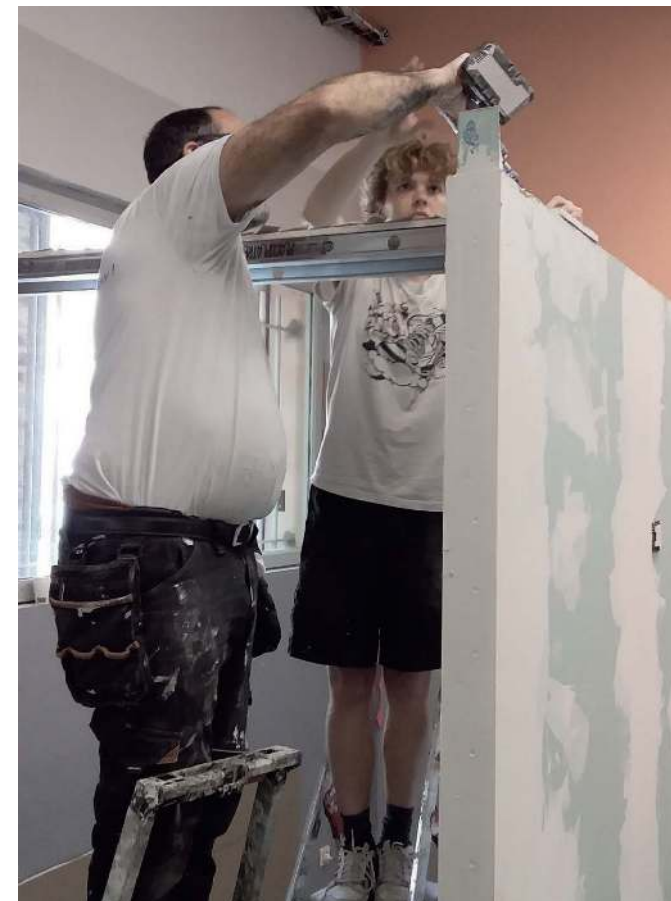
Established in 1957, Compagnons Bâisseurs (CB) is a non-profit organization dedicated to combating degraded housing through construction and informal education. As a full-time employee of CB, I contributed to multiple initiatives that combined renovation, education, and social impact.

#### Key roles and responsibilities :

- Partnership development : Maintained collaborations with public institutions. Established partnerships and initiated projects focusing on : recycling and reusing materials, energy efficiency, permaculture in the built environment, housing crisis & health
- Training and educating : developed teaching agendas through construction works, training students, volunteers, and residents renovation and building techniques.
- Community workshops : led participatory design/build workshops emphasizing cross-generational and multicultural collaborations.
- DIY : Managed a DIY solidarity workshop financed by public institutions, providing tools and training for community members to improve their homes.
- Technical supervision : oversaw social housing renovations, managing logistics, budgets, and material sourcing.



Workshops facilitating the employment of the young public through the construction industry



Since 2021, I have continued to serve CB as a board member, contributing to its strategies in empowering vulnerable communities through hands-on construction and education.

For more information about CB and our initiatives please visit our website :  
[www.compagnonsbatisseurs.eu](http://www.compagnonsbatisseurs.eu)



# 7. Diverse projects

## A passion for building with a civic engagement

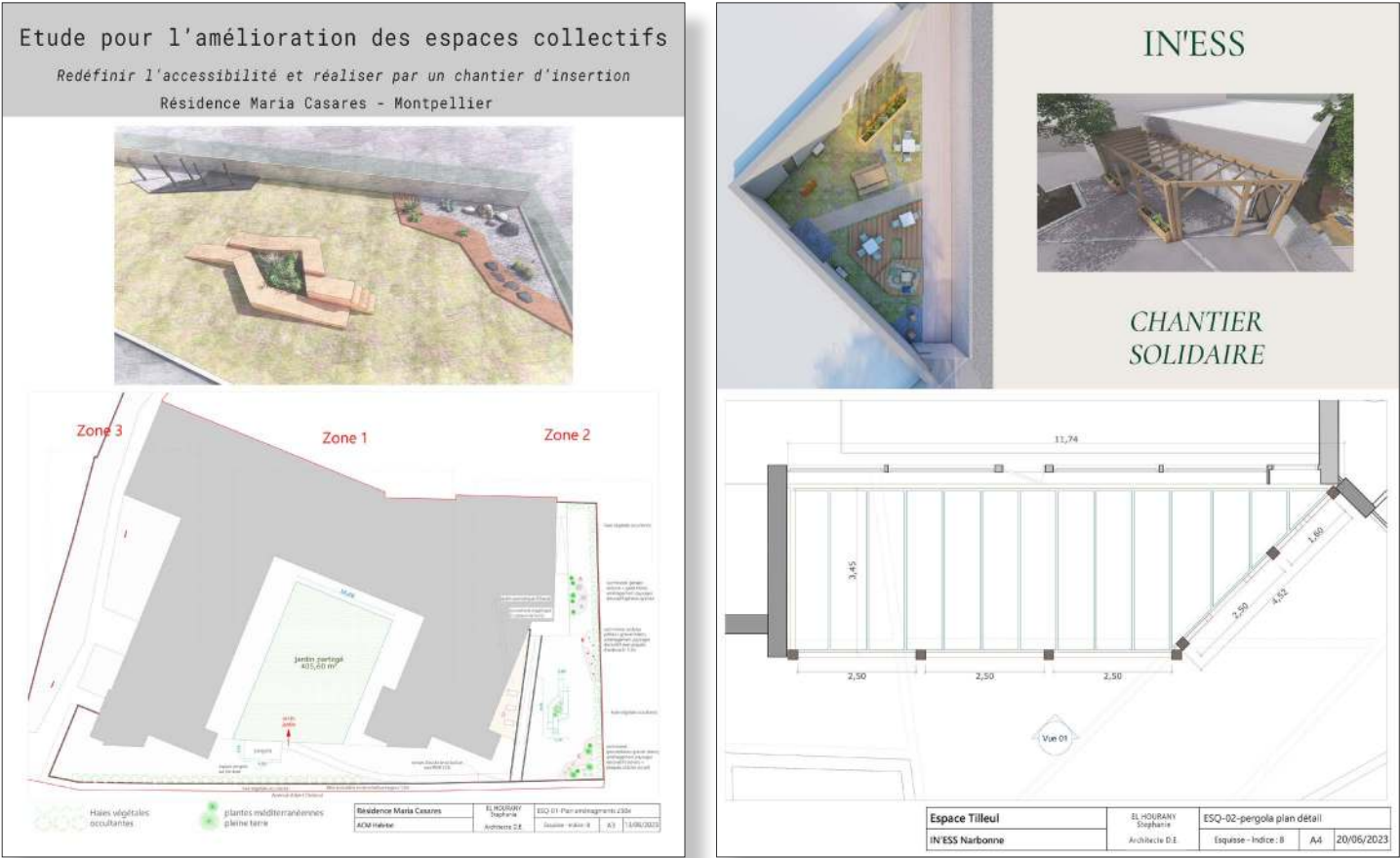
As a freelance architect, I have balanced private sector work with a commitment to civic engagement through community-focused projects. These efforts reflect my dedication to making architecture accessible and impactful for those who typically lack access to professional design services.

- Key accomplishments :**
- Provided voluntary consulting to students and non-profits in my city wishing to develop projects rooted in the community.
  - Led a study for a state agency managing social housing, creating guidelines to improve communal spaces in large-scale residences. This included community gardens, landscape design, and accessibility enhancements, developed in collaboration with residents and cross-industry experts.
  - Designed and took part in the building of an urban installation in partnership with the local municipality, socially disadvantaged youth and social workers. This initiative combined technical drawings and training in construction (wood and concrete) with an educational agenda, offering participants a pathway to skill development and empowerment.

Through every project, I strive to share knowledge and foster experimental learning environments. I firmly believe architecture has the power to transform lives and strengthen communities.



A lecture i gave at the architecture school



Reports of studies conducted and detailing for the commisioned projects



Skill-focused building workshops with the youth



powerful catalysts in the design process

### Key Tools and Practices :

- By documenting and visualizing the journey of a project, I aim to leave a trace for others to learn from, ensuring architecture serves as both a practice and a teaching tool.

The diagram illustrates the process of creating an association, categorized by three main dimensions: **CONCERNE** (Concerns), **IMPLIQUE** (Involves), and **INDIVIDU** (Individual).

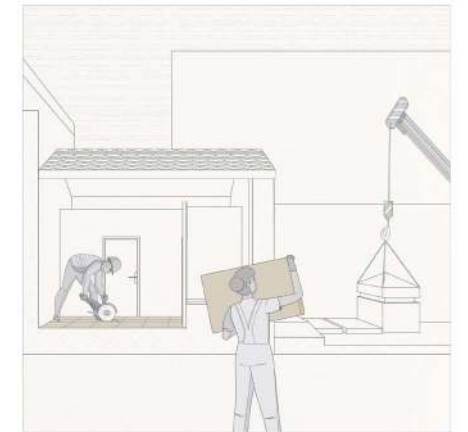
**CONCERNE (Concerns):** The process is divided into three main stages: **Mise en contact** (Initial contact), **Création de l'association** (Creation of the association), and **Mobilisation** (Mobilization).

**IMPLIQUE (Involves):** The process involves several key actors and roles: **Leader de communauté** (Community leader), **Membre actif** (Active member), **Affiliés** (Affiliates), **Stagiaire** (Trainee), **Pratiquant** (Practitioner), **Adhérents** (Members), and **Associés** (Partners).

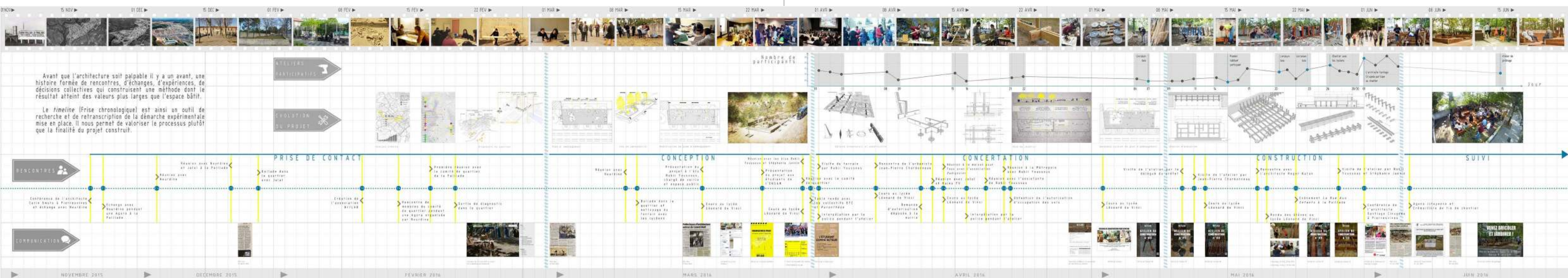
**INDIVIDU (Individual):** The process involves several key individuals: **Pierre Goudon**, **Adile**, **Jalal**, **Jean-Louis**, **Patrice**, and **Youssef**.

The process flows from initial contact and individual involvement through stages of sensibilisation, creation, and mobilisation, leading to the formation of an association and subsequent activities.

*Short film presented as a project outcome*



## Construction planning through storytelling



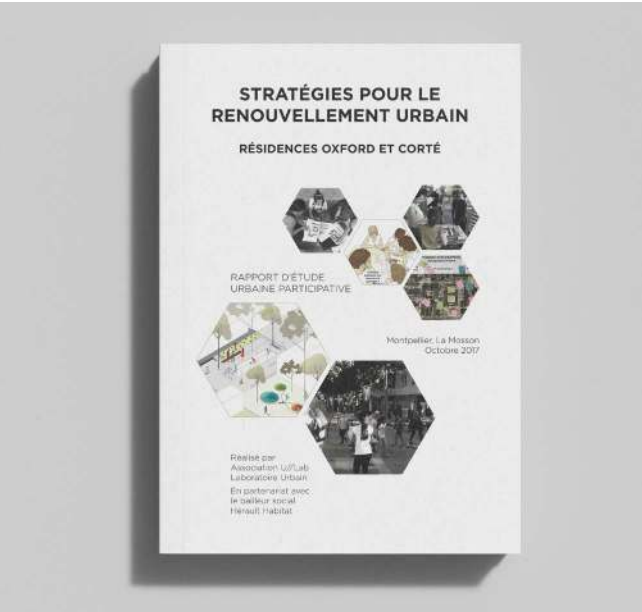


# 9. Appendix

## Media, publications and events



Master’s thesis “Revitalizing Abandoned Industrial Spaces: The Process as a Strategy”, mentored by architect Arturo Franco at ETSA Madrid (2015)



Published report of a participatory study I led for a public institution : strategies for urban renewal



Curated a conference series focused on the students’ role in their education and how architecture fosters social change



Completed the Architecture sans frontière ASF challenging practice training part A: essentials for the social production of habitat (2017)

Articles published in the local press about projects I led or contributed to.



featured student work in architect Alberto Campo Baeza’s publication during my time at the Polytechnic University of Madrid (2015)



## 10. Inspirations and intellectual foundations

These individuals and their practices have been guiding principles in my career, fostering my dedication to rooted architecture and experiential education. Their influence is reflected in the projects I've undertaken and the teaching methodologies I've developed, as showcased throughout this portfolio.

### **Atelier du désert (Desert workshop) by André Raverau :**

A groundbreaking educational experience from the 1950s where the french architect and students immersed themselves in the algerian desert's culture, traditions, and history, learning to create authentic designs that reflect the spirit of the place. This initiative inspires my belief in teaching through cultural and environmental immersion.



### **The University of Talca school of architecture**

Talca's design/build studio experiments served as a model for my Master's final project and academic explorations. This school exemplifies how architecture programs can actively engage with their geographic and social contexts, engaging students in their territory's evolution.

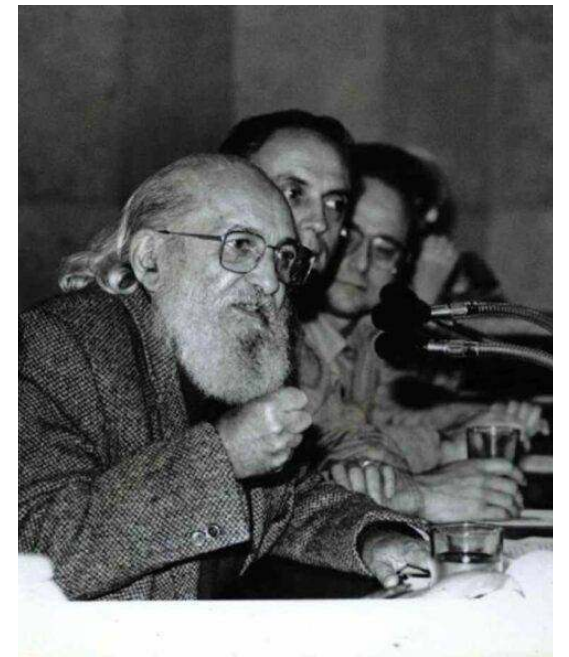


### **Architect Santiago Cirugeda - Spain**

Cirugeda is a socially driven architect who practices at the intersection of activism and construction. His work, awarded the *Global Award for Sustainable Architecture* in 2015, showcases the transformative potential of self-building in education and deeply informs my work philosophy.

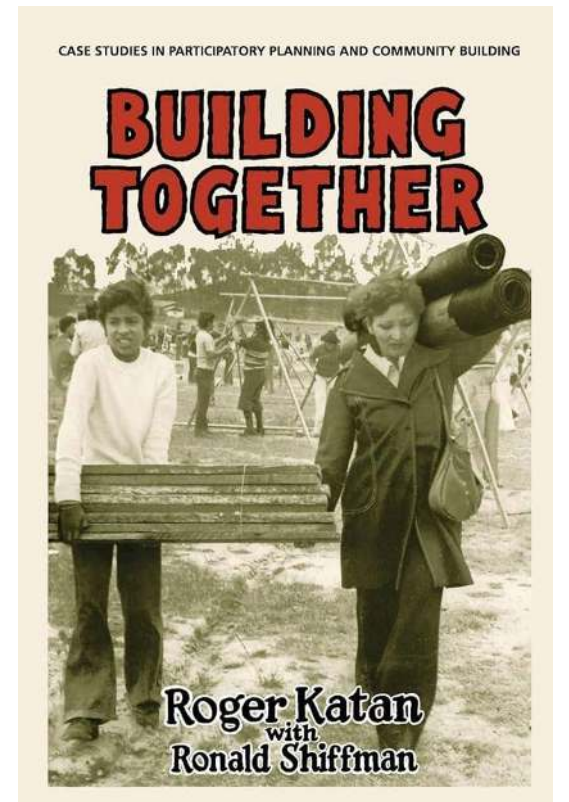
### **Educator Paulo Freire - Brazil**

An educational visionary whose work highlights the way education empowers individuals. Freire's emphasis on cooperation and active participation inspires my educational approach. As Freire aptly put it: "The teacher doesn't teach but learns while in dialogue with the students."



### **Architect Roger Katan**

A pioneer of advocacy planning and participatory democracy applied to urban design, first in East Harlem and then across Latin America, he has influenced my work ethics. I seeked his advice during my Master studies, as he encouraged my work and taught me valuable lessons about community involvement and the transformative power of participatory building.



### **Architect Carin Smuts - South Africa**

Carin Smuts is an architect and educator whose work is deeply rooted in the community, she engages in participatory processes to address inequality through design. Her work in the Cape Town slums, integrating inclusive and sustainable solutions, has been a lifelong inspiration for my own approach to architecture as a tool for empowerment. Having collaborated with her on a community kitchen project in South Africa, I continue to benefit from her mentorship and guidance.





*" By building, I do believe I have  
constructed myself. "*

Paul Valéry in *Eupalinos ou l'Architecte*.



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