

AESOP Thematic Group for Public Spaces and Urban Cultures

Series UNSTABLE GEOGRAPHIES – DISLOCATED PUBLICS

First meeting, Beirut, 9-11 November 2016

Call for papers

Defragmenting and Activating Public Spaces in Unstable Urban Settings

The *Faculty of Architecture, Art and Design* at the *Notre Dame University – Louaize* will host the first meeting of the *AESOP Thematic Group for Public Spaces and Urban Cultures* (AESOP TG PSUC) in Beirut, Lebanon. This meeting launches the new thematic series: *Unstable Geographies – Dislocated Publics*, with its four sub-themes:

(see http://www.aesop-planning.eu/blogs/en_GB/urban-cultures-and-public-spaces)

- *City, refugees, and migration*
- *Fragmented social fabric – individualised patterns of consumption*
- *The decline of national politics – Resurgence of the urban political*
- *Change of perspective – worlding urban studies*

The series aims to address current issues related to public spaces common to cities globally, from an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary perspective, while engaging a variety of actors and stakeholders. The purpose of this meeting, organized in parallel to the *City Street² Conference* (refer to <http://www.ndu.edu.lb/citystreet2016/index.htm>), is to unfold themes under the title of the series within the local and unstable context of Beirut. The meeting will combine the keynote speeches of *CS²* presentations from the contributions to this call, a field visit and a workshop. The workshop will provide the opportunity for stakeholders to discuss, exchange views, and propose ideas with the purpose of sharing resources and producing knowledge on contemporary public space concerns. A concluding roundtable discussion will consolidate the ideas, concerns and recommendations presented during the meeting, and set the basis for further practical and theoretical explorations.

Theme

This first AESOP TG PSUC meeting in the new series in Beirut is proposed as an amalgam between the thematic group's meeting and the *CS²* conference thus bringing together a diversity and richness to the discussion on public spaces. Based on the characteristics and issues in Beirut that are also

pertinent to other cities in the global South as well as the global North, this TG meeting would focus on the two sub-themes: City, Refugees and Migration, and Fragmented Social Fabric: Individualised Patterns of Consumption. Similar to other countries hosting immigrants and refugees, Lebanon is undergoing various dynamics related to refugees, migration and social fragmentation, which lead to changes in urban spaces and everyday social life, thus turning it to fertile ground for collaborative ideas among public space scholars and practitioners from different backgrounds. Through interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary perspectives, the City Street² Conference addresses the role of streets in relation to the sudden and sometimes recurring dynamics that affect everyday urban life. Unexpected events are affecting streets worldwide, without differentiation between developed and developing cities. Therefore, learning from cities in either hemisphere, which have gone through conflicts and instabilities becomes significant.

As Beirut has a prolonged history of conflict that affected its public spaces, it serves as a laboratory to explore, unravel, and question the lives of its public spaces, and their evolution through time. In the Lebanese civil war period 1975-1990, public spaces were annihilated, being the most vulnerable urban spaces and least desirable to be in. This fifteen-year absence contributed to an initial neglect of public spaces in the post-war period, while local authorities catered for the more urgent urban needs such as the transportation network, water, and waste water infrastructure to name few. In parallel, and not unusual for the Lebanese case, individual and group initiatives, which are independent from the local authorities, have addressed other everyday needs in response to their lack.

Beirut is a city that has hosted refugees in the past and more recently with the waves of refugees entering the country from neighbouring countries in conflict. It has a strong local identity, yet a global image. Beirut is a city that never sleeps, yet falls silent during turbulences. It is the city of contrasts in terms of its spatial, social, cultural and economic composition. All the stated circumstances impact the city's urban spaces. Within political conflicts, the escalation of tensions, and increased security measures, the deterioration of urban spaces, and the pedestrian environment within Beirut is striking. Nevertheless, some people still commute on foot, and some public activities persist. The contestations are many, and various borders are drawn, forming obstacles to uninterrupted pedestrian mobility, and convivial urban open spaces. Despite the various obstacles, pockets of public spaces that are either managed by the local authorities or invented by urbanites emerge within the city. These signal the co-presence of contrasts on many levels including the social, economic, spatial, functional, and political. Within these contrasts, various 'publics' navigate through the city's urban spaces, and generate social interactions, activities, and relations over time, despite the broader conflicts that the city keeps witnessing.

(See http://www.aesop-planning.eu/blogs/en_GB/urban-cultures-and-public-spaces)

The purpose of the investigation is to determine the roles of various stakeholders in providing further opportunities for the sustained accommodation of differences, encounter, and exposure to 'the other', in an attempt to defragment public spaces within turbulent and unpredictable contexts. Several questions are raised:

- What is the people's understanding of public space in specific cities in unstable contexts, and how does it vary across generations?
- What are the current public space practices of defragmenting public space? How do the various spaces accommodating these practices differ? What does the current state of public spaces in a specific city that has been facing conflict look like?
- Who are the current public space actors involved in public place making in cities within unstable contexts?
- What is the relation between social media networks and public space practices that defragment public space? How does it affect the ecology of city's public spaces, particularly in times of sudden and sometimes recurring dynamics of stability and instability?
- What can be learned from people's identification or/ and practices in 'activated'/ 'invented' public spaces in unstable contexts?
- How can we (actors from various fields) intervene in improving the state of public spaces in terms of accessibility and inclusiveness in the current environment of low governmental investment, and a financially capable market-driven approach, particularly in cities and regions facing geopolitical instability?

Important Dates

Deadline for abstract submission is Monday 4 July 2016.

Please submit an abstract of 200 -250 words along with a max 100 words biography to 150 words Authors will receive **notification regarding their abstracts by Friday 15 July 2016.** Use the online submission on: <https://citystreet2.exordo.com/>

Deadline for paper submission is Monday 19 September 2016.

Preliminary Program

DATE	AESOP TG PSUC MEETING	CS ² EVENTS
Tuesday 8 November	Arrivals*	CS ² Registration
Wednesday 9 November	AESOP TG meeting registration Presentations	First day CS ²
Thursday 10 November	Field visit	Second day CS ²
Friday 11 November	AESOP TG meeting: Workshop & roundtable	Third day CS ²
Saturday 12 November	Departures*	CS ² tours
Sunday 13 November	Optional for those staying after the AESOP TG meeting	Beirut Marathon

*** Arrivals and departures could also take place respectively on Wednesday 9 November early morning, and Friday 11 November evening.**

Fees

Participation in the AESOP TG meeting with all its related activities is free of charge. This AESOP TG meeting is interdisciplinary, and targets the inclusion of actors with different perspectives, with the objective of providing insights on public spaces. Therefore, submissions from academicians, practicing professionals, and interested persons from any background are invited as contributions to this call. AESOP TG delegates who would like to participate in the full CS² conference and receive the full package and documentation, they will have to register for the conference (<http://www.ndu.edu.lb/citystreet2016/index.htm>)

Otherwise, the AESOP TG delegates are offered to attend the CS² opening and closing ceremonies, welcome reception and the three keynote speeches free of charge. Moreover, coffee breaks are offered.

Furthermore, if they wish, AESOP TG delegates can register for the conference banquet and/or post-conference tours separately, against a fee.

Contacts

For further information on AESOP TG PSUC Beirut meeting please contact:

- Christine Mady (Lebanon) christine.mady@ndu.edu.lb (local host)
- Nadia Charalambous (Cyprus) charalambous.nadia@ucy.ac.cy (AESOP TG representative)
- Matej Niksic (Slovenia) matejn@uirs.si (AESOP TG representative)

The general TG blog at the AESOP page:

http://www.aesop-planning.eu/blogs/en_GB/urban-cultures-and-public-spaces

- The TG wiki page:
<http://publicspaces-urbancultures.wikispaces.com/>

- The TG FB page:
<https://www.facebook.com/AESOPPSUC/>

- The TG contact:
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