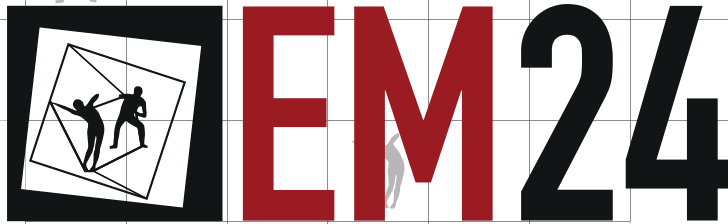


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IN-PRESENCE / THE BODY AND THE SPACE

The role of corporeity in the era of virtualization

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IN-PRESENCE / THE BODY AND THE SPACE

The role of corporeity in the era of virtualization

For those who deal with the city and the territory, space refers to the body
(C. Bianchetti)

The EURAU Milan 2024 Conference aims to unpack the significance of corporeality in contemporary times and its relevance for the upcoming years. Specifically, the focus is on the relation between body and space and how this relates to architecture, the city and the environment, interpreted as physical facts and processes. Within the background of a technological turn, the focus is now on what has changed or will further change in this relationship and what, on the opposite, remains unalterable, inherently bound to the material and impervious to the virtual.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

16	MARCO BOVATI, ANNA MORO, DANIELE VILLA Spaces, Bodies, Design - A Multidisciplinary Perspective
21	/ COMMITTEES
25	/ KEYNOTE SPEAKERS
27	1 / CONCEIVED
29	ID002 NADIA AMOROSO Visualizing climate action in urban design and landscape architecture. Strategies and impact
33	ID005 JOSEP MONTAÑOLA, MARGARET KRAWECKA, MAGDALENA SAURA Architecture and corporeity. Towards a new concept of place-making
37	ID009 LAMIA ABDELFATTAH, MATTEO ARIETTI, ANDREA BALESTRINI, CHRISTIANE BURKLEIN, GIULIA CASTELLAZZI, DIEGO DEPONTE, ANDREA GORRINI, VIRGILIO DÍAZ GUZMÁN, ZAYNEB KADIRI, GIULIO MARZULLO, FEDERICO MESSA The anatomy of public space. A multidisciplinary perspective
41	ID010 JORGE RAMOS-JULAR, FERNANDO ZAPARAÍN-HERNÁNDEZ Body-space relations in Bill Viola's audiovisual scenographies
45	ID012 ZHENGWEN ZHU Approaching the playground. Spatial practices for the body
49	ID020 MARÍA REDONDO PÉREZ Products, atmospheres and interactions. Relations between the body and Light Art
53	ID023 DIANA SALAHIEH, LAYLA ZIBAR, IRENA FIALOVA Exploring narrative research methods for an embodied reading of Prague's walkability
57	ID025 DANIELA COPPEDE PACHECO CIONI COPPOLA Diagramming & mapping. The underlying system of architecture
61	ID028 ALESSANDRO DI EGIDIO Fighting technological alienation. Performing media as a sustainable practice of human-machine symbiosis

65	ID034	SARAH JAVED SHAH, LIHENG ZHU The [socio-cultural] production of space. Doorstep: Exploring threshold in non-western contexts
71	ID035	FRANCESCA BERNI The weather body, the water space. Exploring the landscape as technological environment
75	ID040	CIGDEM AKIFOGLU, PELIN DURSUN ÇEBİ Bodily experiences on paper space. Imaginary narratives
79	ID041	BEATRICE LAMPARIELLO, SILVIA GROAZ From object to subject. The body architecture of Hans Hollein
83	ID042	LAURA SUVIERI The silent body. Exploring the neglected nexus of type, materiality, and human perception in Carlos Martí Arís
87	ID044	INÊS SALGUEIRO, RUI AMÉRICO CARDOSO, LUÍS S. VIEGAS On the importance of the body's experience in space and the act of drawing for the architectural conceiving process
91	ID046	MARIO COPPOLA Coexistence: The goal of architectural composition now. Architecture as trespassing tool to embrace culture, body, Earth
95	ID047	ANNA PROSKURIAKOVA Reimagining interaction between Industrial heritage and human bodies. Revitalization of post-industrial areas as an opportunity for small and medium-sized Italian cities
99	ID048	NILSU ALTUNOK, PELIN DURSUN ÇEBİ Looking at the city from our body through the "Walkers' Handbook or a Walking Lexicon"
103	ID049	MINGYUE ZHANG, JIN BAEK The body in architectural experience. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology interpreting the strolling spaces of traditional oriental gardens
107	ID050	ANTÔNIO FREDERICO LASALVIA Paxton after Paxton: Form as formlessness in the dance of architecture
111	ID055	ROBERTO PODDA Eye-foot-hand. Actuality of a phenomenology of bodily life in the "exponential" space
115	ID060	GAMZE SENSOY Tracing the experience through the metamorphosis of body-space relationship
119	ID063	ZÜMRÜT SAHİN The artist's studio unveiled. Exploration of practice, body, and space
125	ID067	RAFAËL MAGROU Re-composing the theatrical space from the fourth wall
129	ID068	FRANCESCA CASALINO Dancing bodies. Anna Halprin and her workshops at Dance Deck and beyond
133	ID071	EZGI SELİN KARADEM, ET AL. How do we use our bodies to investigate our surroundings? Deciphering the individual and collective narratives of the architects
137	ID072	BEATRICE-GABRIELA JÖGER Between virtual and corporeality. Challenges in experiencing architecture today
141	ID073	ELİF CEMRE ÇELİKCAN Spatial cognition and representation of a verbally experienced environment. A study on preschool children's spatial construction through drawing
145	ID074	GEON-IL LEE, JIN BAEK Questioning the meaning of 'atmospheric'. A foundational study on climatic approach to 'atmosphere'

149	ID081	ZÜMRÜT SAHİN, NILSU ALTUNOK, PELİN DURSUN ÇEBİ, FATMA ERKÖK Performing the everyday. Temporal spatiality constructed by body movements
153	ID085	YUE ZHONG Touching the surface "Nahsicht" theory of Alois Riegls in tactile interaction between body-space
157	ID087	VALENTINA RADİ Generative thresholds. The simultaneity of passages
161	ID090	FRANCESCA COPPOLINO, VINCENZO VALENTINO Spectrographies. Body, cinema, memory in the architectural project
165	ID095	ANDREA CRUDELI The corporeal imagination of tactility. The methodology of Harquitectes
169	ID096	PABLO BERZAL CRUZ Performing space. An approach to architecture through performance
173	ID097	MELİKE NUR SAHİN Transformation of the objective-subjective dialectic in the body-space relationship throughout architectural periods
177	ID099	MARTINA CARANDENTE, ANNUNZIATA AMBROSINO Space and rhythm. The cult of the body
181	ID102	FÜLYA SELÇUK, FERHAT HACIALİBEYOĞLU From me/my body to margin: Discovering the minor spatialities of daily life through subjective trajectories
185	ID105	DEMET SATI, PELİN DURSUN ÇEBİ Rethinking the body-space dynamic: Space as a body. A comprehensive investigation through phenomenology and language
189	ID108	VOICA MARIUS, MARIA TÎLVEȘCU-NICULA, MARIA-CRISTINA CLENCIU Unique experiences in the approach of architectural education
193	ID109	LINGZHENG ZHU Writing as Cosmogogenesis. A Chinese genealogy of bodily traces in digitally augmented spaces
199	ID110	SIMONA CAPALDO The transitional project for disused buildings. An alternative to the vulnerability of bodies and spaces for another way of doing architecture
203	ID115	TIANQIN CHEN, ANTÓNIO CARVALHO Integration of aesthetics and accessibility. Enhancing living spaces for ageing communities
209	ID117	PAOLA BUCCARO Beyond the threshold: The effects of the dematerialisation on the relationship between city and home
215	ID120	FRANCESCO TOSETTO Natural tension. Myth, shape, body
217	ID127	LEONOR REIS, CARLA GARRIDO DE OLIVEIRA, FILIPA DE CASTRO GUERREIRO Fragmented narratives: Drawing memory and time in the scarp of Fontainhas
221	ID129	ESTHER LORENZ The Augmented Kinesthetic City. Embodied experience of Hong Kong's urban morphology
225	ID130	SEGAH SAK Ankara train station as a locus of conflicts

229	ID132	AI CHENG, WU YUE, FILIPPO ORSINI The interplay of action art and architectural spatial practice. A case study of Chengdu
233	ID134	ANGELO GANAZZOLI The tomb as an architectural garrison in the era of virtualization. The recovery of the sacred dimension of architecture
237	ID135	TIAGO ASCENSAO Ready-made architectural processes: Re-signification of reality as a solution
241	ID137	SARA GALANTE DE CAL From 'common place' to a 'place in common' through architectural design
245	ID139	GIACOMO D'AMICO, ROSA MARINA TORNATORA Designing beyond Earth. An evolution in body-space-architecture paradigm for space design
249	ID142	MARTINA RUSSO Ludomestic. Critical perspectives on dwellings, from standardization to Reversible Destiny lofts by Arakawa+Gins
253	ID148	MARTINA CRAPOLICCHIO, SANTIAGO GOMES, ROSSELLA GUGLIOTTA Elements of everyday life. Domestic spaces and actions in a pedagogical experiment
257	ID150	JEONGHEE KO, BAEK JIN Reimagining Myeongdong. An act-oriented approach to urban resilience and adaptation
261	ID153	LUÍS CARLOS BUCHA The shell as spatial emergence: A house for and from the body
265	ID173	YIDAN LIU, MARCO BOVATI, PAOLO VINCENZO GENOVESE Cultural narratives in transitional spaces of Miao Villages. A case study of Guzang Festival and Jiubai Village
269	ID174	CARLA COLLEVECCHIO Corporeal landscapes: Sculpture as a pedagogical device
275	ID177	MARIA LUNE NOBILE The city as a laboratory. Investigating body space interactions in the contemporary city
281	ID181	BILGE CAN, FATMA ERKÖK Critical potentials of embodied mind through the works of Raumlabor
285	ID184	MARGARITA DANOU, SEVINA FLORIDOU Voroklini coastal promenade and re-configuration of the Verki coastal estuary
289	ID190	ELIF CEMRE ÇELIKCAN, ASLIHAN SENEL Spatial correlators in the functioning of autobiographical memory: wandering through Virginia Woolf's home
293	ID194	OZAN AVCI The Body as the site of architectural knowledge
299	ID205	MICHELA BAROSIO Types, codes and algorithms for a perception's centered design
303	ID206	GIANLUIGI DE MARTINO, VIVIANA SAITTO, STEFANO GUADAGNO Not only human. Not only terrestrial. Teaching through the measurement of body and space
307	ID212	CLAUDIA PIRINA, GIOVANNI COMI To the rhythm of dance. Interactions between body, light and architecture
311		ALISIA TOGNON 1/ ENDNOTES

313 2 / INTER-ACTIVE

- 315** ID004 LUCA LAZZARINI, GLORIA LISI, MARO MAREGGI
The Walking Body. A reflection on the walking–design relationship based on the experience of Laboratorio del Cammino
- 321** ID006 DAFNI RIGA
Bodies on the move. Exploring the effects of speed in the body-space relationship
- 325** ID008 ALBA BALMASEDA DOMÍNGUEZ
Bodies, water and the city: Collective bathing in urban surroundings
- 329** ID021 NICOLETTA BRANCACCIO
Embodying the oblique. How space coding and construction of reality can explain the relation between space and emotions
- 333** ID024 BELEN ZEVALLOS BORGES
Making a case for space in schools. The learning landscape of Wütoschingen
- 337** ID030 SIDDHARTH SRIVASTAVA
The body and its urbanity. Cities in India
- 341** ID033 YOURI SPANINKS AMARO
The body is the machine. Interpreting Lisbon's threshold spaces through corporeity
- 345** ID036 CAROLA D'AMBROS
How body shapes architecture. The immersive experiences of Villa Fontana and the Twin Villas
- 349** ID037 SILVIA SFLIGIOTTI
The art of arriving. A somatic approach to a critical understanding of the built environment
- 353** ID039 BUKET SAMANCI, IREM SÜTÇÜ
Dynamic interactions between boundary and the body: Instantaneous spatial formations
- 357** ID045 SUSANA VENTURA
The composition of architectural sensations: Blocks of intensive body-space and their potential to transform environmentally-sensitive architecture
- 361** ID054 CHRISTINA GEORGA
When cinema introduces the new embodied spatial experience. Regaining hapticity through the cinematic lens of Michelangelo Antonioni
- 365** ID058 RAFFAELLA CAVALLARO
The pedagogical value of the body in the design of contemporary learning spaces. Giving the child back his ninety-nine worlds
- 371** ID059 ROBERTO JUAN CARDINI
Interactions in the processes of occupation and appropriation of space. Interpretation of practices in the Mercato Sonato, Bologna
- 375** ID065 IPEK ÖZER
Reading body and place relationship through public art
- 379** ID069 SEÇİL YATAN GÜL, ASLIHAN SENEL
Notational Drawing. A study of an embodied knowledge of architectural space
- 383** ID070 FRANCESCO IULIANO
The interaction inhabitant-space as a design tool. How an inhabitant-centred design approach can shape the renewal of the existing building stock
- 387** ID080 NATALIA MATESANZ VENTURA
Affluent bodies and spaces in the reshaping of the established city. Urban communes and counter-drag in the free city. San Francisco, 1966-75

391	ID084	INÊS SALEMA GUILHERME, RUI JORGE GARCIA RAMOS, GISELA LAMEIRA Everyone and everywhere. Intergenerational practice as evidence of the bodies in the space
395	ID086	GIULIA AZZINI The human scale of riverscapes. A body-centered perspective for fragile territories
399	ID092	THIRUNESHA NAIDOO Interactive designed public spaces: Shaping Melbourne's general markets through performativity and performance
403	ID093	CASSANDRA COZZA Children architectures. Spaces for discovering and caring inhabited by different and changing corporealities
409	ID100	GIANFRANCO ORSENIGO "You must have been there". Designing re-socializing spaces within prisons
415	ID106	FRANCESCA MUSANTI, ANDREA MANCA, CLAUDIA PINTOR Sensitive places. A phenomenological perspective for accessible design
419	ID124	MAHDI ALIZADEH The pursuit of presence in Siza's architecture. A phenomenological narrative of Piscina das Marés
423	ID131	MARIA OLIVEIRA EPIFÂNIO DA FRANCA, ANA SOUSA BRANDÃO ALVES COSTA A journey around my apartment. The relationship between dwelling and the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown
427	ID136	ELEONORA ANTONIADOU The body as a tool in architectural pedagogy. Global tools Body Workshops
431	ID140	GLORIA CALDERONE Designing bodies: New challenges for a more corporeal urbanism
435	ID141	ANDREA SCALAS Grounding. Body and contact with prehistoric matter
439	ID155	ANDRÉS SEÑORET Does social interaction at a street level promotes community ties? Density, diversity, bodies and affect in neoliberal downtown Santiago
443	ID157	ANDREA MANCA The maieutic value of form. A genealogical ramification of engagement in architectural and urban project
447	ID166	BARBARA COPPETTI Retrospective Prospective. The body inhabits the world
451	ID170	JAVIER SÁNCHEZ MERINA Microarchitectures. Exploring intimate connections between body, space, and the understanding of diverse realities
455	ID171	PAOLA SCALA Traces, bodies and the public space
459	ID172	YIORGOS HADJICHRISTOU Body in space. Space as a body. Interaction of bodies in Malleable courtyards
463	ID182	BILGE CAN, FATMA ERKÖK Searching for the traces of avant-garde theory in practice. A parallax view of Diller and Scofidio
467	ID191	E. BURCU ERYILMAZ Les immatériaux and the paradigm of interaction
471	ID193	ORFINA FATIGATO Project as a process of transition: Precision, adaptability, indeterminacy

- 477** ID195 SORAIA PATRÍCIA ANTUNES DOS REIS, CARLA GARRIDO DE OLIVEIRA , FILIPA DE CASTRO GUERREIRO.
Cross-border cooperation: For a sustainable territorial planning. Insights from Rio de Onor and Rionor de Castilla in the northwest of the Iberian Peninsula
- 481** ID200 NEIL LAMB, WHITNEY BEVAN, MARÍA JOSÉ MARTINEZ SANCHEZ
Enhancing student learning, inclusivity, and a sense of belonging in higher education through community engagement and civic projects
- 485** ID203 GERARDO SEMPREBON, CHANG LIU, ZHI LEI
The enigma of density. Testing design proposals to revitalize Hua'anli urban village (Wuhan)
- 489** ID216 CRISTELLE LECOEUR
First semester in architecture: A body confronted with the reality of suburban spaces
- 492** STEFANO SARTORIO, FRANCESCO AIROLDI
2/ ENDNOTES

495 3 / AFFECTED

- 497** ID007 AIKATERINI ANTONOPOULOU, SEBASTIAN AEDO JURY
The body of the crowd as a cartographic tool through the Kill the Bill movement in Bristol
- 501** ID027 JULIA NERANTZIA TZORTZI, MARIA STELLA LUX
Citizens as main characters in urban adaptation. People's experience and contribution in the development of Decision Support Systems
- 505** ID056 ALESSANDRO GAIANI
Post natural inclusion
- 509** ID061 CINDY MENASSA-KÜELBY
Rethinking design: Body, behavior, nature, and our role in balancing ecosystems
- 513** ID062 FRANCESCA DI FUSCO
Interdisciplinary dialogue: Body, space and well-being. The impact of architectural and urban configurations on paces of care
- 517** ID078 SARA NAFI
Exploring the synergy between transit-oriented development and architectural humanism. Qatar's transit evolution: bridging architecture and urban living
- 521** ID079 CICEK KARATAS
Navigating fragility and urban memory: The role of the Beledna Memory Map in preserving intangible cultural heritage post-earthquake in Antakya, Hatay, Turkey
- 525** ID089 FRANCESCA MELINA
A paradigm of the contemporary city: Temperature as embodied perception
- 529** ID091 ZHENG WU
Wind-driven urban design. Design urban ventilation corridors from the block scale
- 533** ID098 DANIELA BUONANNO, LUCIANA MACALUSO
Tree-space-body. Urban forestry in Naples and Palermo
- 537** ID101 DEEMA ALATTAR
Examining outdoor thermal comfort and the use of public transportation system: A sustainable approach for Qatar's rapidly evolving cityscape
- 541** ID118 CATARINA FREITAS, GISELA LAMEIRA
Visual urban quality and health. A pre-intervention analysis method
- 545** ID121 GENNARO VITOLO
Contemplation and rebirth: Cemeteries between atmospheres and inner journeys

549	ID122	GRETA CALIENDO Cultural heritage and public space. Affecting social complexity of Contemporary City
553	ID138	FRANCESCA ZANOTTO Diverse bodies, multiple scales: Architectural strategies for urban biodiversity
559	ID144	GIOVANNI COMI Thinking in architecture. Matter as mediation between body and nature
563	ID152	ALESSANDRO FRIGERIO, LAURA MONTEDORO Overtourism in UNESCO sites and its effect on urban public space. An EU project experience of research by design in Athens, Florence and Krakow
569	ID158	AYELEN BETSABE ZUCOTTI The tags associated with the Munch Museum and its relationship to the Oslo community
573	ID159	KRYSTALLIA KAMVASINOY, LORENZO STEFANO IANNIZZOTTO Bodies in the Void: Addressing socioecological challenges through temporary practices in <i>Terrain Vague</i> sites
577	ID168	NADIA MOUNAJJED The body and the architectonics of the desert
581	ID179	FRANCESCO AIROLDI Every-Body. Spatial education as a co-design strategy for disaster risk reduction, disaster risk mitigation, and climate change adaptation
585	ID180	HOCINE ALIOUANE-SHAW Using situated pedagogies and the concept of interdependence to engage with the environment and call its future into being
589	ID186	SILVIA DI MAURO Relational stratifications. Body-centered approaches for an adaptive reuse strategy
593	ID189	ALESSANDRA SWINY, MARIA HADJISOTERIOU, TERESA TOURVAS Unsettled. Creating community in a displaced environment
597	ID209	SILVIA BASSANESE Bodies - Figure[s] - Ground[s]. Practices that enable conflictual society to find form of coexistence
601	ID210	ALISIA TOGNON, EKIN OLCAY Mountainous Mastery. Architectural adaptations and urban fabric in Trentino's challenging terrain
607	ID213	YI GUO The affected body in hyper-dense urban habitats: Exploring embodied architectural experiences in Hong Kong and Shenzhen
610		SILVIA DI MAURO, KEVIN SANTUS 3/ ENDNOTES

613 4 / VULNERABLE

615	ID017	ALLANA AVILA DORNELES Vulnerability and Neuroarchitecture. Approaches to care in healthcare environments: a narrative review
621	ID032	MICHELA BASSANELLI, CAROLA D'AMBROS Bodies, Work, Care. How office and domestic space is changing
625	ID043	NADIA MOUNAJJED Pedagogies of care: Practices and methods for a non-ableist body-centered design

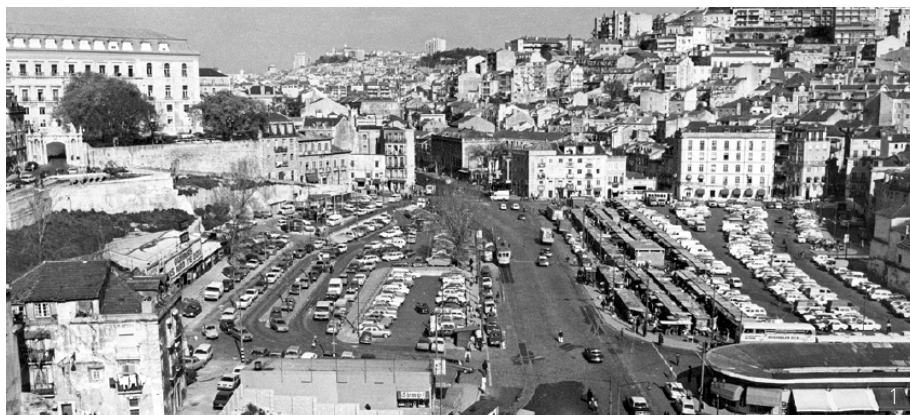
629	ID052	LUCA LANA The Gardening Body: The queer ecology of Prospect Cottage
635	ID053	FABIOLA CRISTALLI Sewing along the borders. Spaces and identities in and through modern cross-border cities
639	ID066	GAMZE AKYOL, EKIN OLCAY Echoes of heritage: Navigating the intangible heritage and urban memory in the post-disaster
645	ID077	ANGELA COLUCCI, ANTONELLA CUPPARI, ANNA SCHELLINO Diversity as a resource for inclusive public city. Exploratory walks for public city co-production and co-design
651	ID088	SARA RICCARDI The invisible ones: Bodies and spaces of the Italian prison in the 21st century
655	ID104	CLAUDIA PINTOR, ANDREA MANCA, FRANCESCA MUSANTI As many people, in as many places, as possible. A hypothesis of phenomenological approach to accessible project
659	ID114	FRANCESCA RIPAMONTI Shaping new and diverse gestures. A qualitative approach to the design of Healthcare Centers
663	ID116	INÊS ANDRADE, LUCIANA ROCHA Architecture in conflict. Dichotomies on current challenges in state-subsidized neighbourhoods in Oporto, Portugal
667	ID126	MARIO GALTERISI Built spaces, vulnerable bodies. A study on the influence of stigma in architecture
671	ID133	MICHELA VANDA CASERINI Beyond the ring-road: Ethnographical reading of a spontaneous settlement in Maputo
675	ID146	FIDEL MERAZ, ELEONORA NICOLETTI, MERATE BARAKAT Architectural inclusivity: Adaptive spaces for aural wellbeing of individuals with dissimilar sensorium
679	ID147	MARGARIDA PINHAL, FILIPA DE CASTRO GUERREIRO, CARLA GARRIDO DE OLIVEIRA The palimpsest, strategies to drawing multiples spaces to multiples communities. Martim Moniz, Lisbon
683	ID160	ARIANNA SCAIOLI Empowered bodies. The legacy of Tschumi's work as a driver for social and spatial transformation
687	ID161	MARIANA AGUIAR ANTUNES, CARLA GARRIDO DE OLIVEIRA, FILIPA CASTRO GUERREIRO Res-publica: The social role of architecture and urban design in the production of public housing in Porto
691	ID162	EMILIA CORRADI, CAMILLO FRATTARI Addressing vulnerability through place-based knowledge and co-design practices
695	ID169	SILVIA DI EUSANIO Rethinking urban spaces: An intersectional perspective
699	ID178	CAMILLA CASONATO Standing around the model. Bodies, participation, and landscape representation
703	ID185	ANGELA KYRIACOU PETROU, MARIA HADJISOTERIOU Design practices of inclusion
707	ID187	SAMER WANAN Child's play in the Palestinian landscape: On vulnerability & attachment
711	ID198	FRANCESCO STEFANO SAMMARCO, ANNA TERRACCIANO From Limit to Limine. Piazza D'Armi in Nola: from marginal place to new gateway to the city

715	ID201	CAMILLA CASONATO, ERICA CANTALUPPI Heritage, community, and education. The case of Museu da Cidade in Sao Paulo
719	ID202	GERARDO SEMPREBON Architectural design to regenerate fragile buildings in rural China
723	ID208	MARIA FIERRO The "invisible" spaces of marginality: The case of Roma communities
727	ID214	DIOGO FARIA Queer spaces of the cityscape of Funchal
730		ARIANA SCAIOLI 4/ ENDNOTES

733 5 / AUGMENTED

735	ID011	ALEKSANDAR DUNDJEROVIC, STEPHEN SIMMS, MARIA MARTINES SANCHEZ Body-centred strategies of urban scenography and cybernetic theatre: Two practice-based research case studies 'The Cybernetic Cabaret' and 'Looking for Andy'
739	ID013	ASMA MEHAN Corporeality in Virtual Spaces: An exploration through AR/VR Technologies
743	ID014	AARON PATERSON, MARIAN MACKEN, SAROSH MULLA Embodied Drawings and Virtual Twins
747	ID015	TINO GRISI The generative artificial intelligence as tool of human augmented intuition and sensitivity in architecture
751	ID016	ADEL FERNANDO AL BLOUSHI Virtual postures. Presence and simulated spatial phenomena
755	ID018	JENNIFER SHIELDS, ANNA OSELLO Cultural heritage and augmented, mixed, and virtual realities: Accessibility and inclusion for people with disabilities
759	D019	STEFANIA RASILE Architecture, death and the digitalization of memory: Cemeteries in virtual commemoration times
763	ID022	ANDREEA-GABRIELA NISTORESCU (MARINESCU) Synthesis and synergy. The role of human-centered design in interior architecture and the dynamic interplay between physical and virtual environments
767	ID029	NERANTZIA TZORTZI, TARA SAHAFIAN Analysis of water element integration in the architecture and landscape of Persian Gardens amid the hot and arid climate of the Iran's desert
771	ID038	JUAN CARLOS DALL'ASTA, JOHN LATTO Reimagining body-space dynamics: Lessons from Shanghai, the contemporary land of Toys
777	ID051	ELENA ROCCHI, ELIZABETH LERMAN Principled innovation in immersive learning environments: A roadmap for transformative change at Arizona State University's Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts using "technologies of human expression"
783	ID075	CUI LIU, ZHIYUAN GU An assessment framework of physical-virtual publicness in public space
787	ID076	MAGDALINI GRIGORIADOU, GIORGOS LOUKAKIS, THEMISTOKLIS LEKKAS Beyond reality: Exploring embodiment-disembodiment in mixed reality environments with non-euclidean geometries, innovative navigation modalities and perceptual dissociation in video games

793	ID111	VALENTINA RIZZI, DANIEL BARBA-RODRÍGUEZ Virtualizing bodies in transformative platforms of corporeality: Embodied visualisation over flesh boundaries
797	ID113	ANDREEA ROBU-MOVILA Neuroarchitecture. From effective computing to affective computing in the design process
801	ID128	SARA ANNA SAPONE Transformation of an anthropic ecosystem. Essemburg Park between physical experience and digital representation
807	ID156	SARA CODARIN, KARL DAUBMANN Humanizing VR: Foregrounding the role of the body in digital twins
811	ID163	GIOVANGIUSEPPE VANNELLI, MONICA ROSSI-SCHWARZENBECK When the body-space relationship needs wider understanding to foster participation. A strategy to integrate reality, virtuality and stakeholders in post-disaster design
815	ID176	DARIA BELKOURI, PRITCHARD DOUGLAS Reclaiming the city for people. Digitisation of city walks to enhance urban co-creation
819	ID183	CAROLINA PACCHI Just cities in the digital era. Hybrid spaces, bodily presence and planning
823	ID192	ALVARO GONCALVES, PEDRO GUILHERME, SOFIA SALEMA Rescuing an Unfinished Vision: A representation of the semi-dome of the Malagueira neighbourhood through Immersive Virtual Reality
827	ID199	MARKELLA MENIKOUI, ADONIS CLEANTHOUS Prosthetic intelligence: Bridging the corporeal-ethereal gap in perceptions of space making
831	ID204	PRITCHARD DOUGLAS, DARIA BELKOURI Assessing quality in the convergence of the physical and virtual: Challenges and imperatives
834		GERARDO SEMPREBON 5/ ENDNOTES



The palimpsest, strategies to drawing multiples spaces to multiples communities.

Martim Moniz, Lisbon

Key Words

Interculturality, Integration, Needs, Vulnerabilities, Ecumenical

Synopsis

These keywords are interconnected in the context of Martim Moniz square in Lisbon, where interculturality and integration, specific needs of different communities, perceived vulnerabilities and the quest for an ecumenical environment are central elements. Its urgent understanding and addressing these needs as crucial for fostering a more inclusive and harmonious urban environment.

Context

Portugal is heavily influenced by its proximity to the African continent and the Mediterranean Sea serving as a gateway for Arab and Asian communities. Located at a strategically accessible point and being a place of opportunities, Lisbon attracts large masses of migrants seeking better living conditions. With them, different cultures and experiences arrive, like the common issue observed in other European cities.

However, Lisbon already has a multiethnic history due to its legacy of colonization and slavery since the 16th century, resulting in the formation of generations stemming from these historical processes. Consequently, African communities have long existed and remained integrated into Luso culture, stabilizing with jobs and families. In this way, it is crucial to instigate effective integration to prevent the repetition of forced processes from the past. Subsequently, with migratory flows to European countries, there is a growing influx of communities from Eastern Europe, the Arabian region, and Asia, primarily. Thus, the city witnesses a multicultural phenomenon, emphasizing the urgent need for a redefinition of urban concepts that, in their design and use, must reflect and promote its ecumenical nature.

Multiculturalism

In this Western and Mediterranean space, different social groups or classes “confront each other, follow completely different patterns, and are driven by different motivations,” (Filgueiras 1985, p. 21) making their integration into the urban environment of Lisbon challenging.

These ethnic spheres, by problematizing their differences and characteristics, suggest paying attention to the uncertainties and insecurities related to the thought and design of space when addressing multiculturalism. The aim is to broaden the concepts and their meanings, such as outdoor dining, conversations, or moments of rest, and, crucially, to demystify prejudices.

Prejudices automatically create a barrier, even if it is culturally unintentional, or when architects unconsciously make decisions in their designs, it affects the primary intention that one wants to discuss in this approach to urban space.

Having a conscious design of the vulnerabilities of space based on demographic and spatial analysis, along with the potential for extreme complexity and the existence of many particularities, highlights the extensive material that design should leverage to evoke the feeling of and in a place. Through cultural, sports, or social events, the intention to promote social interaction becomes visible, so providing a unique vitality to the space and thus becoming a more effective process of integration into urban life in the city. (Cohen 1974, p. ix-x)

Case study

Martim Moniz square is located in the center of Lisbon and is the second-largest square in the historic city. It is recognized for undergoing constant transformations, characterizing itself as a palimpsest (Fernandes 2023, p.7). The square is associated with different cultures, raising questions about its identity and integration into the city of Lisbon. These cultural variations give rise to uncontrolled prejudices, leading to the stigmatization of this square. The differences, marked by the strong presence of numerous minorities condensed in one space, emphasize the spatial and social distance (Gmelch, Zenner 1996, p. 495) from the other squares in the Lisbon metropolitan area.

The urban fabric of Martim Moniz is inhabited by several generations of international communities, mainly from India, Nepal, China, and Bangladesh. According to the Diagnostic of the Parish Council of Santa Maria Maior, 15% of residents are foreigners, with approximately 23% in Mouraria alone, almost a quarter of the total resident population, considering a density of 11,350 inhabitants/km². [1]

Currently, the square is an attractive and culturally rich point in Lisbon due to its multicultural offerings in gastronomy and shoppings. However, it is in a state of fragility due to disbelief, lack of maintenance, homelessness, and depopulation, which encourage crime and minor offenses such as drug trafficking or smuggling. This degraded state is reflected in insecurity and inaccessibility. Thus, a public competition was launched by the Lisbon City Council in 2023 for the redevelopment of the square and its surroundings to address the needs felt by the people who use the space today and eliminate the previously mentioned situations.

In preparation for the competition, the participatory process involved a set of public participation methods for users, residents, and workers in the surrounding area of Martim Moniz, with the aim of understanding the relationship of Lisbon's residents with the square and gathering as many ideas as possible for its redevelopment. This process was organized in a divergent manner, involving associations, organizations, and entities that had interactions with the square, aiming to interpret the needs felt by closer sources, the main users. All the information collected is relevant to understand, from a sensitive perspective, the best possible solutions for each cultural sphere specifically and, thus, contributes to a more solid and intuitively accepted design by the population.

Concepts discussion and (their) challenges

The discussion revolves around questioning the deconstruction or reformulation (Riaz 2013, p. 310) of the concept aimed at representing the redesign of public space, with the primary rule being ecumenicity. It explores methodologies that may be more suitable for a better approach to communities, seeking to understand which tools should be chosen based on a particular culture. The association of a design that represents the primal needs of each ethno-cultural group also raises the question of “how?” Thus, the discussion suggests considering whether the design can find similar hypotheses through parts or common activities, leading to a proposed intervention that addresses the needs of each group and, fundamentally, ensures that none is segregated due to incompatibility.

It is also important to emphasize the purpose of making visible their humans rights, especially if a large part of immigrants is illegal. These individuals or communities effectively occupy urban daily life in various ways, impacting the quality of services, commerce, and dining. These positive aspects are strongly evident and prompt reconsideration of areas for improvement.

Observing the diversity of cultures and the qualities each ethnicity brings contributes to the sustainable and progressive development of the city. It serves as an incentive and fosters a clearer and more visible understanding, showcasing a different way of living and current exterior activities. It is simply a valid and valuable perspective.

This study theorizes about the definition of the ecumenical space, building on the needs of these communities and the sense of living in the outdoor spaces of their home countries. The aim is to approach a design that is ecumenical and feasible. The theme of multiculturalism awakens a special social dimension that should not be a force of resistance but rather a driver of development and productive transformation at both the local and urban scales, as well as internationally. This diversity presupposes the existence of sensitive and available spaces for very distinct social appropriations.

All this material and immaterial wealth implies extreme complexity and many particularities in the way of inhabiting, which, in turn, relate dichotomically to the sharing of the same space, resulting in daily challenges. Depending on the variability of tolerance within each culture, space is always conditioned. Given this, this place, the subject of conflict and deep divergence, is waiting for answers, which can be ambiguous, as a space intended for everyone may become a space for no one.

The goal is to understand how public space intrinsically relates to the various modes of occupation, despite preventing areas of social conflict and resistance. Therefore, the aim is to reaffirm a public space that brings the city and residents, as well as future generations, closer together. In this way, this abstract suggests several strategies can be taken for a more effective intervention, through a more realistic and reliable perspective, with the possibility of finding at least a utopian solution, heterotopic places.

ENDNOTES

[1] Socio-demographic data related to the selected area for the contest proposals, in Terms of Reference: Annex I.II – Characterization.

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FIGURES

Fig. 1 – Author 1, Martim Moniz in 1908, 2022 and 2023, collage, 14,82 cm x 20,99 cm, Martim Moniz Square, Lisbon

Fig. 2 – Aerial photograph of Martim Moniz Square in 1908. Retrieved January, 15, 2024 from <https://arquivomunicipal3.cm-lisboa.pt/xarqdigitalizacaocontent/PaginaDocumento.aspx?DocumentoID=338052&AplicacaoID=1&Pagina=1&Linha=1&Coluna=1>

Panoramic view of the square and the city of Lisbon; Retrieved May, 8, 2023 in Annex VIII: Photographic survey for the public tender for the redevelopment of the square from <https://encomenda.oasrs.org/concursos/detalhe/oBVUE1/requalificacao-da-praca-do-martim-moniz-lisboa>

Fig. 3 – Photograph of a religious celebration in the square, author unknown. Retrieved January, 10, 2024 from <https://bloguedominho.blogs.sapo.pt/muculmanos-em-portugal-celebram-a-festa-6290801>

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