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Temporality and Rhythmanalysis in Brussels. Exploring variations in the spatio-temporal appropriation of a multicultural metropolis

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Abstract : This paper examines the multiplicity of context-producing and context-generative agencies that realize 'locality' as a property of social life (Appadurai 1995). It underscores the importance of 'time' in this fragile social achievement through an ongoing research study on rhythmanalysis and locality-building. This research was designed to help students of the KU Leuven International Master of Architecture program examine multiculturalism in Brussels. Following Lefebvre's (1995 ; 2004) theory on 'rhythmanalysis', the study adopted a methodological orientation that emphasized the 'lived experience' comparable to participant observation in anthropology (Highmore 2005 : 150). As this lead to a broader reflection on temporality and the transience of urban realities, the study then turned to experimental group assignments on the usage of public space. This compnent began to explore how rhythmanalysis could tap students' inner knowledge and insights and connect these « designerly ways of knowing » (Doucet & Janssens 2011:2) with everyday social realities. While study outcomes are yet to be finalized, they indicate that urban studies ought to integrate 'time' as a full-fledged fourth dimension of urban life. By including the study of 'rhythms' into its curricula, spatial practitioners can reactivate their part in the increasingly intangible - network-, information and media-based - production of locality.

Keywords : rhythmanalysis : temporality ; multiculturalism ; Brussels

Introduction

In 1993, Arjun Appadurai (1995 : 204) assessed that 'locality' - the realization of a local life-world - was an "inherently fragile social achievement" in a world where "spatial localization, quotidian interaction and social scale" were " *not always* isomorphic" [my italics]. Today, achieving this place-like quality has become even more precarious and the question how spatially oriented disciplines like architecture and planning can be part of this endeavour may well have become crucial for the survival of the métier.

While architectural research has by and large joined in transdisciplinary efforts to decipher the blurring contexts of localization, day-to-day practice of architects and planners remains entangled in perceptions that differentiate situated neighbourhoods from the less tangible reality of increasingly de-territorialized, diasporic and transnational communities. Yet, both dimensions of locality are often more closely and creatively interwoven than spatial practitioners acknowledge. Human motion has become the norm rather than the exception, and virtual reality is more closely merged with actual life. People over larger distances simply have come closer together, and adjacencies like this are affecting the context within which locality is being (re)produced.

This paper contends that the education of spatial professionals should integrate these features of contemporary life by emphasizing the dimension of time. To exemplify this argument it reviews an on-going research study on rhythmanalysis and locality-building in the Brussels Capital Region (BCR). It traces the study's theoretical basis, unfolds the different phases in its methodological grounding and reviews the potential it holds for positively contributing to design processes. The final reflections offer some of the lessons learned so far and the implications these may have for the theoretical and practical education of spatial practitioners. [...]