

Call for Abstracts:

RC21 Conference "Unequal Urban Worlds"
XVII ISA World Congress, Yokohama 13-19 July 2014

“Ambiguous Spaces: Moving beyond Dichotomies of Public Space”

Session Organizers:

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Session in English

“[W]hatever the deadening weight of heightened representations and control over public space, spontaneous and organized political response always carries within it the capability of remaking and retaking public space and the public sphere.”
(Low & Smith 2006)

In recent decades, public space – the heart of urbanity – has undergone tremendous transformations in cities worldwide. Especially after 9/11, public places have experienced massive restructuring processes through rising regulation, surveillance, control and other exclusionary practices not only in Northern American cities. Simultaneously, increased privatization has undermined accessibility, diversity of use, multifunctionality and freedom of choice in many places and has thereby contributed to a general de-democratization of public space.

Many scholars have thus painted a dark picture regarding the state of public space. Authors such as Mike Davis, Richard Sennett, and Michael Sorkin formulated the now-classic proclamation of the decline, erosion, end or death of public space. At the same time, both scholars and municipal actors speak of the “re-vitalization” or the “re-appropriation” of public space, thereby directly challenging the prevalent discussion. Moreover, different urban actors undertake a multitude of alternative strategies to remake, to reclaim and even to hijack public space, therewith trying to develop extraordinary but also everyday practices of inclusion. Temporary use planning (Zwischennutzungen), squatting, urban gardening, guerilla strategies, ad hoc events, and critical mass events – such practices exemplify some of the many new ways of negotiating and appropriating public space.

In this panel we would like to stress the ambiguity of public space both within the urban studies literature as well as concerning the recent transformations in urban public

spaces. Fixed binary characterizations, such as tightness/looseness, chaos/order, exclusion/inclusion, public/private, rise/decline, democratic/non-democratic, urban/suburban, Western/Non-Western are still prevailing within various conceptualizations of public space. However, we welcome contributions that go beyond these either/or avenues. Hence, we are looking forward to papers that develop interdisciplinary and comparative perspectives that incorporate the interwoven dynamics between these binaries and, thus, address the fluid and contingent characteristics of public space and its role for negotiating social inequality.

On-line abstracts submission:

June 3, 2013 - September 30, 2013 24:00 GMT.

<http://www.isa-sociology.org/congress2014/rc/rc.php?n=RC21>