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Animating public space? Between urban programming and citizen activation

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Animer l'espace public ? Entre programmation urbaine et activation citoyenne



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REFERENCES

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Animating public space? Between urban programming and citizen activation

Special issue of *Ambiances* – International Journal of the Sensory Environment, Architecture and Urban Space

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This issue deals with the modes of animation of contemporary space, whether intentional or not, instigated by inhabitants, officials or citizens, artists, urban planners or designers¹. Contributors are encouraged to discuss the different meanings of these practices of "animation" according to the perspectives considered, and to account for the situation processes at stake, from the intentions of the actors to the consequences of the action.

The papers will focus on public space, treated as an open, concrete space, with its physical and architectural materialities, ordinary or remarkable ambiances, social practices and rituals. This public space is divided up into many singular and moving places. Whether developed or not, invested by ordinary people, passers by or residents, public policies leave their mark on decisions regarding development, and the commemorative or festive management of cultural events. This registry of animation policies can be questioned using concrete examples and can give rise to a critical point of view.

The expression 'animating public space' encompasses a whole series of situations where players meet, people organize events, assist in urban renewal. These participants may be artists, sociocultural energizers, mediators, project leaders, designers, architects, landscape designers, etc.

According to a specific agenda, a particular location – perhaps a town centre or neighborhood, a riverbank or a brownfield site, the front of a church, a pedestrian precinct or indeed the car park of the local supermarket – is converted into an open space accommodating a large audience. Passers-by and residents may become also spectators and they are expected to take part in the entertainment. Other situations arise in which such efforts to breathe new life into a space are part of a larger project, designed to last despite being subjected to the back-and-forth of urban life. Green walls enliven facades with the changing seasons, the trickle of fountain soothers a foil to traffic noise, clouds of

water are an invitation to play, flowerbeds and trees draw patterns and a work of art maybe come an unusual point of reference. Lastly, in all societies, commercial trading, such as markets or fairs, provides an occasion for urban sociability. The expression 'a lively street' recalls a crowded shopping street, and also a street of political demonstration. The streams of people and traffic associated with mobility also enliven the sites through which they pass – stations, subway or tram-lines.

Animating public space is not just part of the history of planning and architecture; it is also central to the history of popular passions and festive exuberance – carnivals, fairs, sporting contests – as well as street art, whether or not they lay claim to this quality. Developing socio-cultural and artistic actions in open spaces – streets, squares, gardens and urban wasteland – accessible to the general public has become one of the objectives of public policy, marking the national and local agenda (street parties, heritage events, festivals, biennial gatherings, sporting events, etc.). Artistic actions, with roots in all art forms, now accompany many projects for urban demolition or renewal. The building site itself sometimes becomes the focus of such action. How does one investigate these processes and situations? What can we learn in terms of citizenship and urbanity?

Urban life also manifests itself spontaneously as well as through rituals: in routines of everyday life and rules of life in common as well as in many ordinary micro-events and improvised practices. Public space involves situations which configure sensory perception and social interaction, practical action and ambient phenomena. This other version of the politics, this "sensible distribution" of public space, can be addressed with a situational approach. If animation involves ordinary social practices more or less informal, routinized, improvised, what is their impact on the aesthetics of public space? The metamorphoses of places and urban atmospheres question also the temporality of public space: is animation reducible to a succession of events, favorable occasion, or ephemeral processes?

The animation of public space involves a plurality of actors and skills and calls upon the intersection of different knowledge. Contributions may come from disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, urban planning and architecture, engineering, art and design. Various kinds of investigation and situations can enter into dialogue so that it describes the sensory fabric of public life, the consequences of this "activation", and its impact on the quality of urban life. Is our urbanity reactivated, re-invented, re-enchanted? Or, conversely, more framed, standardized or monitored?

Contributions to this call for papers are expected in two main lines of questioning which can be linked and articulated:

- Firstly, to question urban intervention (on and in the city) as an enlivening process within the framework of urban projects (renovation, construction, demolition, development, and all activities involved in urban design such as site visits and artistic actions), cultural or memorial policy, or any other partnership initiatives.
- Secondly, to consider ordinary practices and inhabitant creation on a par with artistic activation, citizen cooperation in various cases of formal or informal action. Inquiry will focus on everyday life and street art in order to grasp urban temporalities – tempo, rhythm, cadence, etc. The event, be it amateur or artistic, and the associated practices, marks the specifically temporal dimension of urban life and questions its forms.

Practical information

Authors should send their proposal of article of 3000-5000 signs to the guest editors of the Journal, prior to January 20th 2016:

- pascale.pichon@univ-st-etienne.fr
- jpthibaud1@gmail.com

The summary and the article itself can be submitted either in French or English. Graphic and/or sound accompanying the text are welcome.

The proposals will be examined by the guest editors and the members of the editorial board. After selection, authors will send their full article (between 25000 and 50000 characters) before May 20th 2016. Each contribution will be evaluated according to the standards of the Journal (two blind-review).

Contributors are invited to write their papers according to the note to authors:

- <http://ambiances.revues.org/221>

Submission key dates

- Opening of the call for paper: November 20th 2015
 - Submission deadline for the proposals: January 20th 2016 (3000 - 5000 signs)
 - Notification to authors: February 20th 2016
 - Reception deadline of the full articles: May 20th 2016 (25000 - 50000 signs)
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NOTES

1. This special issue comes from an international conference that was held during the International Biennale of Design in Saint-Étienne, march 2015, initiated by the teaching team of the Master « *Espace public. Design, architecture, pratiques* » and the Aversa University of Napoli, in cooperation with ENSASE, ESADSE, Centre Max Weber-UMR 5283 and CRESSON-UMR1563.