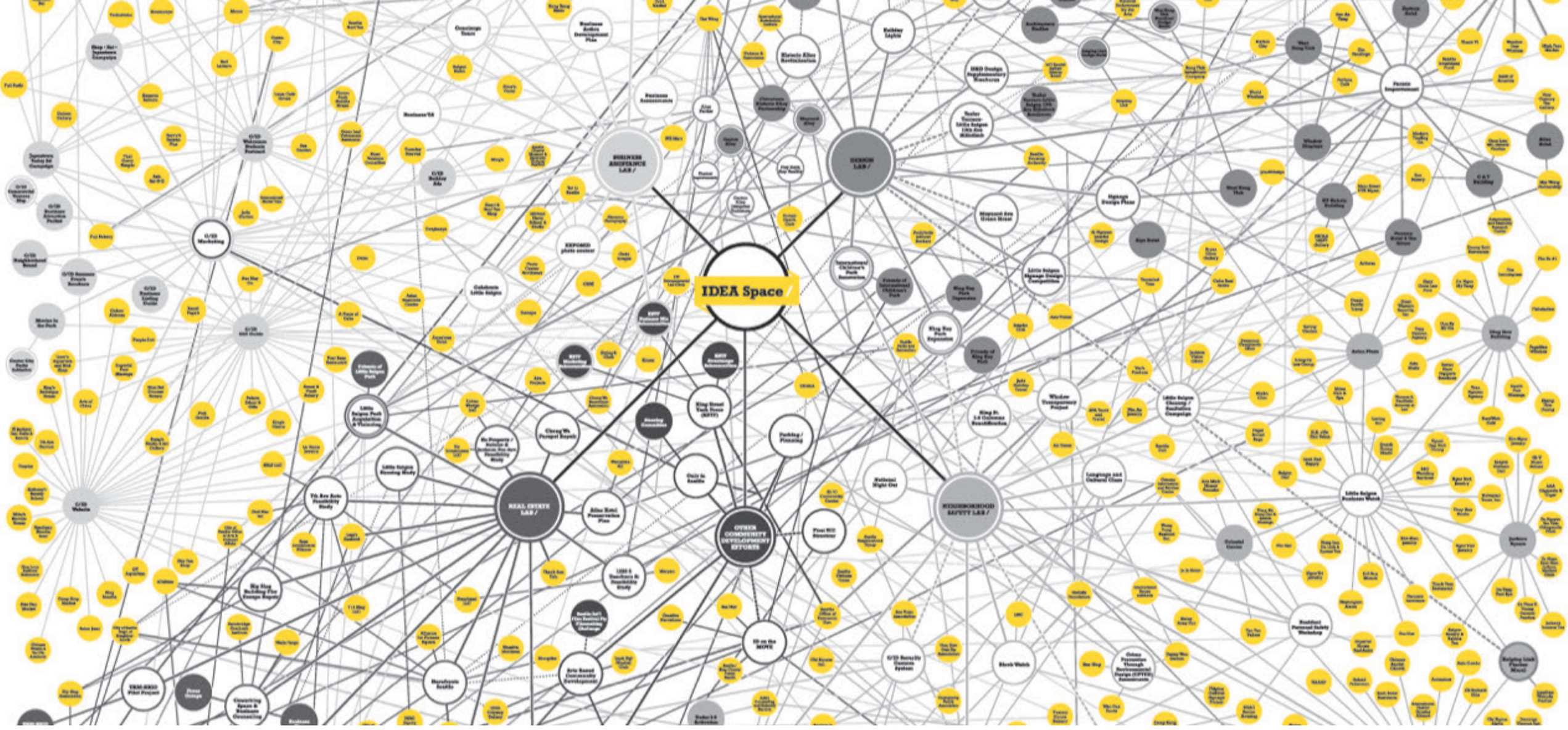


Resilience by the People

Guest Lecture

Jeff Hou

University of Washington

Director of the Urban Commons Lab

Friday, 4th of December 2026, 13:00

Seminar room EBEG1

Karlsgasse 11, ground floor

As cities and communities face more frequent and severe climate crises and socioeconomic challenges, adaptation and resilience mechanisms are critical to their well-being and survival. Over the past decade, institutions at different scales have developed plans to address potential storm surges, rising sea levels, and other forms of catastrophic impacts. However, while large-scale responses may be necessary and desirable, they may also lead to equally disruptive outcomes and deprive communities of their agency to address change.

How can community-based, informal spatial practices contribute to adaptation and resilience in local contexts and beyond? What can we learn from bottom-up, self-organized initiatives? How do these initiatives intersect with formal institutions? How can we bridge the gap between informal, localized initiatives and the coordination needed to address systemic challenges? How can technologies and digital platforms be mobilized to support these initiatives? What are the respective roles of state and non-state actors in these responses?

This presentation will present a series of grounded observations based on projects from Seattle to Taipei and Singapore. It proposes a framework for civic resilience and community capacity-building to guide institutional responses and community actions.

Jeff Hou, PhD, FASLA, is Provost's Chair Professor and Head of the Department of Architecture at the National University of Singapore. In a career that spans the Pacific, Hou has worked with indigenous tribes, farmers, fishers, villagers, and urban residents in Asia, and with inner-city immigrant youths and elders in North America, on projects ranging from wildlife conservation to the design and planning of urban open spaces.

Hou's research has focused on bottom-up placemaking, community design, civic engagement, and urbanisms in Asia. His collaborative publications include Insurgent Public Space: Guerrilla Urbanisms and the Remaking of Contemporary Cities (2010), Transcultural Cities: Border-Crossing and Placemaking (2013), Messy Urbanism: Understanding the "Other" Cities of Asia (2016), City Unsilenced: Urban Resistance and Public Space in the Age of Shrinking Democracy (2017), and Emerging Civic Urbanisms in Asia: Hong Kong, Seoul, Singapore, and Taipei Beyond Developmental Urbanization (2022).

Hou received the Outstanding Educator Award from the Council of Educators in Landscape Architecture in 2023. In 2013, he was appointed the City of Vienna Visiting Professor at TU Wien. Hou received his B.Arch from the Cooper Union, MLA from the University of Pennsylvania, and M.Arch and PhD from the University of California, Berkeley.

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