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Chiara Tornaghi and Sabine Knierbein (eds)
Public Space and Relational Perspectives:
New Challenges for Architecture and Planning,
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Public space, the medium for experiencing and learning about cities, has preoccupied researchers, professionals and students in various disciplines worldwide. Public spaces reflect social dynamics within political, economic and cultural contexts. Whether planned, or temporary, public spaces involve a multiplicity of actors who use but also contribute to the dynamic process of their production. The main argument in this book builds on the need for understanding social dynamics that lead to new trends in public life. Innovative educational practices have the potential to lead towards more inclusive, tolerant and respectful urban spaces, through an understanding of everyday public spaces and their ability to accommodate the ever-changing requirements of urban routines (p. 3). This book presents a radical shift in the conceptualisation, education and research on public space with the purpose of influencing planning institutions and their policies related to public space production.

This book aims to inform the link of 'relational approaches to space and relational spatial practices' (p. 8). To achieve this aim, the editors promote a pedagogical

framework with transdisciplinary and relational approaches to public space. On the one hand, this comes in response to the 'segmented and segmenting approaches to analysis and conceptualisation' (p. 5) of space within the disciplines of architecture and planning, which marginalise differing users, rather than collaborate with them in the production of public space. The transdisciplinary approach links theory and practice, to develop relational public space in its ontological, epistemological and ethical dimensions. On the other hand, 'developing a pedagogical approach based on urban life and difference in public space' (p. 1) would act as a tool within architecture and urban planning for addressing more comprehensively the complexity of contemporary urban life. The significance of a relational approach of public space lies in focusing on social, political and cultural influences on space, the dynamics of various actors and the space, the generation of meanings, and contested uses (pp. 4–5). This approach could improve the understanding of material and immaterial aspects of space as explained by the editors.

The book is of interest to academics and professionals practising transdisciplinary approaches with the purpose of establishing relations across civil society, political decision making, and the practices of design and planning. The book specifically addresses educators in architecture and urban planning, and invites them to use public space not merely as a theme, but rather as the medium for transdisciplinary inquiry (see Chapters 1 and 3). This is achieved through 'cross-pollination' of various education tools from the digital arts and media, social sciences, educational planning, political science, ethnography and others into architecture and urban planning (p. 2).

The book is divided into three parts addressing conceptual, practical and research challenges for a relational public

space approach within architecture and urban planning (p. 1). The first part addresses an alternative conceptualisation of public space within a complex multi-cultural context with changing social, economic and political relations. The second part examines the integration and effective implementation of innovative tools for training future professionals dealing with public space. Such training could eventually instigate institutional change, and in turn face the challenge of affecting policy and practice and forwarding research as discussed in the third part.

Chapter 1 defines issues with public space within the education and practice of architects and urban planners. These issues include discussions of relational perspectives on public space that provide new ways of addressing arising urban challenges in architecture and planning education worldwide. Also, ethical concerns are addressed as part of the conceptual challenges in which 'theory can be informed by embodied social practice' (p. 1).

After the introduction, Part I with its two chapters forms the theoretical framework of the book, which states: first, that dynamic social practices are affected by and affect space and its production process. The focus in this part is on various forms of space appropriation that are not part of the mainstream literature on public space (p. 13) and their significance in understanding the reality about these spaces from the architecture and planning perspectives. Second, learning about new concepts and methodologies requires a transdisciplinary approach, which architecture and planning have not really exploited regarding public spaces as spatial manifestations of social change; in other words, what the editors refer to as 'transducting relational thinking to the field of public space' (p. 8), or 'translating' complex relational theories to education, and dealing with ontology, epistemology and ethics in relation to public space. Chapter 2 explores relational thinking in various disciplines and

proposes a new ontology of relational public space based on publicness, action-orientated learning, and ethics within such a pedagogical setting. Chapter 3 explains the importance of considering public space as the focus of transdisciplinary inquiry and 'vehicle for gaining knowledge … of the everyday' (p. 195) rather than a mere theme. Based on Lefebvre's spatial epistemology, the chapter proposes a people-centred approach within a relational public space framework, which has the potential of reconnecting spatial abstraction with spatial practices.

Part II introduces methodologies in education on public space as part of the relational approach to public space. The purpose is to facilitate educational transfer and 'cross-pollination' from uncommon actors such as activists, artists, and everyday users into architecture and urban planning. To help engage students, professionals and the public, 'communicative and performative tools' (p. 8) become an important component in the education curricula. One proposal is to use play and games as educational tools for reconnecting with the public (p. 67). New digital media are encouraged, especially within an open culture approach (p. 74). Chapter 4 addresses the alternative use of mobile phones within the framework of a relational public space. Chapter 5 examines the use of computer games and virtual spaces for exploring planning approaches that are compatible with the complexity of everyday urban life (p. 89). Chapter 6 presents the use of performative theatre and simulation games in learning about public space within the framework of a learner-centred approach, and provides some learning guidelines. The focus of Part II is on using public space as an opportunity to understand social processes involved in its making and its use, where education is at the heart of the conceptual, practical and research challenges facing public space seen as everyday 'lived space' (p. 2).

Part III explores worldwide cases and presents lessons-learned that can inform education on public spaces within architecture and urban planning. Research on public space becomes one means of utilising a critical analysis of design and planning practice in order to reconnect planned spaces to lived spaces (p. 121) and understand the social practices affected by but equally shaping public space. International experiences present 'methods, approaches or frameworks for dealing with context-specific and complex public spaces as spaces of becoming' (p. 121). These experiences show the extents of educational institutions as catalysts for learning about public space. Chapter 7 presents two cases of 'emerging public spaces' (p. 122) within different power and political systems. Chapter 8 examines the significance of temporary public spaces specifically in shrinking cities, and the role of performative and experience-based planning. Reflexivity and 'iterative and incremental knowledge production' (p. 9) become tools for reconsidering how public spaces are provided within architecture and urban planning.

Chapter 9 examines how different countries are revisiting their educational systems to meet current transformations and needs, and explores research on pedagogy and space. The 'new socio-spatial turn' in educational planning is examined along with educational changes within spatial planning (p. 167). The chapter ends by using theories of 'communities of practice' and 'transitional spaces' (p. 167) to propose further investigation of relational public space approaches based on eight challenges: establishing educational contexts of trust and respect; engaging with intuitive learning methods; encouraging openness to share different perspectives; training students to have an informed positionality towards their roles as professionals; practising the overcoming of a personal comfort zone for the sake of developing integration skills; merging argumentation and interventions in public space to help the process of 'co-shaping public spaces' (p. 192); working collaboratively and integrating conflicting views when developing pubic space ideas; and lastly, involving students in real life, with its conflicts and dynamics, thus allowing them to engage with the ongoing process of public space as lived space.

The book is a springboard for further exploring and critically reflecting upon our roles as educators, our positionality as practitioners, and the opportunities we have as users to influence urban spatial processes and to perpetuate innovative time–space uses in everyday urban life.