

Minutes of the 4th WG2 webinar, 3rd Nov 2020

Meeting Chair(s): Angeliki Sioli (morning session); Sonja Novak (afternoon session)

Morning session: 9,00 – 12,00 CET; participants: Sernaz Arslan, Mustafa Zeki Cirakli, Juan Garcia Esparza, Klaske Havik, Michael Kelly, Adriana Martins, Matej Nikšić, Kris Pint, Angeliki Sioli (Minutes), Eliana Sousa Santos, Saskia de Witt, Imge Waite.

Afternoon session: 14,00 – 16: 45 CET, participants: Nuno Grancho, Sonja Novak (Minutes), Amer Obied, Giuseppe Resta, Willie Vogel, Imge Waite.

Agenda and minutes**Morning session**

Angeliki Sioli opens the session with information on the objective of the meeting, reports on the presentation of the *Vademecum* at the conference “Transmedia storytelling history, memory and identity” 2-5 Nov 2020 in Belgrade, Serbia. Klaske Havik informs on the *Vademecum* being currently printed and it will soon be sent out to members. Adriana Martins asks if it would be good to organize another presentation of the *Vademecum* at the Universidade Católica Portuguesa and will inquire whether this is possible at her institution and will inform the members on the outcome at a later time.

Angeliki then announces an across-the-network event on the 17th November; provides participants with provisional programme and explains future tangible results of these activities – one or more journal issues of *Writingplace* journal and possible in the long-term other publications such as collections of essays. Angeliki Sioli gives the platform to the participant members for conversation on the three main terms of meaningfulness, appropriation and integration.

Meaningfulness

Matej Nikšić opens the conversation pointing to the fact that the notion of “meaningfulness” is absolutely absent from the practice of architecture. Through his 20 years of experience in practice he wonders how can we incorporate such notions in the building of architecture and what tool can we develop in order to understand if users find meaning or connect meaningfully with our architectural design. **Adriana Martins** continues, stating that there are interconnections between the three terms and in everyday practice it may be difficult to differentiate them. She provides two examples from the Portuguese context where meaningfulness takes place in different ways. In the first example (in a central and very tourist area of Lisbon) meanings are imposed on the built environment from the political authorities and work as propaganda. In the second example (a newly developed neighbourhood) the meanings seem to be captured by the rap lyrics of the young inhabitants, who strive to connect their identity with the identity of the architecture. **Kris Pint** touches on these two examples and shows how they also connect with issues of appropriation, demonstrating also that meanings in a city are multiple and they may be conflicting, something which is definitely not negative. He argues that we need to find ways for the different meanings to co-exist, as meaningfulness is by default messy. **Klaske Havik** adds to this perspective the issue of plural vocality, also reminding that there are individuals and groups that are denied meaning in given urban environments. **Adriana Martins** agrees and opens the conversation towards the difficulties for meaning faced by the immigrant communities while **Imge Waite**, after introducing herself to the group, explains how her work investigates issue of segregation, and from this point of view, the meanings are very much connected to the separate understanding of different actors, individuals and groups. Moreover, the meanings change over time, and can also be manipulated.

Saskia de Witt with an intervention in the discussion emerging from the practices of landscape architecture, shifts the topic of the conversation on meaningfulness from the meanings themselves to the objects/artifacts in the urban

landscape that carry meaning: meaningful elements that individual and groups can prescribe meaning to. **Mustafa Zeki Cirakli**, who also like Imge Waite participates for the first time, suggests that meaningfulness should be conceived as the collection of the multiple and conflicting meanings of a community or urban area and that it should be discussed in connection to the collective consciousness of a people. **Michael Kelly** suggest a further nuance in the concept of meaning and the perhaps more individualized term of meaningfulness as related to space or palce. Meaningfulness is more about the process in which subjects experience themselves within the city; as an enactment and performance. He also talks about spaces that are resistant to a sense of established meaning. **Klaske Havik** reiterates the difference between meaning and meaningfulness, pointing out that there is a link to the notion of appropriation in this difference.

15 minutes break

Appropriation:

As the Working Group 2 resumes, **Sernaz Arslan** opens the conversation on the notion of appropriation. She argues that we can we experience appropriation in city (even in big urban centres) if we think from the perspectives of capabilities. Given that we can all use the city as a resource what are our capabilities in appropriating the urban space as women, men, young or older citizens? Sernaz shares her experience with such questions through the interviews she conducted of 21 individuals, who migrated to Istanbul and constitute 3 different generations of the same family. **Michael Kelly** touches on these points, discussing the acceptable narratives of use of public space related with specific capabilities. There is always a fictional account of the city (what places they appropriate, how and why), related to the circumstances of its individuals (like the famous Library named pubs in many English cities). Relating to these observations even further, **Kris Pint** brings our attention to the fictions that we nowadays partake of, coming from the virtual communities, like the fictions regarding the pandemic. He highlights that the same place can include many different mental spaces and it is very difficult, as a designing architect, to take into account every fiction that might emerge, in order to allow for meaningful appropriation of place. He also reminds us that appropriation can have a very negative connotation, particularly from a cultural point of view.

Saskia de Witt argues that when we talk about appropriation of space/place there is no reason to differentiate between positive (good) and negative (bad) appropriation. When we allow for appropriation, we allow for all voices to be heard and although of course we do not want fires in public places, allowing for appropriation means at the same time allowing for trouble. **Michael Kelly** offers an example of unexpected and unpredicted appropriation of place in the new building of his university campus, which has been taken over by skaters, who refuse to use the specially designed skaters park in order to make a statement as of where they can be practicing or not. They specifically tell the municipality, we will skate (be present) where we choose and not where you choose for us to be. **Kris Pint** confirms that appropriation has a negative connotation from the perspective of literary and sociological studies but not that much from the architectural field. He believes that architecture should hold its ground and take the positive elements into account. On that same idea, **Klaske Havik** asks what is the power that the spatial design disciplines have to stimulate, provoke allow or prohibit certain behaviours of appropriation in space. **Eliana Sousa Santos** concludes the conversation on appropriation, explaining that it is very important to acknowledge the negative side of the term and that it would be a very useful exercise to identify places where there is a plurality or even duality of appropriations. She argues that this plurality of appropriations is generally difficult to exist in places and we should focus on this plural.

Integration

Juan Garcia Esparza opens the conversation on integration explaining how in his field integration is related to heritage, where the focus is on static and dynamic values, tangible and intangible aspects of integration. The issue is to discover the potential in integrating all these values together while maintaining local diversity. To do so it is crucial to allow people, that are getting integrated, understand space as something that evolves in time. It is a matter of making precious ideas less important and allow for an understanding of the other and otherness through empathy.

Saskia de Witt adds that we should look into places not as settings but more as habitats. Connecting nature and humans in integration can help a co-habitation between ourselves, the environment and each other. **Klaske Havik** reminds the group (from the memorandum) that integration includes three lines of thought: 1. Appropriation can offer concrete tools and methods for the construction of common grounds among communities, based on relations of meaningfulness and appropriation of their built environment. 2. Architecture as a transformation and communication of narratives (plural vocality of meaningfulness and observation of how appropriation happens) 3. Urban narratives have the capacity to offer “attuned” relationships between people and place (Pérez-Gómez 2016), as well as between different individuals. **Kris Pint** mentions how in all the above three gender plays an important role and that as a designer you cannot be neutral when integration is involved. You make choices that bring to fore certain elements and keep other at bay, thus prioritizing specific forms of integration over others.

Eliana Sousa Santos reminds us that these three concepts (meaningfulness, appropriation and integration) inform each other and this is how we should approach them, because talking about them separately is creating unnecessary difficulties. Meaningfulness and integration erase the negative aspects of the concept of appropriation, if we look at them all together. **Michael Kelly** concludes the conversation offering the personal view that integration is for him transformation. The transformative power of city experience is a dynamic form of integration for example. By simply being part of the city, the city integrates us and influences us. Integration is not about me losing my identity but being in a city in the fullest sense, something that also changes us over time.

Lunch Break**Afternoon session:**

Sonja Novak opens the session with information on the objective of the meeting, reports on the presentation of the *Vademecum* at the conference “Transmedia storytelling history, memory and identity” 2-5 Nov 2020 in Belgrade, Serbia and announces an across-the-network event on the 17th November; provides participants with provisional programme and explains future tangible results of these activities – one or more journal issues of *Writingplace* journal and possible in the long-term other publications such as collections of essays.

Sonja briefly summarizes some of the points of the morning session and invites participants to present what they prepared. Discussion is open to the participants on all three terms simultaneously. **Willie Vogel** offers her definition of meaningfulness as having significance; adding meaning and discusses the different scales of meaningfulness (example of meaning at the level of climate scale solutions as opposed to specific). She introduces the idea that small groups and communities have habits which are sometimes disturbed by outside influence and that causes tension. And it is the role of the designer to relieve this tension with their intervention. Willie continues by defining appropriation as making sth your own and making use of it, but this at the same time means making borders on the one hand and breaking them on the other – appropriation is a question of who owns the city, who develops it and who is willing to invest. On the notion of integration, Willie observes that how this process goes, depends on the positive notion and she understands the process of integration as having reached common ground.

Giuseppe Resta as the next presenter remarks that meaningfulness signifies sth that has one feature that is prominent; sth exceptional and is characterized by uniqueness. His view on appropriation in terms of space refers to a process of transition of ownership which occurs in different ways. On one hand, by outside power when appropriation is imposed and on the other hand by spontaneous architecture, architecture of informality; Giuseppe provides an example of private appropriation of public space – from small scale to large scale – grey area of building regulations. In this process of spontaneous architecture the imperfections of self-made buildings/objects are absorbed and they often imply re-using, re-cycling materials, esp. in low-cost housing. This type of appropriation is characterized by informality and resistance to codifications of urban planning. He emphasizes that this is not violent appropriation, but a way of utilising the space; collective immaterial goods becoming part of private, appropriated space. For Giuseppe integration is about having a seamless passage to becoming something established; there is a boundary that is material, temporal, but it's blended.

Nuno Grancho agrees with 'scales' of meaningfulness but not only; he adds that the meaningfulness is directly related and subordinate to knowledge and to cultural background. He comments on Giuseppe's visual examples by adding that informality is very rich in the private appropriation of public space (a lot of street temples are built in the middle of the streets of Asian cities. People are walking on the streets and can pray in many corners of private houses where divinities are staged). The display of the private in public spaces is very related with appropriation of space.

Imge Waite focuses in her presentation on the power of relationships when reshaping urban areas; she bases her examples on specific areas like slums – and explains on the example of Istanbul the problem of relocation: in situ transformation vs. displacement. Imge's take on appropriation is that of an expression of power where the policy makers and some important stakeholders stripped the meaning and added some new meaning. She deconstructs the word 'meaningfulness': Meaning/ful/ness – perspectives of meaning change (stakeholders, policy makers); depend on understanding of the situation (the depth); it can be absolute or relative; public interest is very important and that would make the urban intervention meaningful. As for appropriation, Imge notes that it requires establishing a shared understanding and perception in assigning of meaning and it depends on various aspects such as different interests; she also emphasizes the aspects of empowerment vs. suppression. Her understanding of integration is to integrate meaningfulness and appropriation.

Amer Obied focuses on the different scale of added meaning and notes that there is subjective vs. Acknowledged meaning/fulness. He observes that meaningfulness is always assigned; meaning is given by a context and a narrative; meaningfulness is collective as it is a fictional layer on top of reality. As for appropriation, Amer remarks that it is always a choice rather than process; it is a purposeful action and it involves the question of normalization. As for integration, in his opinion, it should be a democratic process (which can sometimes be a method of suppression). He concludes that all three notions are human initiatives.

15 minutes break

After the break, the discussion was steered towards the term integration: The conclusions of the discussion are that integration can be active and passive; it is artificial and purposeful. If the aim is positive integration, i.e. acceptance by the users it needs to be allowed time and it requires cooperation between the policy makers, architecture stakeholders (urban planners, designers, architects etc.) and the users/community.

The discussion also touched upon appropriation of land in order to create habitat for humans (dam building) and integration which has influence on climate change and creates meaning for the whole planet. One has to distinguish between cause and result – as cause, it affects one country, but as the result, it affects all countries and bears meaning to the whole planet. After steering the discussion back to integration, it was concluded that integration entails various notions like tolerance, acceptance, willingness to participate, positive manipulation of the outcome, neutrality of facts to make an informed decision on the part of the users.