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DEGLI STUDI
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CROSS-DISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES ON URBAN SPACE
AN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
27-28 June 2015
CALL FOR PAPERS

Organizers

Giulio Giovannoni, University of Florence
Silvia Ross, University College Cork

Scientific committee

Marco Cenzatti, UC Berkeley
Leonardo Chiesi, University of Florence
Giuseppe De Luca, University of Florence
Giulio Giovannoni, University of Florence
Richard Ingersoll, Syracuse University
Medina Lasansky, Cornell University
Andrea Mecacci, University of Florence
Saverio Mecca, University of Florence
Raffaele Paloscia, University of Florence
Davide Papotti, University of Parma
Silvia Ross, University College Cork

DESCRIPTION

Urban space is the physical continuum on which human existence and social life unfold, with their complexities and contradictions, conflicts and fights, passions and needs. However, urban space is not a simple container for human and social life, neutral like an empty theatrical scene which waits to be used by actors and performers. Although inert and difficult to transform, urban space has a natural tendency to form an indistinguishable whole with the society which inhabits and shapes it. Social structures, as well as power relations, inhabiting cultures, and modes of production, are variously encoded in it. Spatial transformations signify social dynamics and changes which are often conflicting and contradictory. Urban planners and designers tend to ignore their controversial and problematic role, hiding themselves behind the supposed neutrality of technical expertise. This is one of the reasons why it is important to critically reconsider the notion of urban space from different disciplinary perspectives, in order to gain a better awareness of the many implications of urban design.

The conference, organized by Giulio Giovannoni and Silvia Ross, is conceived as an opportunity for critical discussion on the topic of urban space from different disciplinary perspectives. It aims to bring together scholars from a range of disciplines including urban design, literary studies, urban and architectural history, urban sociology, urban ethnography, cultural geography, environmental studies, philosophy and aesthetics.



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ORGANIZATION

The conference will be held at the University of Florence, Department of Architecture. Details about the conference venue will be confirmed shortly.

It is not the intention of the organizers to use the conference as a way of collecting funds. Conference fees will be low, aimed at covering organizational costs and conference proceedings costs. A reduced fee will be foreseen for PhD students.

Organization costs will include the invitation of a limited number of keynote speakers.

GOALS AND OUTCOMES The Conference "Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives on Urban Space" is conceived as an intensive workshop, meaning that sessions will be plenary and presenters will be expected to attend and participate throughout the duration of the conference. The Conference has four major goals:

- 1) To advance the debate on urban space from different disciplinary perspectives, taking into account their mutual influence;
- 2) To explore theoretical perspectives, as well as theoretically-informed case studies on urban space in a comparative context;
- 3) To enhance critical awareness about the complex and problematic (political, social, economic, cultural etc.) effects of architecture and urban design;
- 4) To extend the network of scholars interested in investigating urban space from different disciplinary perspectives already initiated with the seminar "Crossdisciplinary Perspectives on Urban Space" held at the Department of Architecture in the 2014 spring semester.

SUBMISSION PROCESS:

The organizers invite submissions for 20-minute presentations to be delivered in English. Please send a 300-word abstract, contact details and a brief bio by **Monday, 15 February 2016** to the session organizer(s) and to the conference email address conference@crossdisciplinaryurbanspace.com

Conference web site: <http://crossdisciplinaryurbanspace.com>

Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/crossdisciplinaryurbanspace/>

The organizers anticipate that a peer-reviewed collection of selected essays, to be published with an academic press, will result from the conference.

SESSIONS

Session 1 – Literary and cinematic portrayals of a city: narratives as interpretative tools for contemporary Italian urban environments

The complex identity of contemporary cities forms the basis of a shared collective quest for interpretative threads that can help inhabitants and city users to understand, appreciate, and live urban environments. Literature and film are a potential territory for the growth of narrations about continuously evolving urban identities. The session welcomes papers from scholars from different disciplines (literature, film studies, geography, sociology, anthropology, urban studies, architecture etc.) dedicated to literary and cinematic accounts of contemporary cities in the Italian context.

Organizers: Dr Davide Papotti (University of Parma) dpapotti@unipr.it and Dr Silvia Ross (UCC) s.ross@ucc.ie



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Session 2 – Identity, History, and the Production of Urban Space

Narratives about community, history, and identity are powerful forces which are often used to create the preconditions for the production of urban space. However, both the concept of community and that of identity are two problematic categories which can easily be misappropriated for questionable political and social goals. This section of the conference will welcome both theoretical contributions aimed at reconsidering the concepts of community and identity, and case studies in which the complex relationship between history, identity, and urban design is investigated and unveiled.

Organizer: Dr Giulio Giovannoni (University of Florence) giulio.giovannoni@unifi.it

Session 3 – Spaces of Conflict in Modern and Contemporary Italy

This session examines the effects of conflict in Modern and Contemporary Italian society on the urban sphere. The session considers how conflict (ranging from World War I, to terrorism of the 1970s-1980s, to current anxieties about migration and integration), shapes people and places in 20th and 21st-century Italy. The experience of conflict affects not only soldiers or resistance fighters or those participating in armed struggle more generally, but also civilians and their surroundings, be they part of the built environment or the natural landscape. The session also explores how the urban landscape is physically transformed by or adapted to conflict, whether manifest (e.g. the ruins of war) or systemic (e.g. urban planning in relation to demographic tensions). Aspects could include: trauma and its effects on identity, on bodies, on space. The panel seeks interdisciplinary perspectives on the topic, ranging from the representation of conflict in space in the text (diaries, letters, novels, essays, film etc.), in architecture, in the visual arts, in urban thought etc.

Organizer: Dr Silvia Ross (UCC) s.ross@ucc.ie

Session 4 – Heterotopias of Difference

Michel Foucault gave, at the end of the 1960s, a lecture in which he introduced the term 'heterotopia' to indicate "spaces of deviance," "spaces that are linked to all other spaces" in ways that suspend, and contradict them. This was half a century ago. Foucault, in the notes for the lecture also points out that although all societies have heterotopias, their function changes from culture to culture and over time. This section of the conference aims at investigating the expansion of the realm of heterotopias, no longer limited to deviance. In a society that is increasingly characterized by multiculturalism, fragmented lifestyles and increasing social identities, heterotopias are perhaps less clandestine and ab-normal, but more pervasive and diverse.

Organizer: Dr Marco Cenzatti (University of UC Berkeley) cenzatti@gmail.com

Session 5 – Urban Space as Art Fake

This section of the conference will focus on the relationship between urban space and aesthetics in a broad sense ranging from theoretical issues (mimesis, artwork, perception) to the analysis of applied categories (pop, kitsch, fake, merchandise). It is evident that aestheticization processes which have occurred in the last thirty years have changed the status of aesthetics and, especially, of the work of art. Also urban space takes an active



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part in the relationship between the crisis of the artistic (the artwork) and the explosion of the aesthetic (diffuse aesthetics), a scenario that certifies the horizon of contemporaneity and definitively dismisses the equation aesthetic-art that marked the thought of nineteenth-century, in a more problematic way the thought of twentieth-century modernism, and in a still recognizable form, the thought of postmodernism.

Organizer: Dr Andrea Mecacci (University of Florence) andrea.mecacci@unifi.it

Session 6 – Designed Space Versus Lived Space

This section of the conference focuses on the relationship between designed space and lived space starting from the assumption that commodities, like persons, have social lives. Empirical evidence shows that designed space often conflicts with the way its users project their values, their cultures and more generally their lives, into space. We invite papers investigating the dynamics between space as intended by designers/planners and space as interpreted by its inhabitants. Both theoretical works and case-study analyses will be welcomed.

Organizers: Dr Leonardo Chiesi (University of Florence) leonardo.chiesi@unifi.it and Dr Giulio Giovannoni (University of Florence) giulio.giovannoni@unifi.it

Session 7 – Ethnographical approaches in “peripheral” areas: intersections with planning and urban design in a time of crisis

The global economic and financial crisis has impacted on cities and urban areas, with significant implications for the present and future quality of life. In many countries, this has resulted in increasing inequalities within and between “peripheral” areas at the neighbourhood, city and regional level. This general condition implies an urgent need to rethinking at Planning and Urban Design “beyond growth-dependency” (Rydin, 2013), identifying also which kind of resources could be mobilized and or/activated by the public action to cope with long term and new emerging problems related to deprivation and social exclusion. Assuming that places’ descriptions and policy interventions (and/or analysis and design) are always interrelated issues, and rephrasing Geertz (1973), more and more “thicker descriptions” are needed to grasp the increasing complexity of peripheral areas’ problems, but also to discover and activate their often hidden resources related to people and places. This session aims at exploring these issues bringing together scholars, planners and urban designers who have worked in peripheral areas through (more or less explicit) ethnographical approaches oriented to action. In particular, contributions investigating these issues with reference to specific case studies are welcomed.

Organizers: Dr Paola Briata (DASTU, Polytechnic of Milan) paola.briata@polimi.it, Dr. Barbara Piga (DASTU, Polytechnic of Milan) barbara.piga@polimi.it

Session 8 – Regulating and designing urban space for pluralism

Cities have always been crucibles of diversity, enabling contact among a variety of ideas of what constitutes a good living and lifestyle. Writing in the early decades of the last century, Louis Wirth declared optimistically that the mere juxtaposition of divergent personalities and modes of life in a city tends to produce a sense of toleration of differences. Today, however, a cosmopolitan outlook, public toleration, and pluralism are no longer—if they ever were—an automatic by-product of the city environment. Quite the opposite has emerged; new forms of



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closure, enclavism, segregation, and discrimination—based on ethnic, religious and social differences—are spreading in several cities. In many cases, these issues have a spatial matrix and are framed in terms of spatial planning and design issues. Take, for instance, several cases of municipal by-laws or street furniture design aimed at excluding undesired groups or lifestyles from public space. But think also of thorny ethical questions raised by the spread of several kinds of private collective spaces such as shopping malls and private residential communities. This session is aimed at exploring the variety of cases in which urban design and regulation (of public spaces as well as of private ones) impact urban pluralism. In particular, contributions investigating these issues with reference to specific case studies are welcomed.

Organizer: Dr Francesco Chiodelli (Gran Sasso Science Institute) francesco.chiodelli@gssi.infn.it