

Repurposing Places

for Social and Environmental Resilience



Edited by Anastasia Karandinou

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Repurposing Places for Social and Environmental Resilience

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Repurposing Places for Social and Environmental Resilience

Whilst the 20th century was mostly about starchitects, 21st century is about synergies and the relevant complex dynamics that these allow to grow. This shift happens in parallel to others; reusing, retrofitting, and giving a new life to the existing places, buildings and neighbourhoods, in an environmentally and socially resilient manner, developing ways for the existing communities to grow in a symbiotic relationship with new ones, designing processes of circular economy and upcycling, which allow people to collaborate and find viable solutions. Participation in architecture is a notion that continuously evolves, even more so in recent years. Knowledge and innovation that contributes to social justice and responsible design practices, emerges from complex networks and agile cross-disciplinary collaborations.

In this context, this conference examined the relationship between social and environmental resilience, by looking into designed projects, cross-disciplinary research and investigations, participatory and collaborative design methods. It welcomed architects, designers, artists, planners, urbanists, engineers, academics, educators, as well as researchers and practitioners of other relevant disciplines, who have addressed some of the above themes through their work. Projects on adaptation and retrofitting of places in an environmentally and socially responsible way, as well as participatory projects, were particularly welcomed. The conference also included presentations of ongoing projects and collaborations, which will drive the relevant conversations forward. This volume includes the short articles of the peer-reviewed and accepted presentations delivered at the conference, in London, in March 2023.

It is often argued that environmental resilience leads to social resilience. Indeed, there is an inextricable link between environmental (spatial) resilience and social resilience and the former leads to, or effects, the latter. However, in the context of this conference, we did not consider this as a simple one-way equation, and we aimed at investigating further the complex relationship between the two.

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Decolonizing the notion of 'Urban Commons' to mitigate the fragility of contemporary cities

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Introduction

In recent years, the international commons movement has increasingly joined forces with the global movement of municipalities, putting common ideas on the political agenda in many western countries. Commons have been widely discussed in literature. Broadly understood, commons refers to the practices for collective development, ownership, management, and fair access to resources and artifacts (social, cultural, economic, political, environmental, and technological). However, the concept remains vague, complex, and unclear, especially when it comes to different contexts in which new definitions are needed to better understand the societal and cultural dimensions of urban commons. Decolonizing the notion of urban commons brings into visibility the unseen cultures, infrastructural systems, and communities showing where de-growth and separation can take place. Therefore, this analysis can provide new insights, opportunities, and the need for new theoretical, methodological, and shared approaches. There is a gap in transnational research and cultural understanding within the field of urban commons. This research opens new lines of inquiry relating to the definitions of commons in non-European countries. This may include longitudinal research on the decolonization and potential fragmenting of the commons and in particular 'commoning' mindset, more detailed empirical evidence of the cultural and communal concepts, and how these cultural diversities and new interpretations can be implemented in collaborative governance in a wider variety of non-western contexts. By challenging existing frameworks, this study facilitates the emergence of differentiated, dynamic, and non-linear forms of social and political subjectivity within various socio-spatial domains.

The fragility of the Contemporary Cities

Contemporary metropolises are increasingly vulnerable to complex and multilayered social, environmental, political, and economic crises. The notion of urban fragility is articulated with humanitarian reason, and can function as a vessel for new practices of government in 'peripheral' regions (de Boer 2015). The concept of 'fragile cities' is deployed to imagine new forms of humanitarian interventions into the resilience of cities, whereby resilience becomes a naturalized category to think of the subjects of governance (Beall et al. 2013) which can be understood as a 'problematic of government' in matters of contemporary racial management from the point of view of the catastrophic and the apocalyptic conditions (Facer and Buchczyk 2019). Here, we follow Roy's (2016) formulation, in which the conceptualization of the fragile city should not become a more theoretical manifestation that proclaims the history of Europe as a universal history, becoming a vehicle for the diffusion of values and interests (Miklos and Paoliello 2017).

Decolonizing the notion of Urban Commons

In developing and underdeveloped countries, the extreme and negative impacts of contemporary challenges, such as climate change hazards, are often exacerbated, leading to the marginalization of already vulnerable and underrepresented communities and extreme socio-political and environmental degradation (Mehan and Tafra, 2022). In addition, top-down state-led approaches adopted by local governments, real estate developers, and international corporations have perpetuated power imbalances, exclusion, and marginalization, leading to the erosion of community trust and participation in urban governance. In this context, the concept of urban commons responds

to the need for inclusive, participatory, and equitable governance structures; however, the notion of urban commons often engages with the colonial legacy of conventional urban theory rooted in Western and European theories, which has led to a lack of sociocultural understanding and application of this concept in non-European contexts (Mehan and Mehan 2022). Therefore, by drawing on experiences and theoretical approaches from the 'South,' it is crucial to decolonize the notion of urban commons to address the fragility of contemporary cities and move towards a more global cope towards the 'worlding of cities.'



Conclusions and Further Discussions

This paper emphasizes that the decolonizing the notion of urban commons has the potential to mitigate the fragility of the cities in the global south. The concept of urban commons has the potential to address this issue, but it needs to be decolonized to ensure inclusivity and cultural diversity (Kozlowki et al 2020; Mehan 2020). The lack of cultural understanding and application of this concept in the non-western contexts is a significant challenge that must be addressed through longitudinal research, more detailed empirical evidence, and collaborative governance approaches. By doing so, we can promote differentiated, dynamic, and nonlinear forms of social and political subjectivity within various socio-spatial domains. Decolonizing the notion of urban commons can help mitigate the fragility of contemporary cities and move towards a more global approach to the worlding of cities.

This study opens new lines of inquiry for further discussion and research, and it is essential to consider cultural and societal dimensions to implement this concept effectively in the global south contexts.

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