Co-producing Alternative Urban Futures through Experimental Urbanism
Symposium Series: Brussels, 15th – 16th January 2026

Book of Abstracts

Presentation session 1: Concepts, classification and context of experimental urbanism

(Moderator: Georgiana Varna, Newcastle University)

Michael Crilly, Northumbria University, UK; **Georgiana Varna**, Newcastle University, UK.

Title: An Experimental Owl: The domain of knowledge on experimental urbanism.

Abstract: Frameworks for understanding urban experimentation, in their broadest sense, are a simplification of reality (Batty & Torrens, 2005), theories of how real-world systems operate. Yet they are invariably underpinned by an ontological framework, either tacit or explicit, that provides a descriptive structure for our knowledge relating to current experimental practice. The idea of an ontology as a simplified description of reality is supported by the mapping of "typologies", "concepts", "relationships", "structures" and "rules". At best it can become a formal, and standardised description of these concepts. Ideally such ontological frameworks are developed collaboratively so shared knowledge achieves clarity through common vocabularies and definitions. Indeed, the actual collaborative task of building / diagramming an ontology is as much about constructing a shared conceptual model of knowledge and understanding (Eskridge & Hoffman, 2012) as it is a strategy about organising and handling information. This is increasingly important in the digitisation of experimental urbanism project data, where clarity in meaning and semantics relating to the use of language is necessary to support information sharing and better interoperability between data handling software without the loss of meaning in the data (Sayogo *et al*, 2014).

We are producing a contemporary ontology of the structure of urban experiments; mapping the relationships between the range of legal structures, organisational governance, internal / external scrutiny, public / private funding and the use of assets; to construct a theoretical framework from contemporary practice. This will be based on a mix of collaborative practitioner reflection with domain experts, data mining open and closed organisational resources, with verification through the experimental urbanism professional network. We aim to identify the specific characteristics of the domain, generate the relationships table, and validate the draft ontology, "(u)tilizing the heuristic approach …. will make the ontological variation … more transparent" (Dunning, 2017 p35), being honest about where our ideas on urban experiments have come from practitioner engagement and project specific experience from within the industry sector. We have initially defined the general (class) and specifics (sub-class) of experimental urbanism and described the relationship between the characteristics and associated attributes as a "triple" - a clear binary relationship that includes a "subject" (the object described by the triplet), a "predicate" (defines the data within the object being given a value), and an "object" (the value). Within the coding classification, this approach allows for the development of an RDF (resource description language) file, and the relational structure of the information leads to appropriate and functional data mining algorithms based on the structure of the ontology within standardised RDF and OWL (web ontology language, a syntax language developed by the W3C Web Ontology Working Group as the way to describe the semantic metadata) (Nebot & Berlanga, 2012). These RDF / OWL triples are machine readable (Barati *et al* 2017) and allow for data mining the patterns of relationships as much as the specific characteristics. The approach is borne out of a frustration around the excluding technical language and repeating / confusing practice in experimental urbanism allied with the implicit political bias in many academic and policy-based research. In this work, we are abstracting

and simplifying the underlying structures, though "there are … dangers in being theoretically polygamous … (but can be) commensurate under (a) critical realist ontology" (Aalbers & Christophers 2014, pp 423-424). We suggest the relevance of a grounding in critical realism, being interested in finding an explanation for social systems, processes and structures, for the scope of work on experimental urbanism, of knowledge derived from in-depth case studies and practice-based experiences (Lawson, 2006).

Benedikt Stoll, Urban Practice eV, Guerilla Architects, fiveP consulting cooperative, former Research Associate at Institute for Design and Urban Planning at Leibniz University of Hannover, Germany.

Title: Place-Based Approaches for a Regenerative Economy.

Abstract: As urban practitioners and consultants working at the interface of urban policy and community development, we have observed firsthand the limitations of popular placemaking and tactical urbanism approaches in driving sustainable change. These small-scale, short-term interventions, often celebrated in urban policy circles, can enliven public spaces and spur community engagement, but they rarely address the deeper structural challenges or produce lasting regenerative outcomes.


We present a thought experiment aimed at bridging the critical gap between grassroots urban interventions and systemic change through innovative financing models and supportive policy frameworks. To inform this exploration, we draw on both scholarly research and practical experiments in place-based regeneration. Scholars such as Buckton et al. (2023) and Rahman et al. (2024) emphasize the importance of holistic, context-specific approaches to regeneration that integrate social, economic, and environmental dimensions. Meanwhile, emerging initiatives like the EU-funded GINNGER project (2023-27), case studies in the Regeneration Journal (2023), and projects from the Democracy Collaborative (2025) illustrate how local experiments can be scaled and sustained when supported by broader institutional networks spanning public, private, and civic sectors. We also critique the prevalent Urban Living Lab paradigm for being overly local in scope (Scholl et al. 2022), noting that without mechanisms to generalize successes, these labs seldom influence wider policy or urban development patterns. In response, we explore how Community Wealth Building strategies (Manley & Whyman 2021; Democracy Collaborative) can anchor regeneration in local economies, ensuring that value created remains within communities and aligns with longer-term development plans. We further argue for embracing "experimental urbanism" (Exner et al. 2023) – a practice of iterative, multi-level urban experimentation – to expand the ambition and reach of interventions. By repositioning placemaking efforts within these broader economic and policy frameworks, our work points toward a new model of place-based regeneration that transcends one-off projects, ultimately aiming for inclusive, scalable, and lasting urban transformation.

Despoina Papadopoulou, MAZi Architects, UK; **Mathias Kerremans**, **Bram Iven**, SMAK Architects, BE

Title: Co-Locating Housing and Education as Experimental Urbanism: Governance, Feasibility and the Re-Drawing of Learning Neighbourhoods.

Abstract: Across Europe, the spatial separation of housing and educational infrastructure is deeply embedded in planning norms, regulatory frameworks, and safeguarding conventions. Yet emerging projects in Belgium, the Netherlands and the UK demonstrate that vertically integrated school–housing models can operate as forms of experimental urbanism: small-scale tests of new governance arrangements, mixed-use financing, and reciprocal urban benefits. Drawing on a practice-based comparative study of built and unbuilt cases, this presentation examines co-location not only as a design proposition but as a policy laboratory that exposes tensions between educational governance, residential development logics and community acceptance. Using a cross-case analytical framework, the research maps three recurrent experimental dynamics: (1) Spatial permeability tests, where public–private and child–adult boundaries are prototyped through shared or temporally layered spaces; (2) Financial and delivery experiments, combining municipal land, affordable housing models, long-term operational partnerships and incentives such as teacher housing; (3) Governance hacks, where schools, developers and cities negotiate deviations from established safeguarding, accessibility, and acoustic norms to enable new hybrid typologies.

The school section could, with some modifications, be partly converted into a residential section or vice versa, depending on the need.

School   26 duplex houses   after school childcare
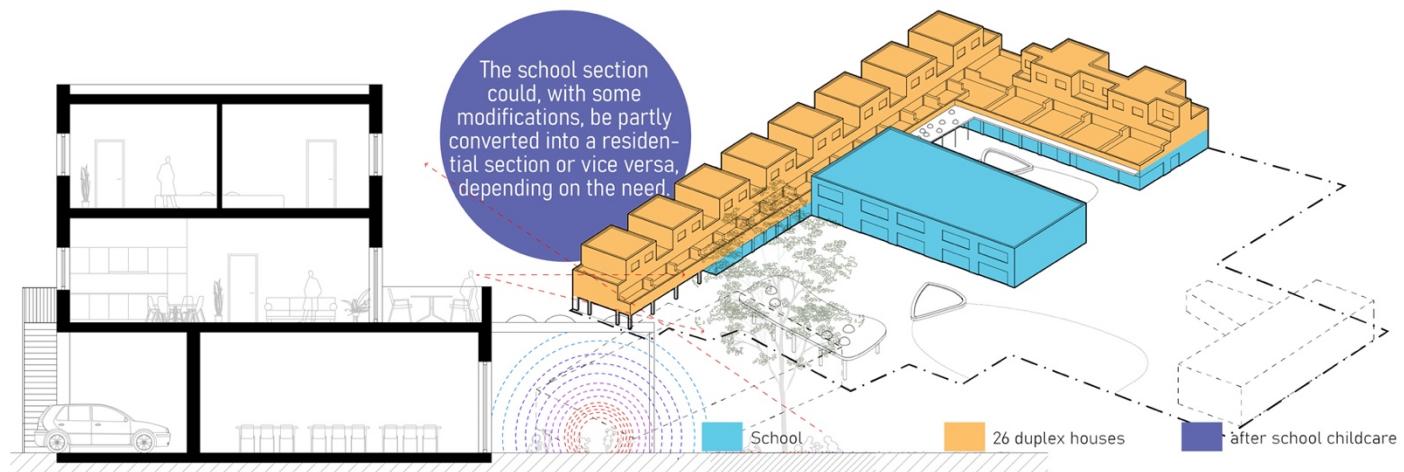
The study also includes a speculative "imagining" for Thessaloniki, Greece to test transferability in a context where co-location is currently impossible under national regulation. This imagining acts as a probe into how Greek planning law, land-use classifications and ecclesiastical landholdings might be re-configured to unlock socially oriented mixed-use educational infrastructure. The Antwerp "imaginging" scenario tests the hybrid typology in a dense urban fabric, exploring social dynamics and feasibility within existing policy frameworks and prevailing investment practices. By positioning school–housing co-location as a form of experimental urbanism, the research highlights its capacity to prototype more compact, socially mixed and service-rich neighbourhoods, while revealing the systemic constraints that hinder innovation. The presentation invites discussion on how such experiments could inform future policy pathways, delivery models, and cross-sector collaborations that bridge education, housing, and urban planning.

Heather Kruger, Sustainable Livelihoods Foundation, South Africa.

Title: Setting the Programme for Social Facilities in Low-Income Neighbourhoods in South Africa.

Abstract: In South Africa, the CSIR recommends that public facilities should be spatially clustered to promote the effective use of government facilities and land (Green & Argue, 2012). However, while this approach is applied, institutional arrangements for state community facilities are often not set up to run

effective operational models and programmes. The consequence of this state of affairs is that public facilities often underperform, despite limited alternatives in low-income neighbourhoods.

Throughout the CSP/FCDO Township Economic Development project, which piloted area-based economic development in five low-income neighbourhoods in five metropolitan municipalities, we observed several examples of municipal facilities that are not performing as well as they could be. One case we encountered was in Delft, Cape Town, where, despite being located on the same property, a library and civic centre, which fall under different departments, were not making effective use of the shared space around the buildings. Through several small-scale interventions, we engaged with City officials and residents to demonstrate the value of activating this space. Throughout this work we were in dialogue with colleagues from Medellín, Colombia, and tested whether concepts such as Library Parks – multifunctional hubs with strong programmes – could be implemented in contexts like Delft. The case suggests that spatial proximity is not enough – transversal operations and programmes are critical to ensuring that public facilities are just that – public. Yet transversality itself is also not a given, there is a long way to go to work out effective arrangements for working across disciplinary and institutional silos. Our experimentation sought to encourage more transversal relationships within the municipality and to co-produce ideas around how public facilities can generate new forms of sociality. This provocation argues that buildings are insufficient on their own – sustained programmes and strategic institutional actions are essential to providing community services to residents in low-income neighbourhoods.

Shaun Young & **Stephen Roberts**, Northumbria University, UK

Title: The Necessity of Non-Linear and Experimental Architectural Practice in the Age of Financial Uncertainty.

Abstract: Since its inception in 1963, The Royal Institute of Architects (RIBA) Plan of Work has provided a linear framework of work stages allowing architects to clearly navigate clients through the necessary stages of a design project (RIBA. 2020). A document remaining unchanged until 2013 when 'Stage 0 - Strategic Definition' was added as part of a broader overview. In 2010 the UK Coalition government deployed an economic strategy that would attempt to rebalance the effects of the global economic crisis (Berman, Y. Hovland, T. 2024). These policies would herald the 'period of austerity', a time defined by severe cuts to all aspects of public funding. In 2025 this economic uncertainty remains with continued suppression of funding to local government, education, culture and the wider arts (Ogden, K., Phillips, D., Winchester, N. 2024). This sustained financial uncertainty is consequently placing arts, education, and community organisations in precarious situations. Stymied by lack of financial resource, they are unable

to procure the professional design services of architects to assist develop and deliver projects that would offer them more economically sustainable futures.
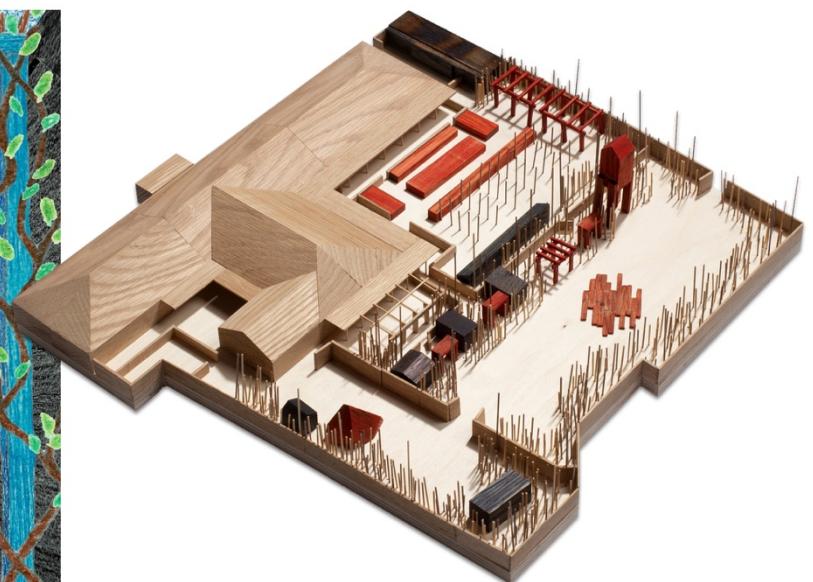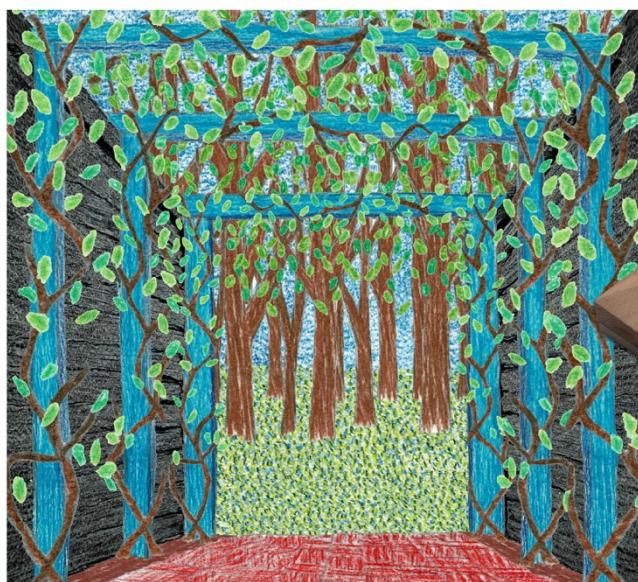
Our ongoing and varied collaborations with such organisations are a direct response to this issue. Repositioning ourselves as 'academic practice researchers', we uniquely operate in the liminal space between professional practice and academia, offering volunteer design services to assist instigate design projects, whilst documenting this work as practice – based research. Impactful, socially and community engaged work desirous and required by institutional research objectives. Emerging from challenging conditions, these projects reveal new, non-linear and experimental practice approaches that question tacit architectural protocols – more specifically, the linearity of standardised strategic frameworks. As a consequence of this multifaceted work, yet specifically through the lens of three practice-led research projects carried out by the authors for community or charitable based organisations, this paper posits the RIBA plan of work requires further redefinition – the addition of 'Work Stage 0.5'. A timely redefinition would bring potential benefits for the academic institution, enrich regional professional practice ecologies and bring positive social impact in this age of financial uncertainty.

Key Words: Experimental Architectural Practice, Community Engagement, Strategic Planning, Project Funding.

Presentation session 2: Experimental Streets, Spaces and Systems

(Moderator: Michael Crilly, Northumbria University)

Jen Storan, Meanwhile Space CIC, UK; **Tom Dobson**, Public Works, UK; **Rebecca Moroni**, Politecnico di Milano, Italy

Title: An incremental approach to shifting narratives at neighbourhood scale: Insights from Loughborough Junction, South London.

Abstract: 82% of neighbourhoods in the most deprived decile according to the English Index of Multiple Deprivation 2025 were also the most deprived according to the 2019 index. For residents of such neighbourhoods, it can be hard to imagine an alternative to persistent socioeconomic marginalisation. But with local authorities in financial crisis, and in a policy context of devolution and asset disposal, there is a need and an opportunity for communities to find routes to more equitable futures. More work is needed to

understand the tactics through which communities can start building these alternative visions and the agency needed to act. This paper addresses this gap by analysing the case of Loughborough Junction, South London, a neighbourhood which at the start of the study period had high levels of deprivation, dereliction and anti-social behaviour. Over more than a decade, local activist groups, community businesses and public sector actors have instigated a series of experiments, from provisional and small-scale to increasingly substantial projects. This trajectory provides a unique lens through which to examine how communities use temporary initiatives to instigate change and gradually shift narratives to develop wider collaborative regenerative practices.


The paper adopts a qualitative case study approach, drawing on the authors' embedded knowledge as temporary-use practitioner, community architect and researcher, complemented by project documentation, stakeholder interviews, and process and network mapping. The analysis focuses on identifying the external factors, actor networks and specific mechanisms which enabled a scaling of community-led regeneration over time. The objective is to evaluate whether this incremental approach can drive further regeneration in Loughborough Junction and to assess the extent to which it may be transferable to other socially and economically marginalised neighbourhoods. The paper discusses the potential for temporary uses to catalyse neighbourhood-scale change, thereby contributing to discourses concerning community empowerment and alternative development models.

Silvia Arnold, Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Switzerland.

Title: An Urban Experimentation for Sustainability Transitions and the Question of Transferability: An Analysis of Contextualisation Practices across European Innovation Ecosystems.

Abstract: Urban experimentation approaches like Urban Living Labs have advanced sustainability transitions in Western and Northern Europe, but their adoption remains limited in Central and Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans. In these regions, limited institutional capacity, fragmented governance structures, and dependence on development finance hinder transformative change, while international cooperation actors significantly influence local sustainability efforts.
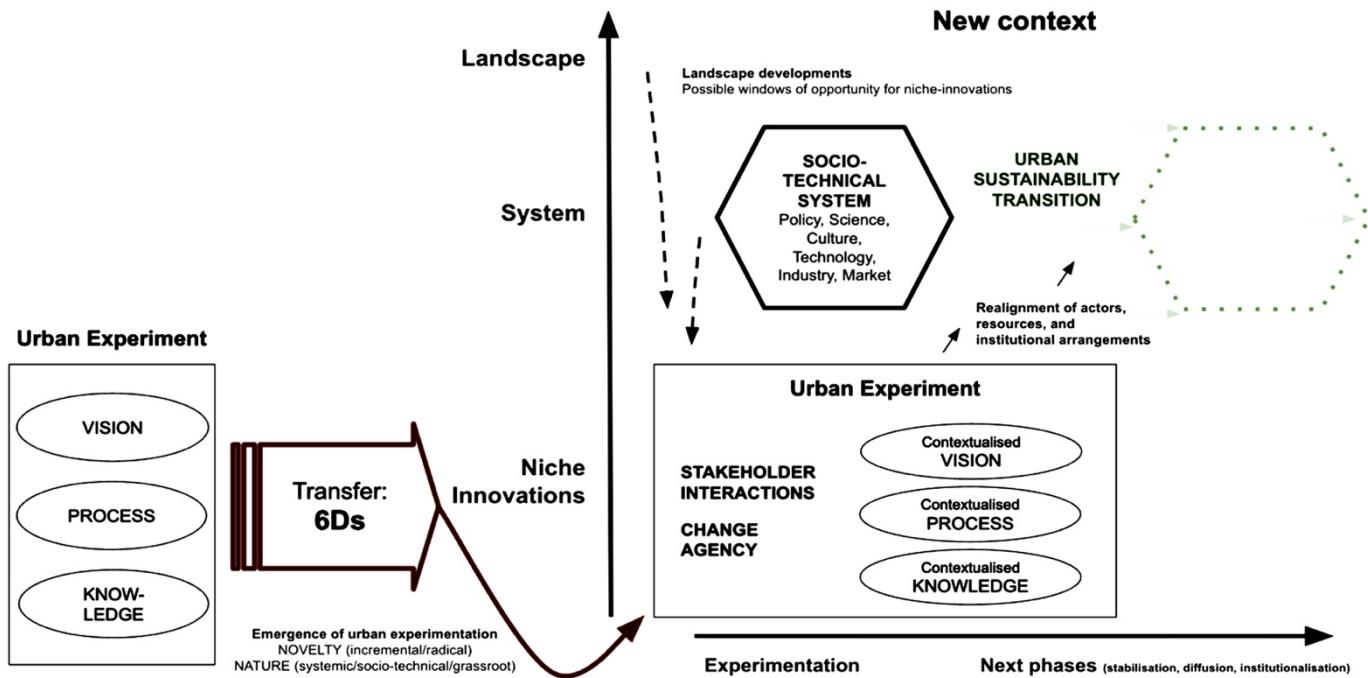
This study explores how urban experimentation practices from established innovation contexts (Switzerland) can be adapted to emerging contexts (Albania). Using a multi-method qualitative approach, the research combines systematic literature review and meta-synthesis with in-depth case studies of Swiss–Albanian cooperation projects in Albanian municipalities. The conceptual framework draws on transition studies, governance studies, and urban studies. The analysis focuses on how institutional frameworks, stakeholder configurations, and local conditions influence the development, implementation, and evolution of urban experiments. Particular attention is given to mechanisms of contextualization and factors that either enable or restrict transferability across different geographic and institutional settings. This research contributes to a richer understanding of how experimental approaches can move across contexts and support systemic change. It aims to provide policymakers, urban practitioners, and international cooperation actors with practical insights for designing tailored urban sustainability experiments and strengthening local innovation ecosystems.

Keywords: Urban experimentation; Urban Living Labs; Knowledge transfer; Post-socialist contexts; Governance innovation; International development cooperation; Innovation ecosystems.

_____

Kobe Tilley, Ghent University, Belgium; **Tim Devos**, Ghent University, Belgium; **Angelos Varvarousis**, ICTA-UAB, Barcelona, Spain.

Title: Eighty initiatives later: tracing impact the of the Ghent Temporary Use Fund beyond place.

Abstract: Financial supporting schemes for temporary use initiatives have been reported to be rather rare (Patti & Polyak, 2015). Since 2014, the Temporary Use Fund in Ghent has supported over 80 initiatives. The fund was established following several successful initiatives that highlighted the power of temporary urban experiments in Ghent. To promote participation and experimentation with spaces, to connect neighbour(hood)s, and to avoid vacancy, the city supports initiatives to make their places safe and accessible. In ideal scenarios, temporary uses are thought to impact and relate to a redevelopment project, and to connect with the neighbourhood along the way. In Ghent, however, the Temporary Use Fund in Ghent is integrated in the Policy Participation Unit of the city administration. Therefore, their rather 'non-spatial approach' prompts us to reconsider how we interpret the legacies left behind. Similarly, Davoudi's (2023) call for a shift towards prefigurative planning inspires to examine the intentions behind temporary use initiatives,

the prefigurative alternatives they (aim to) create, the initiatives' impacts, and the challenges projects encounter.

Our research investigates the legacies which supported Temporary Use initiatives in Ghent left behind. The empirical base is formed by a qualitative analysis of the data behind the 76 supported cases between 2014 and 2024. To further deepen the study the initiatives' legacies, we conducted thirteen semi-structured interviews representing nine cases. Our results show that most of the cases actively try to experiment and use space as their tool. However, they often fail to have a spatial impact, or do not aim to have one at all. They leave legacies behind, but these go often beyond their spatial contexts. This prompts us to reconsider why, how and where temporary uses should be implemented, and what outcome can or should be expected from them.

Edison França da Silva Filho, Università degli Studi di Firenze, DIDA, Dipartimento di Architettura, Italy.

Title: The End And The Beginning of Experimental Urbanism: Reflections on Ephemerality, Governance, and the Temporal Arc of Urban Transformations.

Abstract: The present study examines the transformation of Villaboim Square in São Paulo to explore a central paradox in experimental urbanism: what happens when an experiment succeeds? The project, coordinated by the civic platform Cidades.co in collaboration with local residents, was initially enabled by a municipal urban policy called cooperation agreement in 2016. This instrument formalized a process of co-governance and a sequence of co-design, negotiation and stewardship practices to regenerate the degraded public space. Yet, beyond its visible interventions, the project marked a shift from informal spatial practices to institutionalized experiments, which raises critical questions about temporality, normalization and the limits of the experimental condition.
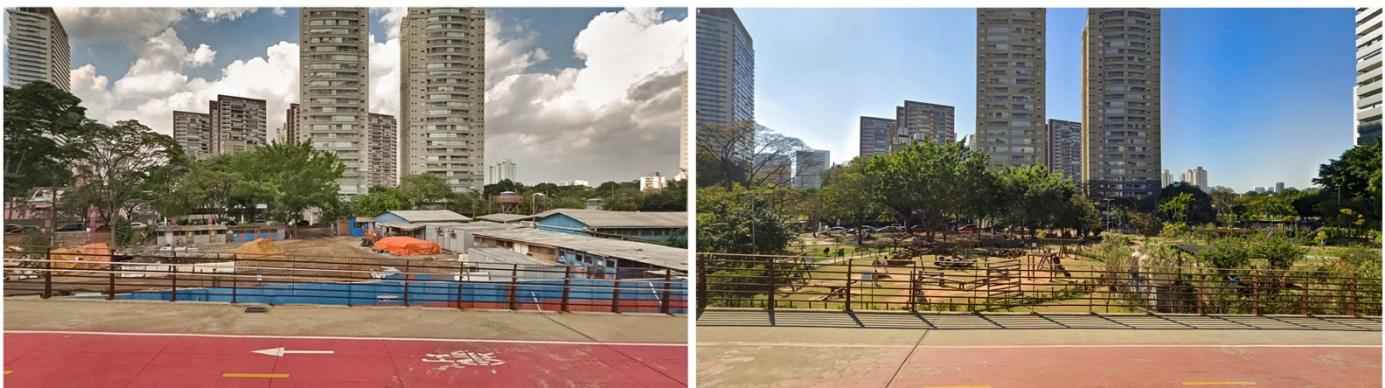
Building on a broader research project, the paper reinterprets this process through the understanding of ephemeral centrality – short-lived but recurring intensifications of sociability, negotiation, and collective use. While earlier spatial analysis based on behavioral tools inspired by Gehl's protocol were used to guide the co-design process, this study proposes a step forward through critical spatial ethnography, a methodological framework designed from the merger of Lefebvre's rhythmanalysis and Guattari's schizoanalysis to capture the affective, rhythmic and relational dimensions of urban practices. These aspects – often disregarded in conventional evaluations – reveal how experimentation once guided towards incompleteness can embed transformative change in the urban space. By tracing how rhythms of everyday engagement gave rise to durable forms of shared governance, the paper offers a situated diagnosis of experimental urbanism's temporal arc: from exception to formalization, from tactical to institutional, from ephemeral to infrastructural. Rather than seeing this trajectory as a closure, it argues for embracing incompleteness as its end and dissolution as a generative force. In doing so, the paper reframes experimental urbanism as an ephemeral and recursive process embedded in the contradictions of everyday life, capable of accepting its ending fate only to provoke new questions and open itself to possible futures.

Keywords: critical spatial ethnography, experimental urbanism, ephemerality, governance

---

Tatiana Bodnar, Swansea University, UK.

Title: RainScape Swansea: Piloting Sustainable Urban Drainage for Future Generations in Wales' Second City.

Abstract: This paper investigates RainScape Swansea, an experimental sustainable urban drainage (SUDs) pilot project installing rain gardens and public-realm improvements in the city of Swansea, South Wales, UK. This climate-adaptation pilot project aims to mitigate surface-level urban flooding within the Sandfields neighbourhood, an urban locality most at risk for flooding in the second city of Wales. Alongside its function of attenuating and cleaning stormwater flow into combined sewage, the pilot seeks to create greener streets, new social infrastructure, and locally meaningful public-realm improvements in a residential urban neighbourhood. Situated within the context of Wales's innovative devolved governance framework, including the landmark Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act, the paper examines the governance, financing, and extra-legal conditions that enabled the emergence of RainScape Swansea. Anchored in a critical climate geographies perspective (Parsons et al, 2025), this paper not only explores the spatial and temporal dimensions of the pilot initiative, but also investigates the emotional geographies (Pile, 2010) of urban experimentation through a look into the emerging socio-political contention of this pilot project within the Welsh context. Key actors include Swansea Council, Natural Resources Wales, the Welsh Government, design agencies, community engagement specialists, residents, and more-than-human elements shaping this assemblage.

Methodologically, this empirical research draws on walking interviews, site visits, and action-research practice, including door-knocking on more than 400 doors of neighbours to the initiative, three public community events, and design charrettes aimed at involving the local community in the development and purpose of the rain gardens. As a researcher-practitioner—working both as a PhD student examining urban regeneration assemblages in South Wales, and as a practitioner with Urban Foundry involved in the community engagement side of the pilot—I reflect on how RainScape Swansea's first and second phase of design and implementation illustrates the tensions and possibilities of experimental, community-embedded public realm retrofit programmes. Finally, I argue that the scheme exemplifies an urban acupuncture approach: a networked form of placemaking and place-activation that targets key infrastructural "pressure points" to catalyse wider urban transformation (Hemingway and De Castro Mazarro, 2022). As Wales continues to face the accelerating challenges of climate change, particularly wetter winters and hotter summers, this paper contributes to debates on urban experimentation by showing how community-embedded 'pin-prick' pilot interventions can advance climate resilience through a place-led approach, while simultaneously becoming contested sites within post-industrial urban contexts—shaping possibilities for current and future generations.

**Presentation session 3: Review, reflection and reality of urban experiments**

(Moderator: Michael Crilly, Northumbria University)

Jan Peter Glock, German Environment Agency, Germany.

Title: Assessing the transformative potential of street experiments.

Abstract: Cities around the world face growing climate risks, while urban traffic continues to exacerbate global climate change and undermines local public health through noise, pollution, environmental justice. These combined challenges demand a fundamental transformation of urban transport systems. At the same time, citizens increasingly call for collaborative and more democratic approaches to such transformations.
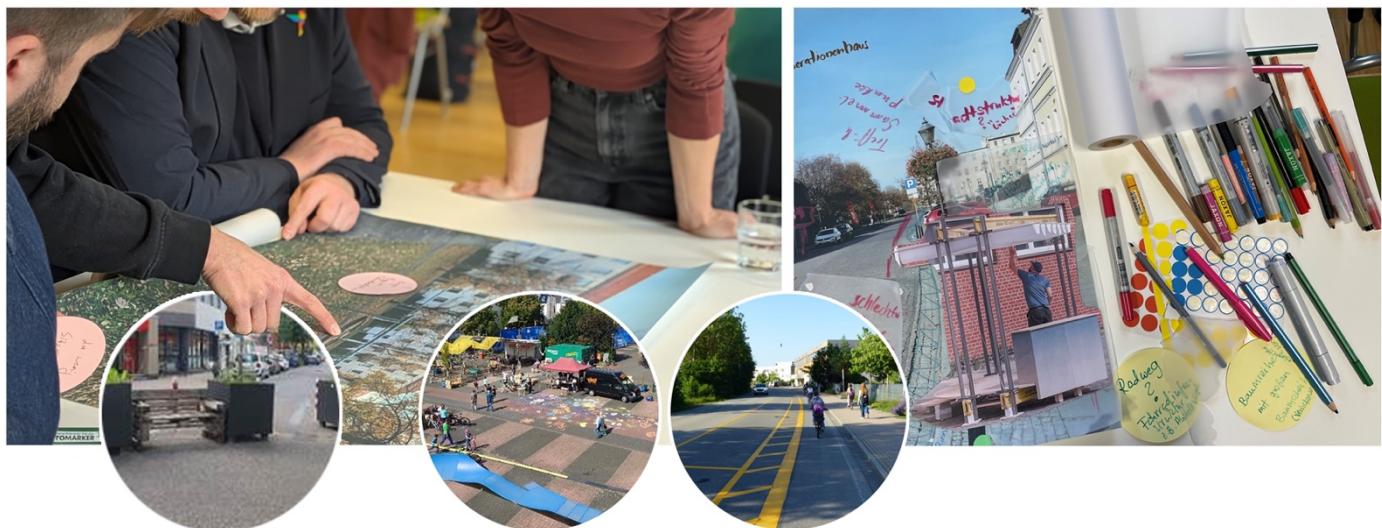
Street experiments have become a widely used planning tool in Germany responding to these complex, intersecting pressures. Yet their transformative impact remains unclear for a variety of reasons. To address this gap, my research examines both the motivations behind the implementation of street experiments and the ways in which they are being evaluated. Building on these research insights, I now aim to explore the purpose, value and feasibility of street experiments – and experimental planning more broadly – across different planning contexts. The aim is to compare the German planning context with contrasting contexts to examine how differing conditions shape planning practice. Deliberative workshops, used as case-based qualitative research, offer an effective approach to generating this contextualized knowledge about planning practice and its context-dependencies. To learn from contrasting contexts, the workshop locations represent a wide spectrum of planning contexts, whose characteristics influence planning practice in ways that reveal differences in their experimentalism. Locations are therefore chosen as "maximum variation cases" (Flyvbjerg, 2006), representing ideal-typical examples of highly divergent planning conditions with regard to local governance structures, urban development objectives, municipal financial capacity, and patterns of urban population growth as a proxy for development pressure on urban space.

Agata Pięt, University of Applied Sciences in Nysa, Poland; **Stella Schroeder**, Universidad del Bío-Bío, Chile; **Rita Ochoa**, University of Lisbon, Portugal.

Title: Mapping and Identifying the Spatial Strategies in the Sharing City: Urban Installations Related to Exchange.

Abstract: The proposed presentation is based on the work carried out by the members of the sub-group "Intermittent Practices / Temporary Uses / Tactical Urbanism" within Working Group 3 (Urban Installations and Gathering Points) of COST Action CA23117, "Connecting critical pedagogies, inclusive art forms and alternative barometers for urban sustainability." The sub-group concentrates on different typologies, practices, and tactical actions in public space that have a temporary and intermittent character.

The presentation focuses on mapping examples of urban installations related to exchange in South American and European contexts. These case studies encompass a wide range of arrangements: ephemeral structures; points for sharing of goods, services, and resources; installations that facilitate interaction between citizens; and community-building elements such as roofs, tents, urban furniture. Despite their temporality and/or reserve nature, some of these interventions may gradually become permanent over time. The first phase of the research involves mapping and geolocating the selected cases. Based on their urban context, physical conditions, and spatial characteristics, we will then define a set of preliminary spatial categories. Each case will be classified according to these categories—such as street, intersection, square, leftover or lateral space, park, waterfront, or vacant lot—allowing us to identify patterns in how temporary installations occupy and activate different types of urban environments. The next step is to analyse why, and to what extent, urban installations and structures for exchange cluster in specific urban conditions (e.g., playful installations in plazas or residual spaces). The presentation will outline the methodology designed to identify these emerging spatial strategies. In a subsequent phase, this framework will be expanded and tested on a larger number of cases within the broader work of the Action, allowing for a more robust comparative analysis. The study seeks to understand how temporary structures reveal latent urban potentials by testing transitional uses or reactivating underutilized spaces. Its main objective is to identify flexible and replicable spatial strategies that can inform future interventions. In doing so, the research contributes to broader debates on adaptability, circularity, and urban responsiveness in contemporary cities.

Katie Friedman, **Kathleen Yang-Clayton**, **Dhruv Shah**, DePaul University, The Center for Equity, Effectiveness, and Efficiency, USA.

Title: Embedding equity in urban experimentation: a meso-level analysis of institutional and organizational dynamics.

Abstract: Experimental urbanism has generated rich insights into urban laboratories, living labs, and pilot projects as mechanisms for producing alternative urban futures (Karvonen, Evans & Van Heur, 2014). Yet experimentation without attention to the power dynamics embedded in urban government risks reproducing the very inequities it seeks to address. This paper proposes a meso-level model of experimental urbanism that centers the institutional, organizational, and funding architectures through which experimentation is mediated. We argue that the meso-level is the missing analytic layer connecting micro-level experiments to macro-level urban inequality. Drawing on Robinson's Ordinary Cities (2006),

we foreground the everyday operations of mid-sized, resource-constrained cities, using Peoria, Illinois as a representative case. This research examines how an "ordinary city" like Peoria has adopted a culture of continuous learning and inclusive innovation that enables a radical reimagining of government's role in transformative change. Integrating Ray's (2019) theory of racialized organizations and Sewell's (1992) conception of structures as schemas and resources, we demonstrate how institutional path dependencies reproduce inequitable dynamics in American communities. We then build upon insights from Dantzler and Yang-Clayton (2022) to develop an equity-centered theory of experimental governance through the REDI Model (Reimagining Equity through Dynamic Inquiry). Through structured inquiry, iterative learning cycles, and continuous improvement, REDI positions internal organizational actors and processes as the foundational terrain of urban experimentation and democratic transformation.

The paper grounds this argument in the Peoria Employment Transportation Assistance Pilot, a flexible-funding initiative designed to reduce transportation barriers to employment for low-income residents. The project demonstrates how innovation in workforce development and mobility required a culture of experimentation, trust, and collaboration between a resident-led citizen commission and local government leadership. Rather than a one-off initiative, the pilot reveals how transformation within the city's institutional infrastructure can be leveraged for radical community change.


Madeline Mesich, Independent Researcher – Formerly affiliated with 4CITIES

Title: "This system was not made for us": Systems Thinking and Tenant Organizing

Abstract: In Winnipeg, home to Canada's largest urban Indigenous population, the "housing crisis" reflects intersecting forces of settler-colonial dispossession and neoliberal policy failures. In the absence of strong tenant protections, the West Broadway Tenants Committee (WBTC) and supporting advocacy network responds to tenant needs in acts of radical care. Through participatory action research centering tenant voices, this study documents experimental methods that challenge traditional housing policy, examining the WBTC's practices as experimental urbanism. A participatory systems mapping workshop brought WBTC members and tenants together to collectively diagram the interconnected forces perpetuating the "wicked problem" of housing precarity, tracing causal loops evictions, inadequate maintenance, racialized poverty, and policy failures.

This collaborative visualization process transformed individual experiences into a shared structural analysis, revealing the ways in which housing injustice operates as a system rather than isolated incidents. Participants also mapped alternative futures: imagining counter systems rooted in tenant power, collective ownership models, and feminist care-based governance. These mappings were translated into a community published zine, demonstrating how experimental urban methodologies can function as accessible knowledge mobilization tools. The zine was circulated beyond academic spaces, becoming an organizing resource that works to make complex systems thinking accessible for broader tenant and community networks. The WBTC case offers replicable models for community-led experimentation in addressing "wicked problems" of housing injustice across diverse urban contexts. Findings explore tenant organizing as radical care centered on the role of experimental urbanism in achieving socially sustainable, decolonial urban futures.

Semire Bayatli , Pratt Institute, New York, USA.

Title: A Thought Experiment in Experimental Urbanism: "Sensory Placemaking" beyond the Visual-Dominant Debate

Abstract: Current academic and practical debates in urban planning, architecture, and urban design remain dominated by the visual qualities of space. This visual-centric paradigm not only limits how public spaces are experienced but often fails social equity goals by overlooking users with diverse needs, including those with sensory impairments. This presentation offers a theoretical contribution and "thought experiment" that challenges this traditional approach. It proposes "Sensory Placemaking" as a form of experimental urbanism. This methodology moves beyond aesthetics, integrating findings from neuroscience and social science into a human-centered, interdisciplinary design process. Its primary aim is to create more inclusive, accessible, and sensorially prosperous public environments by designing for all senses.
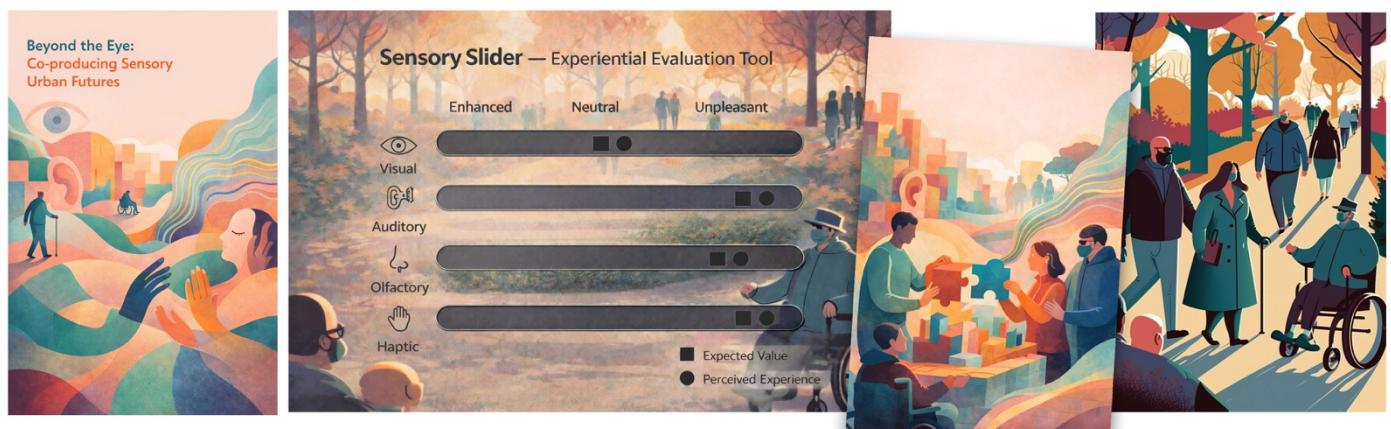
The core value this "experimental" approach adds to the current debate is encapsulated in the proposed concept of "Sensory Justice". This theoretical framework reframes equitable access to multisensory experiences in public spaces as a fundamental component of social justice. This presentation will discuss the potential of Sensory Placemaking to move urban design practice beyond debates of mere physical

accessibility, contributing to a more democratic and socially sustainable urban future based not on how our cities look, but on how they are experienced.

Presentation session 4: Politics, protest and participation in urban experiments

(Moderator: Georgiana Varna, Newcastle University)

Harry Smith, Institute for Place, Environment and Society, Heriot-Watt University, UK; **Maria Soledad García Ferrari**, Edinburgh School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture, Edinburgh College of Art, University of Edinburgh, UK; **Carlos Velásquez**, Mesa de Vivienda y Hábitat de Comuna 8, Medellín, Colombia; **Wilmar Castro Mera**, Escuela del Hábitat, Facultad de Arquitectura, Universidad Nacional de Colombia sede Medellín, Colombia; **Ana Miret García**, Edinburgh School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture, Edinburgh College of Art, University of Edinburgh / Institute for Place, Environment and Society, Heriot-Watt University, UK; **Róbinson Velásquez**, Mesa de Vivienda y Hábitat de Comuna 8, Medellín, Colombia.

Title: Co-produced experiments in integrated disaster risk management, climate change adaptation and urban planning in Comuna 8, Medellín, Colombia.

Abstract: Co-production of urban planning and management instruments and projects that aim to future-proof emergent neighbourhoods against disasters and adapt to climate change, needs to understand and work with the complexities on the ground, drawing on a 'dialogue of knowledges' among civil society, the state and academia. This paper reflects on ten years of work in Comuna 8, a district of Medellín where disaster risk management and climate change adaptation has become a key driver of community mobilization. It traces the evolution of a uniquely continuous sequence of participatory action-research projects around disaster risk management in self-built neighbourhoods involving all these actors, linking community activism and knowledge, scientific knowledge and policymaking. These include experiments in community-based monitoring, and community-built landslide mitigation works, rainwater harvesting and nature-based solutions at the project level, and in the preparation of neighbourhood and district-level disaster risk management and climate change adaptation plans at the planning level. The paper highlights the diversity and capacities of community organizations and other actors that support them, and how their interactions with state actors have evolved, as well as how an integrated approach to disaster risk management and climate change adaptation has emerged from a bottom-up understanding of the complexities of place. Finally, it draws lessons on factors that may affect the success of co-production, including long-term collaboration between actors, strength of existing community organization networks and leadership, and the use of co-production methods that facilitate the 'dialogue' among scientific, technical / administrative and local knowledges.

Melissa Quetulio-Navarra, Ateneo de Manila University, / Advisor for Joly Homes Foundation (JHF), Philippines.

Title: Street Dialogues as Experimental Urbanism: Co-producing Durable Solutions with the Invisible Population of the Philippine Metropolis

Abstract: Street dwellers in the Philippines constitute a significant fraction of the 4.5 million homeless population, representing a "wicked problem" of urban exclusion exacerbated by contradictory top-down governance. This paper presents a case study of experimental urbanism from the Global South, exploring how "urban outcasts" can co-produce alternative urban futures. Diverging from traditional state mechanisms such as the conflict between social welfare (MCCT) and aggressive "clearing operations", this project functioned as a mobile "living lab" to challenge the invisibility of this sector. Functioning as a tool for democratic engagement, this study was conducted in partnership with the "Kariton Coalition," a network of

faith-based organizations managing feeding centers in Metro Manila. The research is situated within a broader initiative advocating for the institutionalization of a durable shelter program. By employing Paulo Freire's dialogical approach, the study experimented with breaking the "culture of silence" to foster "conscientization" and agency among vulnerable populations through "street conversations" and inter-hub events.

The findings reveal a critical disconnect between state-imposed interventions and the bottom-up reality of street life. While participants demonstrate resilience through "street family" dynamics, their aspirations for dignity and sustainable livelihood clash with the state's focus on short-term relief and displacement. The paper argues that true innovation in urban governance requires shifting from top-down policy to a collaborative framework grounded in lived realities. Consequently, these findings are driving a multi-scalar advocacy strategy, including the social organization of street dwellers as a recognized sector and the co-formulation of a legislative "shelter program" bill in partnership with policymakers. This research demonstrates how centering the voices of the marginalized is essential for co-creating inclusive, resilient, and durable urban solutions.

_____

Menglei Zhang, Bartlett School of Planning, UCL, UK

Title: Exploring the role of temporary urbanism in urban regeneration within the context of China's urban transformation: the shift from a focus on quantity to a focus on quality

Abstract: China's urban transformation is undergoing a crucial shift from quantity-driven expansion to quality-focused development, necessitating innovative regeneration approaches. Temporary urbanism, characterised by its adaptability and flexibility, presents an alternative strategy for sustainable urban regeneration. While extensively studied in Western contexts, its role within China's unique urban development framework remains underexplored. This research will explore the role of temporary urbanism in the process of Chinese urban transformation and how it reshapes the constructed urban space. The research developed an analytical framework premised on two axes: the logic of genesis (Spontaneous versus Deliberate) and the mode of temporal (Interim versus Ephemeral) to examine the diversity of temporary urbanism projects in Beijing.

Two projects will be selected for in depth case study to investigate how temporary urbanism contributes to urban regeneration and examines the dynamic interactions between temporality and spatial restructuring. Employing a mixed-methods approach—integrating qualitative case study analysis with quantitative POI data mapping and spatial signature — this study conducts a comparative analysis of iconic projects. The findings highlight its potential in reactivating inefficient spaces and reveal how temporary urbanism acts as a strategic tool for state-led placemaking and a precarious tactic for grassroots resilience, often existing in a state of co-option and tension. By bridging theoretical gaps and providing empirical insights, this research aims to advance understanding of temporary urbanism's impact on China's ongoing urban regeneration efforts.

_____

Wattana Songpetchmongkol, Mackintosh School of Architecture, The Glasgow School of Art, UK; **Sing Hang Tam**, University of Art, London, UK.

Title: The Meaningless-ness of Protest: An Urban Pseudo-Leisure

Abstract: Using recent protest actions in London as a case study, this paper argues the demonstration's over-normalisation produces a paradox in which urban protest becomes increasingly politically inconsequential. When protest is absorbed into the rhythms of everyday urban life, its capacity to generate meaningful political engagement is diminished, and the perceived effectiveness of collective action is weakened. This phenomenon is compounded by widespread public indifference, limited governmental responsiveness, and a growing sense of frustration and exhaustion among activists, which narrows the discourse of protest itself. These dynamics render protests into a form of alienated pseudo-leisure, rather than a politically disruptive practice. As people march down the street, their collective 'walk' is not only the physical act of frustration, but also the reflection of the desired leisure that has yet to exist (Songpetchmongkol & Tam, 2026).

The paper highlights a central dilemma: in contexts where protest is restricted or prohibited, collective mobilisation often carries significant political weight; yet in cities where protest is permitted, routinised, and rendered safe, it risks becoming symbolically hollow. Through the lenses of the recent protest by different groups in London on national identity and immigration, this analysis illustrates how activist movements

may become unfulfilling, ineffective, and meaningless when urban conditions erode participation and collective agency, interrogating how political expression is shaped by the structural affordances and limitations of urban life. Through the experimental thought exercise, this paper proposes to imagine a new form of socio-spatial urban setting that would allow protests to be routinised but still remain meaningful and impactful–unsettling protests that actually disrupt the urban landscapes. Essentially, if a protest is indeed the 'walk' toward the urban pseudo-leisure, does its meaninglessness still matter? This paper critically pencils the insights that may help future activist movements avoid discursive dead-ends and pursue more impactful avenues for social transformation.

Keywords: Pseudo-Leisure, Socio-Spatial Politics, Urban Protest

---

Zeynep Nur Gün & **Duygu Cihanger Ribeiro**, Middle East Technical University, Turkey.

Title: From Guerrilla to Governance: Experimental Urbanism in the Urban Context of Turkey

Abstract: Experimental urbanism practices, such as DIY Urbanism, Tactical Urbanism, Guerrilla Urbanism have gained increasing attention in the last decades, focusing on being cost-effective, small-scale, flexible, and creative interventions. These projects also bring out questions regarding their geographical limitations, as most of the focus is on the Global North, their role in shifting the existing power relations, urban political structures, and governance models, and lastly, the long-term impact on urban space and societies. Current approaches, inclining towards neoliberal actors and governance models, emphasize ecological, technical, and economic dimensions while mostly underrepresenting the social and contextual aspects of urban change (Hodson & Marvin, 2009). As Karvonen et al. (2014) also point out, developing the politics of experimentation is critical to unlocking their radical potential.

The case of Turkey, regarding experimental urbanism projects and current urban planning and design politics, is worth discussing in relation to these points, as it stands out with its distinctive socio-political and spatial conditions. Although Turkey is often positioned within Global North frameworks, its urban practices reflect Global South realities such as informal housing, transport, and continuous breaches in the urban developmental laws, creating a complex and contradictory situation. Experimental interventions in Turkey, such as Ayda Bir Gün Sokak Bizim. TOPUK, Sokaklar Dönüşüyor, Güzel İzmir Hareketi and Tasarımcılar Çeşme'de:Kıyı-Köşe face limitations, including being institutionally undefined in both legislation and within central and local governments, as well as ambiguities in inter-institutional authority.

This paper argues that, beyond recognizing experiments in urban space within urban planning and design policies and implementation, a transformation in governance perspective is also needed. Methodologically, in-depth interviews will be conducted with a growing number of practitioners and policymakers working in experimental urbanism in Turkey, with a focus on Izmir and Istanbul. A discourse analysis will be employed when necessary to assess political discourse and power relations. Additionally, projects implemented in Turkey will be examined through a multiple case study and a participatory action research approach. This approach aims to reveal key governance themes, challenges, and opportunities. Focusing on a scarcely studied local context, this research seeks to advance the discourse on experimental urbanism beyond temporariness and permanence by proposing a holistic governance framework that sustains transformative capacity and preserves creative essence.

Keywords: Experimental urbanism; governance; urban design politics; global north–global south; Turkey

---