Editorial: Volume 7, Issue 1, 2016

Spatial Cultures

Daniel Koch
School of Architecture KTH

Pages: i-vi
This issue of the Journal of Space Syntax – JOSS 7(1): Spatial Cultures – is exciting in a number of ways. The first and foremost, of course, is the series of great articles included and their insights into a wide range of in-depth perspectives on ‘spatial cultures’. The quality of this exploration into new territories and deepened understanding is impressive, prefaced by the republishing of John Peponis’ article *The spatial culture of factories* that anchors the new contributions in a historical context, whilst re-disseminating a pivotal work on the theme. The concept of ‘spatial cultures’ is clearly both pressing and fruitful as a field of inquiry. It welcomes both new and returning contributors, covers new and revisited questions, and includes a wide range of methodological and theoretical approaches both in concrete analysis and in theoretical and methodological frameworks. Articles range between theoretical approaches to the general issue of the call, specific studies of building types, studies of relations between buildings and streets, and studies of social stratification in urban environments. In addition, a non-thematic article completes the issue in an investigation of mixed use urban settings and adaptability of buildings, followed by a book review that resonates remarkably well with the issue theme. And there is already a series of papers in the pipeline for the next issue. We are delighted to have had this opportunity to curate the theme, to see complementary papers both within and between the issues form a full exciting volume – and there are more contributions to come with the call for issue 2!

Through the thematic call, the issue is intended to raise questions around socio-cultural relations to space and the material built environment, as well as cultures of designing, curating, and arranging space for the implicit or explicit purpose of what Julienne Hanson (1998) might call encoding and transmitting social and cultural information. This highlights questions of cultural specificity in the formation of space, the ways through which culture takes form and shape, and how culture affects relations to spatial formation. On the one hand, different cultures have different spatial traditions seen in how various building types are formed, the types that exist, and how they are aggregated in settlements. On the other hand, different cultures invest differently in space, be it in regards to what is manifested, or to what extent society is manifested through built form. Thirdly, however, there are architectural forms that are more deliberately or explicitly meant to hold, communicate or exhibit cultural production – such as museums, libraries, cinemas, culture houses, and similar buildings, or public spaces of art or cultural events. This is all clearly reflected in the contributions to this issue.

The issue begins with the republishing of John Peponis’ article *The spatial culture of factories* from *Human Relations* 38(4) in 1985 – and we are very grateful to SAGE for working with us to find a good solution here. The article, in addition to its pivotal contribution to the field at its time of publication, remains highly relevant today, anchoring and contextualising concurrent research in the history of the research field. In the article, Peponis argues that factory layouts have social functions over and above the purely technical, which have a strategic effect on the culture of workplaces. The article operates with both qualitative and quantitative data, comparing spatial and social variables in six cases. Peponis finds stable morphological relationships when it comes to status, but differentiation in how this stratification relates to manipulation and configuration of control. It is also found that
organisational and encounter boundaries largely correspond. Specifically, the higher status positions in the respective organisations seem to correspond across the cases, so that ‘higher statuses seem to have greater internal cohesion as well as higher levels of overall interaction’ (Peponis, 1985, p.376). Based on found differences in how the factories organise space and how the organisations relate to spatial configuration, the article concludes with a discussion of strategic differences between the cases, and a discussion on strategic dilemmas in factory design.

The second article by Garyfalia Palaiologou, Sam Griffiths and Laura Vaughan, Reclaiming the virtual community for spatial cultures: Functional generality and cultural specificity at the interface of building and street, addresses the broader theoretical question of spatial cultures explicitly, which is then more closely investigated, with the argument that ‘a micro-morphological approach to the description and analysis of the building-street interface helps to supply a ‘missing link’ in theorising the space-society relationship as part of a broader project of rethinking what ‘design’ means in an urban context’ (p. 50). Palaiologou, Griffiths and Vaughan are here careful to relate both to the work within the field on the notion of interfaces, and a wider theoretical context that includes Heidegger, Habermas, Lefebvre and De Certeau (to name a few). This context further underpins the relation of their work to the field of Urban Morphology. While presenting a deep theoretical discussion, the article is consistently anchored in empirical material and continuously discussed through the specific question of building-street interface, concluding with a discussion on how this interface can be thought of as a design strategy for the formation of virtual communities.

Mattias Kärholm, in his contribution In search of building types: On visitor centres, thresholds and the territorialisation of entrances, addresses the formation of spatial cultures on a micro-morphological level, which also develops questions raised in the earlier JOSS issue Changing Building Typologies (2014). Basing the discussion on actor-network theory and the works of Bruno Latour, Kärholm investigates the emergence and consolidation of a new building type in Sweden, the ‘visitor centre’. In this study, Kärholm makes a fine-grained typological distinction between how visitor centres can be understood as different types of thresholds. The article thus clearly communicates with the contribution by Palaiogolou, Griffiths and Vaughan in that it addresses the meeting between inside and outside, private and public, or building and city, but sets this relation in a different perspective by contrasting the concepts of threshold and interface with one another. As different from interfaces, Kärholm states, ‘[t]hresholds are also associated with territorial transgression and transformation’ (2016, p. 62), and often concern meaning and can signify changes in states of mind or other transformations, perhaps more so than with relations between different inhabitants.

Kali Tzortzi and Bill Hillier, in their contribution From exhibits to spatial culture: An exploration of performing arts collections in museums, analyse six museums of performing arts to build a discussion on museum spaces as synthetic space (espace synthétique) and how ‘commonalities we find at the global level can be thought of as outlining a generic spatial culture, through which it is possible to create, in the museum, dimensions of the circumstances in which performances are realised, transmitting some of the living richness of their experience’ (2016, p. 72). They furthermore raise questions around the concept of museums as stage-setters for experience, and whether museum spaces can play a role in the transmission of intangible as well as tangible aspects. On the one hand, there is a continuous engagement with configurational concepts and aspects of the museum layouts; on the
other, a largely French museological literature. Part of the conclusion relates back to the concepts of A-, B-, and C-spaces in syntax studies, and suggests that the staging of the performative arts in museums seems closely linked to the use of AB-space pairs, making visitors go into spaces to experience the exhibitions rather than going through them, which through the concept of parataxis is argued to enable a curation where relations are understood through direct experience and imagination, rather than solely imagination.

Lucy Donegan and Edja Trigueido present a study of three Brazilian beaches in their article To each, their beach: Unveiling the nexus between architecture and society in urban beaches, from an initial observation that ‘the most superficial observation reveals that frequenters of each beach are quite different, as seem to be their modes of use’ (2016, p. 89). In the context of the issue theme, the beaches could be considered as different spatial cultures, and the paper contributes a careful study and discussion of social stratification related to the syntactic context and properties of these beaches. This includes looking into the delicate issues of relations between class distinctions, and who makes use of which beaches and how. Through a careful and detailed empirical study, the paper addresses wider, complex social and spatial issues of segregation, differentiation and social norms and structures. Although often claimed to be lively, socially inclusive spaces, the study demonstrates the beaches to rather be strengthening a polarisation between the more and the less well off, finding links between this observed socio-cultural segregation and how the beaches are situated in the city’s configuration.

The issue concludes its range of papers with a non-thematic article by Laura Narvaez and Alan Penn, The architecture of mixed uses. Narvaez and Penn investigate links between economy and morphology, examined both at what other papers in this issue term a micro-morphological scale and on a larger scale of localisation in the city context. The article constitutes ‘a discussion on the location, use and form that supports the architecture of mixed uses’ (p. 132), where a key question is adaptability of buildings both generically and studied through four types of adaption. One of the key contributions of their work is relating a local, micro-scale morphological investigation of building adaptability to a larger scale urban context as both of high importance for the emergence of mixed use urban environments. Specifically, the study focuses on the commercial-residential building, and how it can be understood as an adaptable urban and architectural element in continuously evolving cities. Here, the paper in part echoes the discussion of the Changing Building Typologies issue, but looks much more clearly on buildings as part of a larger urban process of continuous change, and discusses morphology and policy as enablers of such change through architectural adaption.

Following the papers is a book review of Sam Griffiths’ and Alexander von Lünen’s (2016) Spatial Cultures: Towards a New Social Morphology of Cities Past and Present, which is clearly topical for the theme. Such a fit is of course neither curated nor a coincidence. When formulating the call, we were not aware of the approaching publication of the book, but it would be naïve to think that both the journal call and the work with the book are not interlinked in a less tangible way through discourse and tendencies in architectural and urban research in a wide sense as well as in the field of space syntax. It is likely that at least part of the apparent coincidence can be traced back to, for instance, discussions at international space syntax symposia, earlier JOSS issues, and conversations in other contexts making both direct and indirect links.

In addition, the issue marks a few steps in the ongoing development of the journal. Firstly, we have made some stylistic updates to both articles and website. This includes a slightly
edited look of the main body of the articles that we believe enhances clarity and readability, and the introduction of brief referencing and copyright information on the front page and first page of each article. While this makes the front page a little more cluttered, it aligns more clearly with the front page of other downloaded journal articles, and is a step in the longer-term plan towards getting the journal indexed and ranked.

Secondly, we have made a few strategic decisions regarding the structure and content of the journal for the coming years. In terms of structure, this mainly concerns the types of contributions we will accept: the journal has featured wide ranging types of articles, some of which were present from the beginning and some of which have been added as issues and themes have developed. These have, based on earlier publication patterns, been consolidated into five types of articles based on length and standards of review. The journal now has full articles, short articles, forum articles, reviews and news articles. Earlier distinctions between, for example, theory, research, methodology, software, practice and education have been removed in favour of this simpler submission typology. The journal certainly still encourages submission of all these different categories, but the submission type should instead be based on the character of the content and degree of scrutiny, whilst the editorial team will ensure that every article is reviewed by suitable reviewers for its topic and theme. Software and methodology articles can thus belong either to full articles, short articles or forum articles depending on the extent to which they are experimental, technical, grounded in research development or, for instance, empirically tested. Both short and long articles will still be double-blind reviewed, whereas forum articles will receive a single review in addition to an editorial review, and news will be reviewed by the editorial team.

Strategically, we have decided to run themes over volumes instead of issues, where issues can come to have sub-themes. The themes for the coming volumes have already been planned and are currently being refined for announcement in spring 2017. This plan goes up to and includes the anniversary volume 10 intended to form a kind of stocktaking issue of the field as a whole. This will allow the editorial team to establish a more regular publication rhythm, and greater scope for authors to plan ahead in terms of best fit for their contributions. In parallel, we hope to maintain and strengthen the non-thematic section, with both articles independent of the themes, and articles following on from earlier themes.

The themes and announcements will strive to balance between the various questions, aspects, issues, and foci of syntax research in a wider sense, and to always have authors involved both from the core of the field and from ‘outside’, to make the journal a nexus of both internal dissemination and development, and a site for dialogue, development, and discourse on the wider set of questions positioned from the early days of the field and still continuing to evolve today. While research within the field can and should also be published via other channels including other journals, JOSS can and should be the journal where the wide range of research in the field can meet, regardless if it concerns urban or architectural questions, social, morphological, cultural, technical, ecological, or other issues, whether it is statistical empirical research, a qualitative humanistic interpretative study, theoretical discourse on spatial modelling, pedagogical development, mathematic-geometric refinement or inventions in modelling, archaeological studies of ancient settlements, specific and detailed case studies, overall patterns in big data studies, or any other kind of research that develops the field. In addition, contributions are welcomed which blur the boundaries
from within as well as from without, and that enable other kinds of research to contribute to developing knowledge around the matters of concern.

To wrap up, I would like to again state how pleased we are with the issue at hand and the contributions by the authors. I would also like to thank our anonymous reviewers for their contributions both in ensuring the journal's quality standards, and in providing critical and constructive feedback to authors to improve submissions. Without this work, the journal could not exist.

Finally, I would like to thank our copy-editor Ella Sivyer for fantastic work and, as always, patience with a publication process that is still finding its form.

References