

Researching Architecture and Society. What can a Sociology of Architecture learn from Science and Technology Studies?

Workshop of the Working Committee “Sociology of Architecture” of the DGS-sections Urban and Regional Sociology and Sociology of Culture in cooperation with the Bielefeld Graduate School in History and Sociology (BGHS)

June 6-8, 2013, Bielefeld University, Germany

Call for Proposals

In recent years, researchers from social sciences, humanities, and cultural studies analyzed the relation between societies and their architecture (e.g. Yaneva and Guy 2008; Fischer und Delitz 2009; Delitz 2010). They discuss both theoretical concepts and problems of empirical research in this field. They show that within urban sociology and the sociology of architecture, the specific relations between objects and “the social”, thus between non-human and human actors, and the focus on the constitutive role of materiality for social relations are new topics.

In contrast to this comparatively new approach, *Science and Technology Studies* (STS) analyzed the influence of materiality and non-human actors for a long time. E.g. authors of the so called laboratory studies analyzed the influence of the laboratory space and the scientific instruments and objects on the production of scientific knowledge (e.g. Latour and Woolgar 1979; Knorr Cetina 1981; Star 1995) and showed that technologies have “semiotic power” that enable them to influence the social (Bijker 1997). Others argue that technologies stabilize social organization (Beck 1996) while both human and non-human beings are interactionally and rhetorically re-classified so that the borders between human and non-human actors are challenged (Knorr Cetina 1999). Last but not least, one of the most prominent approaches, Actor-Network-Theory (ANT), conceptualizes the world as a network made of socio-material elements (Callon 1986; Latour 1988).

We start our workshop with the hypothesis that the STS-approach may be fruitful for urban sociology and the sociology of architecture and want to end with an answer to the following question: What can a theoretically and empirically ambitious sociology of architecture learn from STS?

Some authors already used the vocabulary of STS to analyze the relation between architecture and “the social” (e.g. Gieryn 2002; Hommels 2005; Yaneva 2005). Still, they focus on the influence architectonic objects have on the society. Some STS-ideas may broaden this perspective, because they claim a reciprocal influence of non-humans and the social world (Law 1987). Thus, the sociology of architecture emphasizes only one side of the relation between buildings and the society, whereas for STS this relationship is potentially symmetrical. How can this supposed symmetry, the mixing of social beings and technical artifacts, be fruitful for the sociology of architecture? Or is it better to speak just about their relations, like ANT-representants do? Furthermore, we ask if architectural objects are open for any possible use or if they allow only

specific forms of use, with this being subject to a „located accountability“, as Suchman (2002) suggests.

This workshop calls for theoretical and empirical papers that analyze the architecture of societies and aim at including concepts and methods developed by STS.

A broad variety of questions are of interest:

- Which STS-concepts may be translated into questions of the sociology of architecture?
- Which conceptual modifications are necessary?
- What methodological consequences result from these modifications for the analysis of architecture and its relation to society?
- How can empirical studies include the possibility of reciprocal influences of buildings and society?
- What can the sociology of architecture learn from authors who criticize the inclusion of non-human actors (e.g. Collins 2010)?

We welcome papers dealing with one or more of these questions. Researchers from all qualification levels are welcome (graduate students, post-docs, professors).

We also plan a publication dealing with the question how urban sociology and the sociology of architecture may benefit from STS.

Proposals

- Write your proposals in English or German with no more than 400 words including a summary of your central arguments, research methods, and possible results of your paper.
- Please send the proposal to arch.sts.2013@gmail.com .
- Selection process: The papers will be selected in a two-step process, including double-blind reviews by urban sociologists and STS researchers.

Deadlines

- Submission Deadline: February 15, 2013, please send proposals to arch.sts.2013@gmail.com
- Notification of Acceptance: March 15, 2013
- Final Papers Due: May 15, 2013
- Workshop Date: June 6-8, 2013

Workshop Schedules

Start: June 6, 2013 public lecture in the evening

Panel discussions until noon of June 8, 2013.

Organizers

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