TANGIBLE - INTANGIBLE HERITAGE(S): AN INTERPLAY OF DESIGN, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CRITIQUES OF THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

• Paper / Proposal Title:
Toxic Heritage: Post-Industrial Sites and New Urban Identities

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• Presentation Method. I would like to:
  i. present in person (with a written paper)

• Abstract (300 words):
Post-industrial sites are iconic reminders of ongoing deindustrialization, of the loss of economic bases, and of a central element of the cultural, social and economic identities of many cities. They are interpreted as both symbols of the failure of the industrial age and as location of fundamental renewal. Their often sublime aesthetics and momentous environmental issues make for a conflicted and hard-to-ignore heritage, but also render them locations for re-imagining new forms of city and urbnity, and agents for cultural, social, economic and ecological change that is “sustainable” or “resilient”. Traditionally, discourses on their past, present and future value such places based on a fundamental construction of human and other-than-human processes as dichotomic and normative (‘culture’ and ‘nature’, ‘utopia’ and ‘dystopia’). This paper proposes a “heterotopian” (Hetherington 1997) approach that
expands and subverts two prevalent strategies: the “tabula rasa”, erasing most if not all traces of previous industrial use and focused on environmental remediation and new development, or the preservation and redevelopment fetishizing remnant structures as a source for instant aesthetic appeal and apparent “authenticity”. Analyzing several post-industrial sites this paper suggests that discourses on “sustainable” or “resilient” cities are played out through the often underestimated role of aesthetic-visual practices and regimes, produced and reproduced through designed post-industrial sites, territorializing and deterritorializing loci and processes of memory, meaning, place and community identity. Post-industrial “heritage” then is instrumentalized by different agendas of urban change, inviting questions of “aesthetic justice” (Mattila 2002). This aesthetic-representational agency of urban space is central to understanding and facilitating processes of urban change, an important addition to the traditional focus on economic or physical-functional performances. It contributes to social and environmental justice and the "right to the city" and to the construction of counter-hegemonic positions to the siege of the urban public sphere associated with resilient neoliberal governmentality.

Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Joern Langhorst is an Associate Professor in the College of Architecture and Planning at the University of Colorado Denver and a fellow of the Colorado Center for Sustainable Urbanism. Previously he has held faculty positions at the University of Oregon and Iowa State University. His research and teaching focus on theories of space, place and landscape, on media theory and issues of visualization and representation, emphasizing film, and on post-industrial and post-disaster sites with a focus on the cultural production of space and place. A particular emphasis is on post-industrial, post-colonial and post-disaster cities and their mechanisms of de-development and re-development. He has been consulting on the recovery and redevelopment of post-disaster and post-industrial sites nationally and internationally, with a particular emphasis on the role of emergent technologies, alternative processes and the relationships between traditional and new actors and agents.