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# TEMPORARY URBANISM: ITS RELEVANCE AND IMPACT ON TEACHING URBAN DESIGN

Florian Kossak argues for radical temporary urbanism

The earlier articles have dealt with various temporary urbanism strategies in different urban contexts. They have portrayed success stories as well as the risks or problems that are associated with temporary urbanism. Overall they have made the case that today temporary urbanism is not only an indispensable tool in the gradual development and regeneration of European cities, but that it is also a crucial field of activity for urban design professionals.

One could argue that this is reason enough for incorporating temporary urbanism into the architectural and urban design curriculum, and if we agree on this, several questions arise. What form(s) of temporary urbanism do we want or ought to teach postgraduate urban design or architectural students in general? This question is particularly crucial as we are potentially dealing with two very different student cohorts who will operate in very different urban contexts. These two groups – either overseas students from fast growing cities in China and India, or UK students who have to deal with de-industrialised cities and who will operate for the foreseeable future in a climate of economic stagnation – have inevitably very different understandings of temporality and temporary, let alone urbanism.

What are then different elements, moments, and layers of temporary urbanism that are relevant to these different students? And, *how* do we teach temporary urbanism to students? Can the curriculum itself incorporate elements of temporality? Can we actively engage in temporary urbanism, in temporary urban acts – and if so, how?

Going back to the first of these questions, *what is temporary urbanism*, one can assume that the first and prevalent understanding of temporary urbanism is that it acts as a test for future more permanent developments, it is used as a catalyst to support future development, and it acts as place holder in times of economic stagnation. One can also assume that all of these are more or less moments of temporary urbanism in the interest of established planners, developers, investors, city officials, and corporate business (even if they are disguised or promoted as user/ community driven, bottom-up urbanism).

But there is another second rationale for temporary urbanism that is of equal importance. It is a temporary out of necessity. It is where the actors/ agents do not have the means and interest to create more permanent situations/ structures. Temporary urbanism is cheaper, easier to construct, and without the same legal

consequences. It is used as a tactic, not a strategy, an end in itself, not as a means to something else.

Both these aspects of temporary urbanism have their place in teaching and research at the Sheffield School of Architecture (SSoA). There is an undeniable rationale to teach specific knowledge and skills that will enable urban design or architecture students to better engage with the first form of temporary urbanism practice – after all it might be part of their portfolio in the future. Yet we believe that it is the latter tactical practice – the one which is indeed initiated and executed by affected communities, user groups and/or individuals, both emancipatory and transformative – that has more critical potential for research and education, and is therefore the more crucial aspect to engage with. In order to distinguish this second form of temporary urbanism, we can call this Radical Temporary Urbanism.

Structurally this work is supported through the SSoA research centre AGENCY and the research and teaching project *Radical Urbanism*. These are also providing the specific theoretical background and ideological contexts through which we can explore specific temporary urbanism projects in teaching programmes and/ or research. Educationally we explicitly conduct this work in the design studio in the one-year MA in Urban Design Programme of our Graduate School; the six-week live projects at each year's start of the Part II MARCH programme; and, the lecture and seminar course *Urban (Hi)Stories* that is delivered for third year undergraduate as well as urban design Master students.

## AGENCY

AGENCY was formally established as a research centre at the Sheffield School of Architecture in 2007, after various staff had worked on similar issues for several years. AGENCY chose deliberately the slightly provocative strapline (at least for the academic context) of Transformative Research into Architectural Practice and Education. AGENCY aims to take 'a critical view of normative values and standard procedures in this area, in order to propose alternatives'. In relation to research we stress the word transformative – to suggest a research activity that both creates and responds to shifting conditions. Instead of remaining passively (and safely) contained within our academic environments, we see ourselves as agents acting both within and between the fields of research, practice, education, and civic life. AGENCY aims to act as a forum for testing, mediating and/ or publicizing research, teaching and other activities, which are of specific interest to pedagogues and

practitioners, and students within architecture, urban design and the built environment at large.

## RADICAL URBANISM

Radical urbanism is a term and concept that has been used in fields such as planning, human geography, sociology, or critical theory to describe a politically engaged interpretation of the built environment, which seeks to achieve social and spatial justice. However, this debate is largely absent from the field of architecture and urban design; what is missing is an analytical and propositional position that would give answers to the question of how such a social and spatial justice is manifested through built space and architecture. At the SSoA we have consequently initiated the research and teaching project *Radical Urbanism* that engages with this topic in a diverse range of levels and formats.

Radical Urbanism has a historical component: the transformative experiments in architecture and urban design of the avant-garde in the 1920s as well as the politically, socially and ecologically motivated positions of the 1960s and 1970s. It is also investigating contemporary expressions and positions in architecture and urban design concerned with informal urbanism, bottom-up approaches, and the collaborative production of built environment to name a few. It is here where we work specifically on the notions of a Radical Temporary Urbanism. Of particular interest are lessons that can be learned from the tactical and opportunistic approaches in user-led developments in most large cities of the Global South.

## RADICAL TEMPORARY URBANISM

Temporary Urbanism, in its radical political understanding, whether as an educational project or as a real project, can also be seen as 'laboratories in real-scale'. They give students, producers and users the opportunity to experiment on a spatial, technological, social or cultural level in a scale identical to that of more permanent built structures, or processes leading to more permanent buildings. The temporal nature of structures erected as 'laboratories in real-scale' allows for a simplification of the complexities in more permanent building processes. One can thus concentrate on several aspects that are tested through the temporary urban intervention. 'Laboratories in real-scale' thus allow for more pronounced questions and extreme propositions, and are able to reinforce radicalism in architecture and urban design. Furthermore, temporary urbanism and the 'laboratories in real-scale' afford the experimentation of new production forms and processes, whether collaborative or participatory. The aim is for the expansion of the design field both in relation to the actual artistic and cultural discipline, as well as in relation to its practice. This ultimately can also shift and extend the scope of the profession and the role that it plays within the production of the built environment.

Radical Temporary Urbanism thereby challenges the prevailing politics of architecture, urban design and the production of the built environment. Through research, interrogation and critique of the normative parameters that are commonly used to produce architecture and the urban realm, we can suggest alternative forms and processes

in the production and perception of the built environment. Radical Temporary Urbanism and 'laboratories in real-scale' are therefore dealing with political experiments, and the desire for new politics in architecture and urban design.

## SPACES OF HOPE

The paramount aspects for a progressive transformation of architecture, urban design and urbanism are to be found within the actual production processes that shape our built environment, as well as within progressive social, political and economic concepts and programmes of usage. It is here where architecture, urban design and urbanism as artistic, cultural and social disciplines, as intellectual discourses, as well as professions, have the most potential for a radical future. It is here where our *Spaces of Hope*, as David Harvey's term says, can be made possible. This means a hope for a shift in the processes and questions how and by whom architecture is produced; a shift that will consequently lead to a necessary transformation and extension of the concept or understanding of architecture and our built environment. It is also the hope for new production processes that a progressive and experimental praxis will have to engage with. These are processes which include collective and collaborative production, questioning normative and hierarchical structures, and user participation and interaction, that will ultimately transform the role of the producer and include new actors into the production of architecture. It is the hope for a praxis that would positively transform our society and the built environment we are living and working in – for a truly emancipated architecture and liberated space.

As architects, urban designers, students and academics, it is our duty to initiate, design, and facilitate processes, tactics and tools that allow these *Spaces of Hope* to happen. Radical Temporary Urbanism is one approach that we have here at our disposal. ●

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