This research proposes a set of architectural and urban strategies to deal with the issue of intervention in informal settlements, informed and empowered by the use of computational tools for modelling and simulation. The global aim is to find possible ways to integrate bottom-up self-construction processes with top-down planning rules, creating an interface to generate and discuss developments between citizens and planners. This interface works both on the virtual and the physical layers of the city, generating a system to control and drive growth over time.

This is achieved by the construction of a set of algorithmic tools to simulate the existing growth processes and to generate different scenarios and spatial configuration for development in the selected study area, the neighbourhood of Derbent in Istanbul. The developed algorithms are grouped into two main simulations:

An urban level simulation of settlement growth, based on an economic model, which can provide different scenarios for the growth of neighbourhood and which can at the same time be used as a crowd-sourcing game to collect statistical data about the predicted behaviours of citizens. This is composed of a multi-agents system, generating road patterns, and a cellular-based simulation of growth of housing...
units, both of them being intertwined through a web of potential fields, driving the growth in a complex and adaptive way.

A block growth script, where the relationships between the different existing houses and between the elements of each house can be integrated with new elements, like gardens and service hubs, while maintaining the same nature of the spaces adjacencies.

The model built allows for the creation of different scenarios, either based on a combination of bottom-up processes driven by citizens’ decisions and top-down policies implemented by the municipalities, or on the modelling of possible unpredictable changes, such as demographic shifts or environmental disasters. The scenarios can be tested and evaluated, allowing for the definition of alternative policies of intervention. Thanks to the use of computational models throughout all the process, the implementation phase can then be carried out following different paths, but by sustaining a continuous process of feedback with the simulation tools and the reality of change, maintain a degree of control without imposing a rigid development.

The resulting methodology offers a new perspective towards informality, allowing to study it as a valid alternative to current neoliberal trends, rather than as a problem for urbanity: indeed, the idea of an additive process of construction of the city over time allows to change the current “demolish & rebuild” trend that rules Istanbul’s urbanization processes. Moreover, it challenges the role of the architect and the power of the architectural and planning disciplines in opening up towards a more participatory and sustainable practice of city-making.

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