

28 October 2021

Porto, Portugal

## Writing Urban Places Midterm Conference

### Rewind - Play - Forward

#### Working Group 2 Meeting from 9,00 to 12,30

Attendants: Sonja Novak, Angeliki Sioli, Silvia Quinteiro, Amer Obied, Giuseppe Resta, Saskia de Wit, Matej Nikšić, Adriana Martins, Eliana Sousa Santos, Willie Vogel, Dorina Pllumbi, Sernaz Arslan, Rodrigo Toledo Silveira

The conversation starts with Sonja welcoming everyone, summarizing the events of the conference's first day and setting the agenda for the meeting:

Agenda: Glossary or Blog for New Terms

Definition of terms mid-sized City,

Urban place, urban neighborhood, urban community

Future plans of action

#### **Glossary Format**

Silvia discusses how the concepts and terms emerging from the fieldwork can inform the glossary and Saskia adds that it can also work the other way around: terms from the glossary (and of course the *Vademecum*) can inform the fieldwork.

Sonja asks how we can define the mid-sized city and Matej takes the conversation back to the idea of the blog and who could contribute to it. Would it be a blog internal to the Working Group 2 or open to external input as well? Sonja mentions that the repository of methods is a good format but we also need to be able to include opposing

opinions. She suggests that a padlet could be a good format but we need to control the content. She says that we need to ask the web-designers if we can have access to the website in order to edit or delete content. Saskia reminds us that the padlet format misses hierarchy and adds to Sonja's question for the web-designers whether grouping and linking of terms and content would be possible.

Silvia explains that at the end somebody needs to systematize the discussion on the padlet. And since the padlet is a more open platform we can make links to other texts ourselves and use hashtags. Saskia added to that that we can always use #meaningfulness, #appropriation, #integration, #mid-sized. She also talks about the clouds, where you can see some words (the major ones let's say) bigger than others, a feature that wordpress allows and makes Sonja add to the question for the web-designers, whether our website is on wordpress and what options that gives us.

### Urban Place

Sonja expands the conversation to other terms (she notes that meaningfulness, appropriation and integration have been well covered) and asks if we can replace the term "urban place" with "urban community". Adrianna thinks this suggestion refers to the Action's name (writing urban places) but Sonja explains that this is not what she suggests. She explains that we need to think about the differences between urban community, urban place and urban neighborhood and see which term is more appropriate for our conversations and further involvement with the forthcoming fieldworks.

Saskia expresses her strong preference for keeping the term urban place, as it implies a specific geographical location, relational connections and sociocultural aspects. She also points out that place is specific but does not define scale. A place could be a city or a park for example. Sonja then suggests that we can understand place as an umbrella term for the terms community and neighborhood and Saskia adds that place is about "here" and also what is "elsewhere." She suggests that every fieldwork project should define what makes their location of work a place, as well as what makes the city they have chosen to work with, mid-sized.

Adriana asks whether the fieldwork projects that were presented the day before were all approved. Sonja explains that Working Group 4 has picked three (3) fieldwork projects and one (1) training school. She continues by adding that we have a fourth grant period to all of the fieldworks to be properly developed. The day before the CM members approved the projects and now it is up to COST to approve as well.

Sonja proceeds by suggesting that the members of Working Group 2 should become active and engaged members of the different fieldwork projects and make sure that one of each fieldwork project's goals is to define *place* and *mid-sized* city. Saskia reads out loud her own definition of place and Silvia adds that when you buy a house, it is a space. When you add furniture, it becomes a place. What "furniture" make a mid-sized city a place? The feeling of a community and the concept of care are of course prevalent in a mid-sized city.

Matej asks if we can still consider a city to be a place, if it has not been co-designed by all stakeholders in the community, not only architects, but also the inhabitants.

Silvia answers that you give your own meaning in place and that a place's physical elements say a lot.

Sonja asks what is a community and what are the stakeholders in the community that shape it?

Silvia argues that in Northern countries people participate in community events and decisions more than the people of the South. There are distinctively different mentalities.

Adrianna adds that community is not the only thing we need in order to invest meaning into a space and turn it into place. From a cultural memory perspective, we need to elaborate what is a community. Community is not only about the level of participation of its members. It is also about national level connections and which variables are part of the communities.

Saskia recaps Adriana's comments and says that "variables" is a very interesting notion that could help us with the definitions.

### **Mid-sized European city**

Sonja reminds us all that an exhaustive definition is not the goal and that we could indeed define parameters (variables) to approach the definition. Saskia agrees and suggests that we give a relative definition. Sonja says that we can provide parameters on what might a mid-sized European city be and talks about the OASE issue which could be a starting point: According to this issue a mid-sized European city is not exciting, temperate urban experience, peripheral;/provisional, convivial suburbia. Greenery/security. Sonja reads the full definition from the OASE issue and concludes that a mid-sized city is a condition (not an object), and does not have a small-town identity.

Giuseppe suggests that we can proceed to a definition of "what is not" and start eliminating

Saskia adds that it is in the middle between a metropolis and a small town

Sonja proposes an online meeting for the Working Group 2 for later in the Spring 2022 in which we can discuss what literature on the topic already exists and what suggestion do we have ourselves to add

Saskia jumps in and suggests that we should follow what Adrianna proposed: define the parameters that make the mid-sized city

Sonja mentions the parameter infrastructure and how mobility is under this parameter/term. Adriana wonders if it is easier to implement environmental measures at a mid-sized city than a metropolis. Matej argues that sometimes it is actually the other way around.

Angeliki suggest "care" as a parameter. She explains that it is a tricky notion but a specific kind of care is connected with the scale of a mid-sized city

Amer adds that care may be connected with property and ownership in a mid-sized city

Sernaz discusses the connection of mid-sized cities with a level of urban belonging.

Adriana links belonging to responsibility and accountability, contrasting the anonymity and the protection that offers a metropolis. She mentions an experience of her visiting the city of Leuven in Belgium where the international students are given very clear guidelines and are asked to be very careful (and accountable) with trash.

Angeliki bridges this kind of accountability with care and belonging in contrast to anonymity

Adriana asks what do the mid-sized cities do not have, but could have? For example, how can we reflect on the services that are taken away from mid-sized cities.

Silvia believes that this reality has more to do with the transition to the digital era, through and not with what a mid-sized European city is. The third age people lose their autonomy.

Amer asks if this manifests more in mid-sized European cities.

Silvia asks if security is an issue in mid-sized cities.

Saskia says that when a visitor comes to a mid-sized city, they can understand the place fast because of the physical traces of this place (and probably much faster than in a metropolis)

Sonja argues that being the *other* is different in a mid-sized European city.

Amer mentions a European movie on borders and territories and concludes by stating that in a bigger city we have the allusion of security while in a mid-sized city security is more tangible. It is called "Alice", (2005) directed by Marco Martins.

Saskia discusses security as a way to understand the city.

Giuseppe brings the conversation to the reality of gated communities. He comes from a town of 3000 people and he was extremely surprised when he first visited a gated community, where in order to enter you need to show multiple ID, and the process reminds of borders surveilled by military control almost.

Adriana touches on this point to suggest that we could look into inclusion vs exclusion at a mid-sized European city.

### **COFFEE BREAK**

The second part starts with Sonja summarizing what was discussed in the morning session:

1. Open Platform
2. Place understood as an umbrella term
3. Fieldwork events and how WG2 members can get involved
4. Parameters to define the mid-sized European city

There is a Gmail account for WG2 at which members can start sending parameters [wg2.wup@gmail.com](mailto:wg2.wup@gmail.com)

Amer raises the concern that talking just theory gets us a bit lost. For this very reason Sonja encourages people to join the fieldwork projects and form collaborations

Willie mentions that the parameters we are trying to come up with can also be tested from the users themselves; meaning how do the inhabitants themselves -- of the communities that the fieldworks will take place -- use could use these terms.

Angeliki expands on this idea and suggests that we could invite the locals/users to suggest parameters as well.

Saskia talks about the idea of a "walking symposium" in which half of the participants are "experts" and the rest half inhabitants. Matej jokes and says that in his country this would have been appropriated as a walk and picnic symposium

Giuseppe brings everyone's attention to the fact that the locals who usually participate in these events are biased. They have their own interests.

Silvia says that in the city of her origin, Faro, the inhabitants who participate are very specific, like the local teachers for example and not let's say the waitresses at the local cafes.

Sonja suggests that we have the means to raise awareness through media participations.

Saskia asks how do the 77 minor terms could become part of this process.

Angeliki also mentions that some of these terms, that might have been minor when they were first suggested for the *Vademecum*, are now major.

Silvia mentions that some of the fieldworks seem to miss theoretical base for now. We can actually approach the people who organize them and ask them what they need from us. What terms they think they might use in their work, and how we can help them with that.

Adriana says that we could ask them which *Vademecum* terms are more useful for them. Also, we should look at the *Vademecum* as the first harvest and we should now look for a second harvest.

Angeliki asks if there is space/time for more fieldworks

Saskia and Sonja mention that we could possibly propose some new fieldworks for the fourth season.

Sonja mentions the STSM grants and encourages everyone to check the website for deadlines. They are competitive and could provide for five to seven additional days in relation with a fieldwork. She reminds everyone that Kinga is responsible for the STSM.

Adriana asks if we can participate in more than one fieldworks and then asks which one have been approved so far.

Sonja answers that the ones approved for sure are the one in Tampere, the one in Skopje and the Training School in Osijek and there will be one more fieldwork event chosen in the third grant period

The meeting ends with all the members heading outside in the garden for the Joint WGs Meeting.