

**3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference  
NEW URBAN LANGUAGES – 2015  
24<sup>th</sup>-26<sup>th</sup> June 2015, Delft, NL  
[www.newurbanlanguages.eu](http://www.newurbanlanguages.eu)**

**TALES AND IMAGES OF SPATIAL JUSTICE**  
*Discussing New Urban Languages of Equality,  
Justice and Sustainable Development*

Architects, urbanists, designers and planners often dodge issues of democracy, justice and redistribution and concentrate instead on the technical or aesthetic aspects of their activities. This is not acceptable. Justice and fairness in urban development must be continuously and critically discussed, or else we risk failing to meet the social dimension of sustainability. This is described by Larsen (2012), among others, for whom “for sustainability to occur, it must occur simultaneously in each of its three dimensions: economic, social and environmental”.

But spatial interventions, plans and designs do not happen in a vacuum. They happen in real governance structures, in which there are power struggles, disagreement and continuous negotiation. In short, urbanism happens in political arenas.

Designing and planning the built environment are profoundly political activities. There are no purely value-free or ‘technical’ solutions for spatial problems: all decisions in spatial development are political decisions insofar they must involve choice, negotiation, friction and divergence, and occasionally agreement that enables action. This is also known as politics. Spatial planners and designers have a highly central role in achieving justice, as shapers of innovative spatial and institutional relationships between civil society, the public sector and the private sector and designers of sustainable structures and processes. Cities and regions that are socially, economically and environmentally sustainable and fair are not a “given”, they are an achievement.

The recent financial crisis has highlighted at least one convergence: cities all over the world are becoming more unequal and socially and spatially fragmented, even in the developed world. This is very bad news, as it is widely accepted that economic growth alone is not enough to promote well-being: equity is important too. There is plenty of data showing correlation between inequality in a society and economic success. And more evidence showing that inequality is socially and economically unsustainable in the long run. **But we must leave the dry world of statistics and try to understand inequality where it happens: in space.** In order to advance the discussion, we need to explore some key issues of spatial inequality and its antidote: spatial justice.

In this conference, we want to explore the concept of spatial justice and its implications for urban planners and designers. We also wish to understand in which ways we can describe, imagine and represent spatial justice, in a time in which the representation of reality can be used to distort, embellish, and falsify it.

**Spatial Justice** refers to general access to public goods, basic services, cultural goods, economic opportunity and healthy environments through fair, inclusive and efficient spatial planning, design and management of urban and rural spaces and resources. Spatial justice is crucial to support more equitable and fair societies and to promote the full realization of human potential. In order to achieve spatial justice, we must work towards sustainable governance, fair redistribution of resources, and equitable distribution of and access to spatial benefits and opportunities. These things will be more easily achieved through democracy and participation (UN-Human Rights, 2014, Wigmans, 2001, Papadopoulos, 2007, Avritzer, 2010). Spatial Justice implies the Right to the City, that is, the right to interfere in the affairs of the city and the right to shape the city to one's own desires. Henri Lefebvre is one of the initiators of the concept (Lefebvre, 1968), but more recently David Harvey has written extensively about this, particularly in Harvey, 2008 and Harvey, 2012. The **Right to the City** implies a kind of radical democracy, where citizens are able to get profoundly involved in the management of their cities. But there are challenges to participation, even in the most robust democracies. Not least, the alienation of citizens is one of the greatest challenges facing our democracies today.

The debate will be structured in four connected sessions:

- I. *The informal city and its discontents: critical analyses on informal urban practices and the design and planning responses given to it*
- II. *The city of the rich (and the city of the poor): political organization of space and spatial segregation*
- III. *Utopian images of spatial justice: are architects and planners designers of the just city?*
- IV. *Multiplicitous Representations of the Third space: Visually thinking the spatial justice between the real and the ideal city*

## DESCRIPTION OF THE SESSIONS

### *1. The informal city and its discontents: critical analyses on informal urban practices and the design and planning responses given to it*

The debate on urbanization and housing being currently conducted by many architects and urban designers in European schools seems to rely on one main assumption: as many governments seem unable or unwilling to promote access to adequate housing, citizens must thus take the problem in their own hands. The result is the praise of informality as a way of urbanization and housing provision. This is not a new position. The writings of John F.C. Turner (1963, 1968 etc.) are characterized by his focus on individual liberty and autonomy of informal settlers. The perceived entrepreneurship of deprived citizens who populate the megacities of the South is glorified and home ownership through informal urbanization is seen as a ladder to economic prosperity, leading to the formulation of policies. The IMF and the World Bank – where Turner worked as a consultant – adopted the self-help methodologies as one of their official strategies in the past.

This session seeks to elaborate a critique of this position and discuss the role of planners and designers in housing and urban development in the Global South today.

## ***II. The city of the rich (and the city of the poor): political organization of space and spatial segregation***

As Edward J. Soja writes: "The political organization of space is a particular powerful source of spatial inequality". In the last years new forms of spatial segregation (exclusionary zoning, residential segregation, creation of new enclaves for specific populations and social groups) have redefined in European and non European cities new geographies of spatial inequalities and new languages of distinction and privilege, through exclusive residential projects, gated communities, etc..

The session is aimed at the exploration of the theoretical and empirical conditions of these new forms of segregation and self-segregation, and at the analysis of the spatial and social consequences of these processes in terms of political citizenship.

Particular attention will be devoted to the narratives, rhetoric and languages that promote and shape spatial (self) segregation in the new "city of the riches".

## ***III. Utopian images of spatial justice: are architects and planners designers of the just city?***

Architects, designers, urbanists and landscapers have traditionally arrogated themselves great powers in promoting social change. Modernism had a plight to change the world and create the spaces in which a new kind of man would emerge. Post-war housing projects around the world promoted the idea that healthy, airy, green environments would create new kinds of sociability in face of the ruins of two world wars. Architecture and urbanism have been fuelled by utopian images of progress. But the reality of poverty and increasing inequality has exposed such ambitions as fallacies. The collapse of modernism as a social transformative movement exposed the boastings of architects as cockiness. Designers must seek a much more realistic role for themselves in contributing for change. This session will explore images of justice and redistribution through the work of architects and designers who have achieved or inspired change.

## ***IV. Multiplicitous Representations of the Thirdspace***

### ***Visual thinking the spatial justice between the real and the ideal city***

The modern proliferation of multiple tales of the city is increasingly being played through the pervasive language of images. Images and visual artifacts through which the different forms of power narrate themselves, creating seductive representations, building, literally, fictional realities where Lefebvre's spatial triad (Representations of Space, Spatial Practices and Spaces of Representation) is intentionally blended.

If, quoting Foucault, 'Space is fundamental in any exercise of power', how can we re-discuss the role and functions of visual languages in the description of how spatial justice is played out in today's cities? What binds the growing demand for stakeholder inclusion, information and participation to 'drawing of the city', in its role of 'experiential knowledge'? This session aims to discuss the concept of Thirdspace (Soja) as a catalyst for images of the 'real city'. In Thirdspace, issues of spatial justice require innovative ways to be represented. On the other hand, Thirdspace requires/uses visions of imaginary and imaginable cities, images of ideal cities and utopias that are linked to a long Western cultural history. These images may be a virtual ground for experimentation and change.

## ORGANIZING COMMITTEE

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## RULES FOR SUBMISSION

Organizers and Scientific Committee invites abstracts for papers to be presented on **Third International Conference New Urban Languages** to be held **24-26 of June, 2014 in Delft, The Netherlands**

### **Abstract submission details:**

Researchers and practitioners who wish to present their work on specific topics of the conference are invited to submit an abstract of their proposed paper. Abstracts, of not more than 900 characters, spaces included should be submitted using a specific **on-line form** ([www.newurbanlanguages.eu](http://www.newurbanlanguages.eu)) no later than: **April 13, 2015**

### **Final Paper:**

The final paper limit is **20'000 characters**.

Upon acceptance authors will receive more detailed instructions, including a template for the full paper. It will be refereed by a peer reviewer and published in conference proceedings.

**Important Dates:**

Abstract due: **April 13, 2015**  
Notification of acceptance: **April 30, 2015**  
Registration Open: **April 30, 2015**  
Registration Closed: **May 30, 2015**  
Full Paper submission: **June 4, 2015**

**Venue:**

Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment  
Delft University of Technology  
Department of Urbanism  
Berlagezalen  
Julianalaan 134, 2628BL, Delft  
The Netherlands

**Fees:**

Ordinary: 100 Euro  
Reduced: 60 Euro (PhD Students)

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