



THE POLITICS OF PRACTICE-ORIENTATION

Berlin May 05-10 2015

Call for Papers

With urban and environmental challenges increasingly at the forefront of societal concerns and debates, the expectations and responsibilities resting upon built environment (BE) disciplines have arguably never been greater. That higher education needs to innovate and adapt to ensure that future built environment professionals are prepared to meet these expectations and responsibilities and respond to the complex and shifting challenges associated with today's urban age has become something akin to conventional wisdom in conversations within and outside of academia. However, striving for innovation and achieving it are, of course, two different things – and the question how exactly we should adapt remains a matter of debate. Current debates concerning innovation in education revolve not only the question of how curricula and educational delivery practices should change but also in response to what and to what end. As Jenny Poxon (2000: 563) notes with reference to planning education:

“Although the calls for planning education to change in line with the changing role of the planning profession are strong, there is in fact a great deal of uncertainty over what this role is at the present time and what it is likely to be in the future.”

Poxon, J. (2000): ‘Shaping the Planning Profession of the Future: the Role of Planning Education’, Environment and Planning B: Planning and Design, 28: 563-580

Obviously, this uncertainty has also repercussions for strategizing about making higher education in the BE disciplines more responsive and relevant to practice. The need to enhance practice orientation in urban planning and education, urban design and related fields seems to be widely agreed upon, but the precise kind of “practice” students should be prepared for and teaching and research activities of BE university programs should be oriented at is not. Instead controversies exist. The most obvious being perhaps those between the broader aspirations of academics for BE graduates to develop higher order skills in critical reflection, analysis, and open minded enquiry; the expectations of employers and students for their university education to equip them with the knowledge and skills demanded in professional/industry contexts; as well as the broader calls of communities and community activists for BE education to stand up for their interests and advocate (urban) social justice.

CALL FOR PAPERS CLUSTER MEETING: THE POLITICS OF PRACTICE-ORIENTATION

Funded by the EU's Erasmus Mundus program and including eight universities from across the world, the International Network of Urban Laboratories “UrbanLab+” has identified “practice-orientation” as one of its foci areas of its investigation into the status quo and (potential) futures of built environment education. From May 05-10 2015 members of the network will convene in Berlin for a critical discussion that engages with the politics of practice(-orientation) as well as the manifold meanings and notions of practice and practice-orientation in BE education. In particular it aims to explore and generate discussion in response to the following questions:

1. How is practice-orientation defined or conceptualized in higher education, by whom, and under what circumstances?
2. How can the plethora of different meanings and expectations associated with practice and practice-orientation be addressed and what should practice-orientation entail?
3. How can built environment education better inculcate interconnected conceptualizations of knowledge and education and what models exist to develop greater synergies between research, practice and teaching?

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Comprised of different formats, the meeting also seeks to incorporate the perspectives concerning the politics of practice-orientation of educators, researchers, practitioners, policy-makers and activists who are not involved in the network and consequently invites individuals and groups to make proposals for presentations or other formats that address any of the questions above or related topics.

Prospective contributors may send short proposal, limited to 200 words, or queries to urbanlabplus@architektur.tu-berlin.de no later than April 05, 2015.

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The attendance/participation in the event is free of charge and we would be happy to welcome you there