

CFP for Circling the Square: Re-designing nature-cultures in a changing urban climate

23-24 November 2017 at the Tü Munich.

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MCTS - Infrastructures & Participation Center for Urban Nature and Climate Adaptation

Deadline for abstracts 2 October 2017.

Urban planners, architects and designers are increasingly confronted with highly complex socio-ecological dynamics and challenges. These do not just involve new levels of vulnerability caused by heat island effect and anthropogenic climate change: Cities have also become refuges for many species that are fleeing habitat loss, agrochemicals and monoculture deserts, while globalised 'invasive' species are showing the limits of techno-scientific control in that they are increasingly destabilising urban green infrastructures.

Public squares and parks play a central role in current efforts to meet these socio-ecological challenges. However, our imagination of what squares should be and our analytical models of their uses and functions are still profoundly anchored in modern conceptions and divides between nature and culture, the technical and the social, the urban and the rural, the public and the private: technological infrastructures are to be held invisible, 'nature' has to be ornamental and provide ecological services; public life should not be dirtied with traces of productive activities, etc.

In the November workshop, we would like to initiate a conversation with architects, designers and social scientists interested in circling the square – in sharing projects, experiences and reflections on how to attempt what seems impossible: to reimagine the public squares of our cities beyond the modern constitution and explore alternative conceptualisations of urban squares and/or approaches to designing within socioecological assemblages.

We welcome contributions that in one way or another relate to the following issues, although we are open to, and interested in, other lines of reflection:

The more-than-human scale

How to move from the 'human scale' to the 'more-than-human scale' when exploring, problematising, redesigning and intervening public squares? This entails at least two sets of things: firstly, how to open up design perspectives to the doings and makings of heterogeneous arrays of non-human inhabitants and producers of public squares? Or, put differently, how else to engage materials, infrastructures, animals, plants? But, also, how to engage with hyperobjects, such as climate change, deep geological time and other incommensurable processes and phenomena in the time-spaces of a square? Circling the square, here, is a metaphor for this apparently impossible challenge of bending the categories in which we think.

The material politics of squares

Do squares have politics? How to move from a representational understating of the square as a stage for political expression to a performative one, where the square is the issue, the problem, the very source of politicisation? So, how do squares politicise? How do their materials, their infrastructures, their trees, their landscaping, their actors become issues at the centre of political

mobilisations? And how to design and programme the political capacities of squares? As with the roundabout revolutions, circling the square might serve as a figure to think the capacities of squares to spark publics and actions around them.

The farming of public life

What happens to public life when urban squares begin to be conceived as urban farms? Is food production in public squares simply a reproductive activity at odds with the emancipatory capacity of the public space, acceptable perhaps in war time but to be banned to the semi-private spaces of allotment gardens or social projects? But what if local production-consumption circuits do not simply help reducing CO2 emissions, but play also a role in strengthening public engagement with climate change inspiring a more sustainable lifestyle? What if farming and beekeeping in public squares would force us to think differently about the city, the urban, the public? Then, how can urban design incorporate local food production and consumption into our contemporary urban condition of ethic and aesthetic survival and adaptation? Circling the square here is the image we would like to propose to conjure circular economies and metabolic circulations into the heart of urban public space.

Practicalities

The workshop will be held on November 23–24, 2017, at Tü Munich and is organized by Regine Keller, Lisa Rathjen (Chair of Landscape Architecture and Public Space), Ignacio Farías and Felix Remter (Munich Centre for Technology in Society). The workshop is part of the research project '100 Places:M: Influence of the heat island effect on public space in the city of Munich' funded by the Bavarian Ministry of Environmental and Consumer Protection and located at the Tü Centre for Urban Nature and Climate Adaptation.

If you are interested in presenting, please send an abstract (300-500 words) by the 2nd October to felix.remter@tum.de.

We will inform you by the 6th October if your paper has been accepted.

Reasonable travel and accommodation costs will be reimbursed for all presenters.