WORKSHOP
WORDING URBAN DIFFUSION
Content & Schedule

21 NOVEMBER 2018
AT SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE PARIS-BELLEVILLE
With the collaboration of IPRAUS
The diffusion of urbanization on greater scales is a global phenomenon that has called for revision of the analytical frames used to understand the relation between territories and urbanism. Since the 1960s, research on diffusing urbanization in diverse geographical and historic contexts has produced terminologies and concepts in different languages.

This workshop, organized by the “Diffuse Cities and Urbanization Network” (DCUN), questions the abundance of such production: is it crucial to grasp the local specificities of diffusing urbanization in diverse settings? Does it reflect the discomfort of scholars and planners face to urbanization phenomena that are not easy to define? Do we still need new words and concepts, or shall we « compose with » the words that are already available to us, in order to describe present-day evolutions in the urban field?
Workshop
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Programme

MORNING SESSION
9:00 - 9:30 - Reception of participants & coffee
9:30 - 9:45 - Introduction by the workshop’s coordinators
9:45 - 10:30 - Thomas Sieverts
“What are the problems with wording urban diffusion?”
10:30 - 11:00 - Susan Parham, Matthew Hardy & Stéphane Sadoux
“Repairing Suburbs - The socio-spatial dimension of the traditional urbanism discourse”
11:00 - 11:20 - Coffee break
11:20 - 11:50 - Marion Sabrié
“Yangon in the political, economic, and urban transition: an ‘emerging Metropolis’”
11:50 - 12:20 - Chiara Barattucci
“The Italian urban planners’ lexical inventions describing the diffusion and dispersion of urbanization, since 1960”
12:30 - 14:00 Lunch Break - Buffet

AFTERNOON SESSION
14:00 - 14:45 - Charlotte Vorms
“Does the notion of urban periphery always make sense? Perspectives from collective works on the naming of urban periphery”
14:45 - 15:15 - Fériel Boustit
“Urban peculiarities in Algeria: words and specificities”
15:15 - 15:45 - Astrid Safina, Leonardo Ramondetti & Filippo Fiandanese
“Diffuse Urbanization ‘With Chinese Characteristics’”
15:45 - 16:00 - Coffee break
16:00 - 16:30 - Anne Grillet-Aubert, Bernadette Laurencin & Arlex Gomez
“The texture of the city. Words and Maps of Urban Diffusion in China”
16:30 - 16:45 - Charles Goldblum
Concluding remarks

For further details please contact DCUN’s coordinators [at] dcun.activites@gmail.com
https://dcun.hypotheses.org/
**Workshop**

**WORDING URBAN DIFFUSION**

**Participants & Abstracts**

**Thomas Sieverts** - Emeritus Professor, Technical University Darmstadt

*“What are the problems with wording urban diffusion?”*

The talk discusses the importance of adequate terms for the phenomenon of urban diffusion and the necessity to use words, which are connectible to ordinary language.

This means, that an adequate word should evoke suitable, correct and not negative images, the latter we can observe in Germany and this makes constructive discussions difficult from the very beginning.

A good term might even have a poetic dimension. Completely artificial terms do not generally have these qualities. A special section discusses my own term *Zwischenstadt*.

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**Susan Parham** - University of Hertfordshire; International Garden Cities Institute
**Matthew Hardy** - Oxford University, Prince’s Foundation for Building Community
**Stéphane Sadoux** - Centre for Research in Construction Cultures; Grenoble School of Architecture; University Grenoble Alpes

*“Repairing Suburbs - The socio-spatial dimension of the traditional urbanism discourse”*

In Britain and the United-States, suburbs have over the past couple of decades generated an increasing amount of academic research. Initially, many of these works attempted at shedding light on the forces shaping these changing suburban areas and at describing their spatial characteristics. More recently however, a number of publications have focused on design and action, in particular those produced by academics and practitioners who can be referred to as traditional urbanists. These works suggest a number of principles and methods aiming at transforming, retrofitting and ‘repairing’ suburbs identified as sprawl based on transect principles and in the light of current social, economic and environmental issues.

This paper relies on critical discourse analysis as a method for highlighting the socio-spatial dimension of traditional urbanism. A corpus of nine texts (dated 1996 to 2014) is analysed. These texts are representative of various strands of traditional urbanism (New urbanism, proponents of Urban Villages, of Garden Cities etc.)

The paper does not aim at judging the validity of this discourse, rather, the intention is to show how it built upon a specific language, in particular on vocabulary that explicitly refers to the social dimensions of human settlements.

Elissalde writes about the metropolitan process as “relying on a network of major cities in which the phenomena of connectivity tend to outweigh the proximity relations” (2004). If such a process does not yet affect Yangon (a Southeast Asian city which is secondary at the global and regional scales and the former political capital of Myanmar, which remains its economic capital), this city is experiencing an unprecedented urban sprawl, due to its renewed attractiveness since the economic liberalization of the country and the important immigration from its region and the other national regions.

Is it relevant to apply to it the exogenous term “emerging metropolis” (McKelvey, 1961), used to describe the developed cities of the North for about 60 years? In recent years, other terms have been developed evoking “embryonic forms of registration of metropolisation” (Peyronnie et al., 2017) or a “minor-mode metropolisation” (Franck & Sanjuan, 2016, Franck et al., 2012) to describe the process at work in the important cities of neighboring countries. The term “minor”, unlike “emerging”, means a smaller and recent phenomenon. However, no indication is given about the process at work: if, in time, it remains limited or not.

How are the Myanmar people expressing this metropolitan process in progress, in connection with the opening of the country and the globalization of its territory and its economy since 2010? Thus, would speaking of Yangon as “a metropolis”, while the municipal authorities have not yet defined it administratively as such and that its limits are still vague, be adopting an erroneous representation of this urban territory, or even dumping an exogenous representation on it? While Yangon is experiencing accelerated urban catch-up, partly due to its significant urban sprawl, what about its integration into global flows and its metropolitan functions?

The purpose of my presentation will be to analyze to what extent the Western conceptual framework influences or determines the production of knowledge about the accelerated urbanization of Yangon and its corollaries. To carry out my analysis, it would be relevant to take into account the production of knowledge in Myanmar, but because of the four decades of military dictatorship, it has been much weakened. I will then base my analysis on criteria derived from interviews with the actors of the contemporary Myanmar urban fabric and from the categories in the regional urban analysis.

Chiara Barattucci - University Iuav of Venice, Polytechnic University of Milan

“The italian urban planners lexical inventions describing the diffusion and dispersion of urbanization, since 1960”

This presentation aims at explaining the functioning of sector language of Italian urban planners in relation to their rich neological creation about low density urbanization.

In this contribution the author identifies and observes, in particular, the use, the diffusion and the role of three neological expressions, widely used from the sixties by Italian planners in their texts: (i) Campagna urbanizzata, (ii) Urbanizzazione diffusa and (iii) Città diffusa.

Speaking of Città diffusa, this presentation will also stress the significance given to this expression by its inventor, Professor Francesco Indovina (thanks to a recent interview realized for the DCUN’s workshop).

Charlotte Vorms - University Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne

“Does the notion of urban periphery always make sense? Perspectives from collective works on the naming of urban periphery”

Drawing on the experience of several collective works (“Les mots de la ville” research programme, the book What’s in a name? Talking about suburbs, and “La ville informelle au 20e siècle” research programme), the talk will discuss the relevance of the generic notion of urban periphery and the importance of other criteria to describe urban space, according to place, time and speakers.

Fériel Boustil - University Paris Nanterre, Lavue Mosaique Institute

“Urban peculiarities in Algeria: words and specificities”

The classic concepts of urbanization of the countryside (periurbanization, urban sprawl, etc.) are concepts that present the evolution of the urban world as a simple consequence of urbanization mechanisms in the morphological and functional sense of the term whether in America or in Europe.

The urban growth in the western Mitidja in Algeria implies an incorporation of several terms in the social system of the city of the “periurbanisation”, “rurbanisation” and “between two”, this intimate mixture between city and countryside is as much in space than in the heads of the inhabitants (Pagés, 1985). Peri-urban areas move and move away (Steinberg, 1991) but in Algeria - formerly colonized country - this state of affairs is rather characterized by the notion of order and disorder and a process of migration between town and country (Bendjedid, 1998).

We have approached this contribution, on the phenomenon of rurbanisation by the presentation of the various concepts, in relation with our research subject, and which can enable us to clarify our vision on the subject such as: the city, the countryside, the growth urbanization, urbanization, peri-urbanization ... The need to better understand our theme, led us to do a modest research on terminology in Algeria. Where we have seen that the origins of urban notions date back to the colonial period and have diluted after independence, especially in the period of the nation-

According to the national statistics office (ONS), the equivalent of INSEE in Algeria or peri-urban terminology is not used, we speak of the upper urban (UP) or semi-urban potential (SUP) contrary to academic research or the diffusion of the urban according to the French lexicon is very widespread.

That said, the phenomenon of rural urbanization is one of the problems characterized as a necessary evil in the stage of development and spatial growth of the city. Its concept differs from one country to another and more particularly between developed and underdeveloped cities. Rurbanization in western countries is linked to urban growth and dependent on the city, it is organized around the nuclei of the rural habitat without creating a new continuous fabric.

In the aftermath of independence, the Algerian space gradually becomes the fruit of a model resulting from “arbitrary and outrageous” decisions of the manager or political decision-makers as potential leaders of the territorial entity. Because of this policy, the rurbanisation in Algeria and characterized by the proliferation of informal constructions, with their different forms. These proliferations which developed on spaces more or less devalued their population increase in a considerable way. This increase comes mainly from rural exodus from sub-territories or remote areas has created negotiating territories “new interweaving between rural areas and urban society” (Poulot, 2006).

Astrid Safina - Politecnico di Torino; Department of Architecture and Design
Leonardo Ramondetti - Politecnico di Torino; Department of Architecture and Design
Filippo Fiandanese - Politecnico di Torino; Department of Architecture and Design

“Diffuse Urbanization ‘With Chinese Characteristics’”

The contemporary Chinese landscape has been mainly described by opposing megalopolis to minor cities, coastal to inland regions, and urban to rural areas. However, during the past three decades this landscape has been radically transformed, and nowadays the spread urbanization does not allow the persistence of dichotomic interpretations. Within this framework, a ‘blurred space’ is taking shape by the erosion of boundaries and hierarchies between cities and countryside, by the capillarity of the infrastructures and by stronger interconnections between urban and rural areas. In recent years, scholars have used different expressions to describe this phenomenon, such as city regions (coordinated regional governance encompassing different local municipalities) (Yeung, 2000; Ye, 2017) or urban agglomerations (cluster of cities of a certain dimensions) (Fang and Yu, 2016); while others have associated it to the south-east Asian desakota regions (referring to the functional mix that it is possible to find in the area) (McGee et al., 2007), or to the suburban or post-suburban areas (referring to the way this new spaces are challenging the existing cities) (Phelps and Wu, 2011).

All these descriptions highlight some ambiguous similarities to the diffuse urbanization of other parts of the world, while overlooking some peculiarities of the Chinese context. This fact raises the question: what are the spatial features of this diffuse urbanization ‘with Chinese characteristics’? The aim of this contribution is to investigate this issue by ‘grounding words’, hence looking at the physical characteristics of the space. In fact, while in Chinese context the words used to describe diffuse urbanization mainly refer to its administrative role, dimension or productive or economic characters; the purpose of the investigation is to question the ongoing transformation by inquiring the ‘cultural artifacts’ (Rowe, 1991) on the ground, such as the new forms of urban expansion, the infrastructural systems or the new settlements.
Thus, this contribution presents some outcomes of the ongoing empirical researches on the city of Zhaoqing, in the Pearl River Delta, the city of Zhengzhou, in the Central Plain Agglomeration, and Tongzhou District, in the JingJinJi Region. The materials provided by the authors (maps, photographs and data) will be discussed to question the relation between words and spaces.


Rowe, P. G. (1991), Making a middle landscape, MIT Press.

Rowe, P. G. (2005), East Asia modern: shaping the contemporary city, Reaktion books.


Anne Grillet Aubert - Paris-Belleville School of Architecture, IPRAUS Institute, UMR AUSser
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“The texture of the city. Words and Maps of Urban Diffusion in China”

A rich vocabulary gives account of diffuse urbanization in Europe and in other continents. These words designate different processes and forms of urban sprawl. They invite us to examine the morphological specificities of urbanization in different contexts that also depend on preexisting urban forms. Does diffuse urbanization break with former substrata and processes? Is it a symptom of broader and deeper transformations?

This paper describes the patterns of urban diffusion in China in relation with Chinese lexicon on cities and urbanization. Also, it compares diffuse urban morphologies in China with other periurban territories in Europe and the United-States.

We draw on several documentary sources: 1/ A Chinese lexicon on cities and territories based on recent research on urbanization in China; 2/ A comprehensive SIG mapping of the urban region of Shanghai, developed in the framework of the postgraduate program « Architecture and Urban Project » (ENSA of Paris-Belleville) since 2007; 3/ Several PhD theses; 4/ A collection of maps of the urban regions of Washington, Milan, Brussels, and Paris, realized with the purpose of comparative research; 5/ Series of maps of five urban regions drawn in line with a consistent graphic charter and bar scale.

The objective of these maps is to show the « texture » of urban dispersion at different levels of analysis and representation - from the regional dimension to the building - in order to identify what are the most relevant scales of urban dispersion. They are the starting point for the interpretation of current processes of transformation.

The texture designates « the grain », the minimal unit of meaning, the words of urban dispersion in different languages; a category of visual variables for cartographic representation and the nucleus of urbanization from which further urban development will sprout in the future. On the one hand, we compare the words in the national languages to the urban forms that they designate. On the other hand, we compare diverse morphologies of urban dispersion. We show the facets of the « the texture of the city » - i.e., the genesis and the texture of urbanization, its materiality, its dimension, its hierarchies, and spacing. The use of local lexicon helps us identifying the gaps between the meanings of the words and geographical realities.
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