

Urban Design & Urban Society.

The emergence of urban atmospheres between design practice and social invention.

3rd International Ambiances Network
Conference & Workshop

University of Munich
Department of Geography

6 - 8 October 2011

Call for Papers.

Under the aegis of the International Ambiances Network this conference aims to address the role of urban design and human activities in the emergence of urban atmosphere(s).

Urban space is complex, bringing into play numerous factors which may prompt the formation of atmosphere(s). Of these factors the material environment, in the broad sense of the term, plays an important part. The conference will seek to address this topic by looking at urban design, in particular the question of how atmospheres take form at the meeting point between the desire to design at a given place and the social practices which unfold there. On the one hand the discourse of designers expresses the will to create, or at least control, atmospheres. On the other hand human activities, with their corporeal and symbolic effects, also play a part in bringing out and colouring atmosphere(s).

Through the exploration of four topics we would like to discuss the relation between the design of lived space and its corporeal, social and cultural usage.

1/ Specialization of atmospheres: depending on pre-determined uses, urban spaces may de facto conjure up a “functional” atmosphere of varying force. Of particular note in this respect are places tending towards a single function, typically shopping malls, transit facilities and even leisure amenities. The study of these “laboratories” for conditioning atmospheres seems particularly instructive in an examination of the role played by design in this process.

2/ Securing space: the feeling of security is an important factor in guaranteeing the accessibility of urban space. But widespread deployment of surveillance systems in public urban space seems to jeopardize efforts to bring various publics into contact with one another. Such systems are pervasive in various ways: technically (for example video surveillance), at a human level (calls for greater caution, “sousveillance”, etc.) and with regard to design (planning and architecture). Surveillance systems necessarily make the production of atmospheres a central issue in the discussion of shared public space.

3/ The digital city and its practices: information technology is radically changing the practices in urban space. It has played a part in the switch from the widespread pollution of urban space by news chatter, to individualized, context-sensitive information feeds, driven by the development of the mobile internet. But this change in practice also relates to the increasing availability of technology in public space (for example the development of open Wifi networks), raising the question of how roaming IT affects urban atmosphere(s).

4/ “Resilient” practices: mirroring the first topic and the question of how design may influence the production of specialized atmospheres, we may adopt the opposite approach and look at emerging corporeal practices which question the established or intended order. Bodies may be used as a means of resistance, involving individual, tactical forms of

usage (for example <http://www.appliedautonomy.com/isee.html>) or critical practices, particularly artistic action, such as the videos produced by Kim Sooja, or comic displays, notably actions by urban pranksters. In all cases such practices involve the shared public space and the production of atmospheres, though here the process is less influenced by the material nature of place, and more by human presence.

Atmosphere is a difficult subject to grasp with conventional research tools. Innovative approaches are thus needed to understand the subject. We welcome proposals – from researchers, PhD students, practitioners and artists – on theory, practice and methodology or simply to prompt discussion of projects and achievements.

A **workshop** about the topic of this conference, will be held during the meeting. **We also welcome proposals for possible workshops.**

Please send proposals for talks or the organization of a workshop – in English and no longer than one A4 page – **at the latest by 17 June 2011** to:

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The conference will be held in English. Selected talks will be published after the conference in a peer-reviewed issue of the Journal *Ambiances*.

Damien Masson, Rainer Kazig, Monika Popp, and the steering committee of International Ambiances Network.

<http://www.ambiances.net>



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