

A New "Space Age": Globalisation Is Shaping Urban Development

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"Space" is defined and shaped by social forces. A project at the Vienna University of Technology is presently investigating how current changes in these forces are impacting on urban development. This project, backed by the Austrian Science Fund FWF, is focusing primarily on the consequences of globalisation. Artists, architects and scientists are due to meet this weekend at an interdisciplinary symposium to discuss the initial results in Vienna, Austria.

Space has numerous dimensions: A space can be inclusive and thus define relationships. However, it is not just boundaries that create a "space", but also what happens in it. Architect Dr. Helge Mooshammer from the Institute of Art and Design at the Vienna University of Technology is seeking to demonstrate that the organisation of social cohabitation is increasingly a question of "transgressing boundaries". He is investigating new dynamics in "defining space". He is most interested in the effects of globalisation – and the increasing mobilisation of goods and people – on the development of urban space, because this is causing different values to collide and thus giving rise to a completely new definition of space.

The Architecture of Capital

In terms of values, Dr. Mooshammer believes: "It is, of course, generally acknowledged that social forces define a space. However, this acknowledgement has so far had little positive impact on practical urban planning. Architecture is still closely linked with the principles of ownership. And the increasing tendency to view building projects as an investment opportunity has exacerbated this situation. Share value is becoming the primary factor in the decision-making process."

Dr. Mooshammer believes that this virtualisation of the value of architecture is pitted against a completely different reality in our cities, whereby an increasingly deregulated world is creating new social forces at the heart of our cities as a result of globalisation and migration.

Markets & Migrants

Dr. Mooshammer uses the example of "informal markets" to demonstrate how these new social forces are changing the face of spaces and, therefore, urban development. These markets arise without prior planning and are not regulated by social institutions. The Four Tigers Market in Budapest, where Chinese migrants meet to trade in all sorts of goods, is such a marketplace. These kinds of developments are associated with the introduction of new social structures, which often conflict strongly with local conventions. At a similar market in Moscow – the Cherkizovsky Market – conflicts led to the closure of the Asian market, thus erasing the social space over night. This shows that newly-created spaces do not exist in isolation; they also always exist in tension with established social spaces. Consequently, the idea of creating a space where relationships can be formed and maintained must be taken into account in urban development.

Dr. Mooshammer explains what the findings of the FWF project "Relational Architecture" mean for urban planning: "The current financial crisis is just one aspect that highlights the urgency of the discussion as to how and with what means – monetary, cultural, etc. – we should invest in the design of our towns and cities." This topic will also be at the heart of the discussions at the "Other Markets" symposium to be held at the Architekturzentrum Wien in Vienna on Saturday, 31 October from 2 p.m. to 8 p.m. Teddy Cruz is one of the other speakers who will be joining Dr. Mooshammer at the event. Cruz, an architect and professor at the University of California in San Diego, will report on his projects in Central America, which simultaneously construct a public infrastructure and new economic systems. In this way, the experiences of living together can be used to redefine the goals of urban planning – and herald the dawning of a new "space age".

Text and image material available from Thursday, 29th October 2009, from 09:00 CET at:

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