Editorial: Volume 6, Issue 2, 2016

Future Prospects

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When the prospect of taking over as editor of the Journal of Space Syntax (JOSS) was first put to me, I was truly humbled in many ways. Since its creation and launch in 2010 following the 7th International Space Syntax Symposium, the work of the previous editors Julienne Hanson and Sophia Psarra, co-ordinating editors Reem Zako and Garyfalia Palaiologou, and their respective editorial teams has been impressive in many ways. The journal has, in my view, become a central point of reference for syntax research as well as a place where the discourse has remained both in-depth and widened. Individual contributions and thematic issues have addressed central tenets of theory and methods, provided empirical findings, challenged notions and standards, taken on interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary questions, and consistently sought new grounds and new angles to further deepen, develop and challenge knowledge in the field.

For these reasons, in my eyes this is not the time to paint a picture of the future of the journal – although we do take the opportunity to indicate a future of the field through the issue’s theme – but to acknowledge the work that has gone before us and to round off Volume 6 with its second volume. I will therefore begin by thanking the editors before me, along with Lars Marcus, Ann Legeby and Sophia Psarra for embarking on the next phase as I take up the reigns for a period. With this change of editorial team, JOSS becomes an active cooperation between KTH and UCL, as the latter has graciously agreed to continue to host the journal and the platform, and provide for the copy-editing work.

If I am to say anything about the future at this point, it is that we will strive to continue the work already begun to establish the journal in a wider context, to be the nexus where high quality papers on all aspects of space syntax meet, and where the field as a whole and in an extended sense has a common place of publication. We need to acknowledge, and I do so gladly, that research in the field is published in many other journals, which means the strength of JOSS cannot be as ‘the journal where space syntax research is published’ – this is not our goal. But we can be the place where the wide and varied range of research that together makes up the field is published and viewed together in a peer-reviewed journal, and in this sense JOSS is unique. This allows the field to challenge itself and be challenged by other theories, approaches, questions and methods, and to see how addressing different issues can develop the field in different ways. JOSS is where ‘the core’ can be developed in its own right, but also critically challenged ‘from within’. We can also be the place where everyone can be absolutely sure that the papers published are reviewed by the most knowing eyes the field can muster. And finally, we can be the journal where space syntax as a field of inquiry moves forward to wherever it is heading.

With these ruminations that are to be considered initial thoughts, I am glad to introduce the theme of this issue – future prospects – and content that focuses on the work of the many up-and-coming researchers within the field. Recent issues of JOSS have addressed both established and new questions regarding the field’s current state, future development, and historical development with a range of high quality papers by a wide range of authors. This has deepened and broadened the scope of research, enriching the discourse in the community. It has also reached out to and invited in new peers and contributors as well as established ones, demonstrating a rich, living and constantly developing field of research with a solid theoretical and methodological base.
The current issue seeks to continue this cutting-edge discussion of research and discourse on societies and spatial configuration by specifically focusing on the work of the ‘next generation’ – that is, the work of current and recent doctoral students who have embraced and challenged the theories, methods and concepts of space syntax and made their own use of it. The intention is to show where the field might be heading if the voices of the young rather than those of the established are heard, through the research work performed in doctoral studies.

The call thus went out for ‘young researchers’, defined loosely as PhD students and/or recent PhDs, as a way of building a picture of what the future holds, without making claims for any completeness. I believe the issue forms an interesting and encouraging response. In addition, we are very happy to have a paper by Bill Hillier that shows that any possible reading of the theme as a claim that innovativeness is linked to biological age is neither the intention nor the truth. Instead, we see an innovative, future-oriented and inspiring paper on where syntax research could go and what still needs thorough examinations by one of the oldest in the game. I believe this makes for a perfect composition of the issue – young and old, all new.

Hillier’s paper, which begins the issue, can be recognised from his seminal keynote from the 10th International Space Syntax Symposium in London, and addresses the question of the generic city. This generic city is not a specific pattern, neither physical nor spatial, but of configurative and spatial principles and processes. As Hillier shows, if I might allow myself to simplify, cities – no matter their specific form – tend to always organise into a foreground network of cross-community communication, and a background network of community formation. This is given historical and theoretical depth, linking clearly to the question of how social agglomerations such as cities operate; and, as Hillier addresses, suggests answers to the questions of why cities appear, and why they take the forms they seem to take. This is, Hillier claims, something on which space syntax research until now has had nothing to say.

The second paper, ‘Distances, accessibilities and attractiveness; looking at new approaches to include measures of urban form in hedonic pricing modelling’ by Axel Heyman and Bendik Manum, correlates willingness to pay for dwellings as examined by space syntax based measurements in GIS. The paper asks how contemporary demands on housing, understood through economic means, can be understood and worked with through analytic models in urban design and planning. The paper commences by showing how the standard of the housing itself is a comparatively small influence, whereas contextual factors are of great importance. The paper closely examines earlier studies of Stockholm and Copenhagen, which are then used to further develop methods and theories. This includes examining effects found in syntax analyses, analyses of types, and other factors, and a discussion on factors that the methods cannot address. The resulting paper covers both theoretical and methodological ground, developing a solid base by scrutinising earlier empirical research that will be further examined through testing in Oslo. Heyman is in his early stages of PhD research.

The third paper, ‘Understanding the spatial organisation of economic activities in early 19th century Antwerp’ by Francesca Froy, turns its attention to historical studies. A thoroughly investigated case throughout the paper, the study provides valuable insights into what Hillier’s paper suggests are important processes for ‘the generic city’. That is, if research is to claim general findings, it needs to be examined thoroughly over time and space, to closer investigate how findings relate to different historical, cultural, economic, and geographical conditions, amongst others. Froy’s paper thereby makes an important contribution in the thorough-
ness with which it addresses a city in another time and, arguably, another economy. Froy plans to start her PhD studies in 2016.

The fourth and final paper, 'Disciplined informality: Assembling un-programmed spatial practices in three public libraries in Medellín' by Cauê Capillé and Sophia Psarra, at least ostensibly addresses a smaller scale through three public libraries, but does so by understanding them as part of a larger transport and educational infrastructure. More specifically, it studies patterns of interaction and co-presence in libraries not primarily to understand them as rates of activity, but as socio-spatial network elements. It incorporates aspects of time-space and informal social interaction to discuss conditions and processes of the emergence of self-organised social communities. How people bond, and with whom. This is an important question to address in a discourse with a relative emphasis on how encounters foster interaction and through this a range of social structures and relations. Capillé is currently a PhD student at The Bartlett, UCL.

All four papers thereby make three kinds of contribution, albeit with different emphasis. They make theoretical and conceptual contributions in asking which issues the research in the field can, should, or could be addressing. They make empirical contributions by examining specific cases. And they make methodological contributions through novel ways of addressing the issues and the cases, suggesting how research could take additional steps forward to gain new knowledge.

Following the papers are three forum articles. In the first, Benjamin Vis discusses space syntax in relation to neighbouring fields, asking what difference material makes. Vis discusses one of the central tenets of syntax research – that of how we model space – by comparing the syntax models to other ways of mapping. Vis does not intend to suggest these are better or worse, but rather to point to the need to continuously re-examine models, and to continuously ask ourselves whether there are other possible models that will provide other answers, enriching the field whilst broadening and deepening our understanding of society-space relations.

In the second forum piece, Kayvan Karimi reflects on the latest symposium, setting it historically in the context of the first and following symposia, and proceeding to draw out tendencies in the work in relation to the latest London symposium as a means to paint a partial image of its recent and current state. Karimi points to both methodological and topical trends, as well as increasing amounts of cross-disciplinary work. Finally Karimi, celebrating the breadth and richness of the 10th symposium within a forum article, also highlights a few key observations about what is to come and notes two things he considers inevitable: integration with other fields, and impact on built reality.

The third and final forum piece by Teresa Heitor and Miguel Serra constitutes a reflection on the field in a wide context to point to three challenges they see as forthcoming, and which they hope the next space syntax symposium in Lisbon will help address. They call them the scientific, the dissemination, and the insemination challenges. It is an interesting way to frame the challenges for the coming symposium, and to point forward to what might be coming.

Finally, I would like to thank Ella Sivyer for staying on as copy-editor, and for both patience and quick responses as we worked through the stages of the first issue with a new editorial team. Thanks also go to our reviewers for this issue and indeed throughout the journal’s history, without whom none of the above-mentioned would have been possible. And certainly not least, to Ann Legeby for all her work in the coordination, communications, layout and more, which has been so crucial in pulling the issue together from call to publication.