

*Form presented by the initiative to participate in the Transformative Cities People's Choice Award*

<b>GENERAL INFORMATION</b>	
<b>Location</b>	Porto Alegre - Rio Grande do Sul - Brazil
<b>Title of the Transformative Initiative:</b>	Socio-Environmental Architecture Centre (Centro de Arquitectura Socioambiental - CaSanAT)
<b>Name of the Organization:</b>	Amigos da Terra Brasil (Friends of the Earth Brazil)
<b>Type of Organization</b>	Environmentalist, anti-capitalist, antiracist and anti-patriarchal organization that campaigns for economic, socio-environmental and gender justice and for the peoples' rights.
<b>Website:</b>	<a href="http://www.amigosdaterrabrasil.org.br">www.amigosdaterrabrasil.org.br</a>
<b>Category and Year:</b>	HOUSING. 3rd Transformative Cities Award (2020)
<b>STORYTELLING</b>	
<b>Summary</b>	
<p>The Socio-Environmental Architecture Centre (Centro de Arquitectura Socioambiental - CaSanAT) is home to the Friends of the Earth group and is a point of reference for sustainable buildings in the city. Since 2016 it has hosted the Fruits of the Resistance Agroecology Fair. It is currently faced with an eviction order by the Bolsonaro government. It is also storing tons of donated food for thousands of families.</p>	
<b>Background and Description of the Problem</b>	

The path to sustainable cities is based on the principle of environmental justice, and the fulfilment of people’s right to live in a healthy environment depends on it. As a transformative urban space that has itself been evolving since the initial project in 2004, CaSanAT has sought to adopt community-based sustainable building techniques that respect water and energy flows, and it is used for public interest purposes.

As a space for social organizing and education on the life and idea of the city, its objective is to strengthen the commons and public spaces, waging a constant campaign to place the rights of peoples over and above private interests. With the Fruits of the Resistance Fair, which brings together working class people from the countryside and the city, it also challenges the hegemony of agribusiness in the agrifood system, encouraging support for people who defend and care for their territories by means of grassroots community management. It always guarantees the participation of women as political subjects in collective campaigns and thinks about childcare. Today, even while facing legal action by the Bolsonaro government, the building continues to be at the service of solidarity between movements which, in a rural-urban partnership, guarantee income for farmers and donated food for thousands of families of indigenous peoples, quilombola communities and homeless people in the city.

### **Design and Implementation**

This can be divided into 4 inter-connected stages:

- 1) 2004 design of the CaSanAT architectural and construction project;
- 2) 2016 the Fruits of the Resistance Agroecology Fair;
- 3) 2019 the eviction order by the Bolsonaro government and the campaign to stay in the building, and
- 4) 2020 recent solidarity actions in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

1) 2003 – the search for a permanent base, which was achieved in 2004 thanks to a concession by the Ministry of Planning and Management to use a property free of charge. The building was derelict and at risk of collapse. 2006-2007 – an innovative architecture project: 10 architecture and urban development professionals (8 of them women) + associates participated, and we raised funds for the rebuilding project. 2008 – based on sustainable strategies in terms of energy and water use, we collectively applied grassroots technologies and made the building habitable. We also

campaigned for policies to include the right to the city. CaSanAT serves as an experimental site for community initiatives.

2) Fruits of the Resistance: this involves much more than just buying and selling food. It is a solidarity network that places life at the centre of the economy and politics. Changing the system is understood to depend on dismantling the patriarchy and women's participation as political subjects is therefore guaranteed in the campaigns. The network enables consumers to have more control over the food they eat because it eliminates the need for intermediaries. It is a system of fair trade, with lower prices for those who will eat the food and higher incomes for the farmers who produce it.

3) November 2019 – the Regional Heritage Superintendency, which under the Bolsonaro government now belongs to the Ministry of the Economy's Special Secretariat for Privatization, Divestment and Markets, attempted to evict ATBr. Even in the midst of the pandemic, the lawsuit is continuing to make its way through the courts. We are continuing to take forward the #CaSanATResiste #AmigosdaTerraExiste campaign to remain in our building and we reaffirmed our commitment not to be silent in the face of this political persecution.

4) In March 2020 our city went into lockdown due to Covid-19. CaSanAT is operating as a storage space for food and hygiene products which are purchased (using the funds raised from donations) at a fair price from rural social movement networks and donated to social movements in the city that distribute food to thousands of families. This is a solidarity alliance for and among the working class.

### **Results Achieved and Evaluation**

1) CaSanAT: 2003-2020 - from the pile of rubble that was the building when we found it, the house is now a living space thanks to the ceaseless work done by countless hands. It was the site of an experimental project leading to the approval of a municipal law on the re-use of rainwater, which is just one of the many things worth mentioning. As well as the ideas we would like to implement but are still on paper, the building now has: rainwater collection and re-use, a biological wastewater treatment system, productive landscaping, recovery of cement-free building techniques, and many others.

2) Fair: bringing rural and urban social movements and consumers closer together. We built a space for thinking about and strengthening political alliances, which promotes cultural and political activities to forge links between campaigns as well as selling produce. One of the guidelines we have introduced since the 1<sup>st</sup> round of the

award is to provide childcare in order to ensure that women can participate, while we demand an end to the sexual division of labour and stop overloading women with reproductive tasks.

3) Eviction Order: When the Covid-19 pandemic began, we took a political decision to reduce the intensity of our #CaSanATResiste media campaign because the urgent needs of the communities and social movements had to take priority. We also thought that the eviction order would not be pursued in the midst of the pandemic while we were in lockdown. But on 24 June we were sent a new notification, and now that the case is making its way through the courts we need to reactivate the campaign and continue with our plans to publicize it internationally.

4) Solidarity in times of Covid-19: in a partnership involving more than 10 social movements and organizations, over 10 tons of food and hygiene products have been donated for thousands of families in the state of Rio Grande del Sur, mainly in Porto Alegre, the state capital. CaSanAT is being used as a storage space and for the team to organize the food deliveries.

## Political Strategies

We believe that a transformative city means challenging politicians and disputing public policies with the aim of deepening democracy. As members of ATBr we already participate in many spaces for civil society and decision making (at the city level, for example, in the Municipal Urban Development Council's Master Plan for the City, the Municipal Environment Council and others). But, in common with other countries in Latin America, Brazil experienced a coup d'état and as a result it is currently undergoing a serious political crisis that is just as horrible as the pandemic itself.

The advance of fascism presents us with challenges that only working class solidarity can overcome, and that is what is giving us hope to continue forging ahead towards the common goal of safeguarding the rights of our peoples. Even under the threat of losing our building, we are waging a constant campaign against the ultra-conservative neoliberalism led by the transnational corporations and financial institutions, now underpinned by fascism, racism and xenophobia, misogyny and lgbtphobia. We continue to be committed to the building of sustainable societies to overcome the capitalist system based on the patriarchy, colonialism and imperialism. We forge alliances with the movements that have a vision of systemic change similar to our own and whose stance is anticapitalist, antiracist and anti-patriarchal. We are

fully aware that international and class solidarity is key to moving forward towards a fairer society.

## **Communication and Cultural Strategies**

Communication permeates the whole initiative. We have a vision and an understanding of grassroots communication in which all the people who form part of an organization engage in communication, because organization and communication are inseparable. We also understand that communication should not be a task left to those who have formal training in the area of journalism, for example.

All kinds of communication materials have been produced for the 4 areas of work we are presenting here: artwork, comics, cartoons, radio programmes, texts, videos, films, music – together and/or separately. We understand communication as a tool for political action and education, and that is also why we prioritise coming together with other movements in this process of communication work. Our aim is not just to transmit and amplify the voices from our territories, but also to communicate with other territories, learning to build collectively. We also understand communication as a tool to dispute the meaning and idea of society, placing the peoples' right to the city over and above the the rights of transnational private capital.

The Fruits of the Resistance Fairs have always included cultural activities with music, poetry and capoeira combined with discussions on community issues and demands. One of the videos mentioned below shows how a discussion on rights with indigenous and quilombola leaders is combined with quilombola music to say: the struggle continues!

## **Resources, Funding and the Transformative Economy**

For point 1 we raised funds from donations and it is very difficult to obtain public funds to support structural work on the building, but we are doing it little by little. For point 2 we had a few projects approved to support farming families to bring their

produce to the city to sell, and all the rest – publicity materials, cultural activities, etc – was done by the organization’s members.

5% of the income from the sale of produce is set aside to cover the cost of transport to the city the next time, and this makes the fair self-sustaining. For point 3 we received emergency support from Friends of the Earth International to help with the legal costs of defending ourselves against the eviction order. For point 4 we raise funds from donations in order to buy healthy food from farmers’ movements which we then donate to urban groups who need food during the Covid-19 pandemic.

### **Related Legislation**

CaSanAT was the site of an experimental laboratory for the approval of a law – the Municipal Programme for Water Conservation, Rational Use and Re-Use – which was launched under Law N° 10.506 of 5 August 2008. We were involved at every stage in the development of this law. Our proposal was much more ambitious, but as a result of the liaison work we did in the Commission, at least we managed to achieve the approval of a proposed solution for the city to reduce flooding due to heavy rains – and we should remember that this has a much worse impact on the outskirts of the city.

Our proposal had several other elements, such as a biological wastewater treatment system which we have implemented at a very low cost in CaSanAT and in dozens of other buildings in the city’s periurban areas. This system treats 99% of the waste water and its last stage contains the roots of a productive plantation (descriptions of the building’s sustainable processes can be found in the links section). This biological wastewater treatment system has been certified as a social technology and we have been introducing it in many communities over the years.

## **Ecological Transitions**

ATBr's ultimate goal is systemic change that puts an end to exploitation by means of a shift in power relations through the advancement of local control and participatory democracy. Systemic change requires building a new community-based economy underpinned by the principle of justice. The key objective of the economy should be the promotion of sustainable societies, which are understood to be those living in harmony with nature, without exploitation of the working class or livelihoods, and which develop based on environmental, social, economic and gender justice and the sovereignty and self-determination of the peoples.

The struggle for systemic change is a long one. The concept of a transition is fundamental and it pervades all the answers to these questions, namely: agroecology as the path to food sovereignty; community defence and care of the territory, which also includes indigenous communities and peoples and their ancestral cultures as well as forming part of food sovereignty; energy sovereignty; the feminist economy and the dismantling of patriarchy with a new care economy, and many more.

## **Conclusion**

Links between different political actors and social movements (especially in points 2 and 4 – the Fair and the recent solidarity work in response to Covid-19, as well as in point 3 – the eviction order by the authoritarian Bolsonaro government). This is what makes our utopia real. The working class solidarity shown in these grim times of the health and political crisis where hunger and fascism torment us. The struggle continues! And hope springs anew!

## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

**Supporting documents**

<http://www2.portoalegre.rs.gov.br/cgi-bin/nph-brs?s1=00030452.DOCN.&l=20&u=/netahtml/sirel/simples.html&p=1&r=1&f=G&d=atos&SECT1=TEXT>

Water law, for which CaSanAT was the experimental laboratory and we participated in drawing it up.

<http://www.amigosdaterrabrasil.org.br/sobre/casanat/>

- #CasanATResiste and #AmigosdaTerraExiste Campaign against the eviction order issued by the Bolsonaro government as part of its political persecution against the organization. – With a step by step description of the architectural and construction project to restore the building, and more information about how to support ATBr so that it doesn't lose the CasanAT.

<http://www.amigosdaterrabrasil.org.br/2020/05/30/caminhos-da-solidariedade-organizacoes-sociais-estao-em-luta-contr-a-fome-afundada-pela-cri-se-do-covid-19/>

- Report on the actions we are currently taking in response to the health crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, linking up with social movements in the countryside and the city.

The 1min23sec video will be subtitled in English and Spanish on youtube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pWNY7oj-4Y>

- Video about how the Fruits of the Resistance Agroecology Fair came about and the proposal for using the space, which goes well beyond economic subsistence and seeks to forge links with movements that are fighting to continue living in their territories and secure their livelihoods. In other words, it also involves building other ways of running the economy and transforming it so that the sustainability of life is the central concern.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vQPZI31V2IA>

- 13min18sec video with footage of the 12th Fruits of the Resistance Agroecology Fair in the CasaNAT with indigenous and quilombola leaders, cultural activities and a single firm message: The struggle continues! The struggle continues! And continues!

Impact of the Covid-19 outbreak



CasaNAT placed itself at the service of solidarity actions to address the impact of the crisis on the working class, indigenous peoples, quilombola communities and women. It receives, stores and organizes the distribution of donated food and hygiene products which are delivered to thousands of families. By linking up with the Global Women's March, the Homeless Workers' Movement, the Quilombola Front, the Indigenist Missionary Council, the Small-Scale Farmers' Movement, the Movement for Popular Sovereignty in Mining, the Landless Rural Workers' Movement, the Movement of People Affected by Dams, the Popular Committee in Defence of the People and the Committee Against Hunger, at least 10 tons of food has been distributed since March. This action is not just about solidarity with the people receiving the food, but also with the communities it comes from, as the network brings together working class activists in the countryside and the city and also supports farmers' movements having difficulty transporting their produce. As well as enabling the people in periurban areas standing up for their right to the city and social distancing to receive organic food, it also supports other groups, such as movements defending their territories under threat from mining projects.