

Rethinking the Production and Conception of Built Space in Times of Crisis

Rachel Macrorie
Luca Velo

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Cités Descartes - bâtiment Bienvenuë, Salle A 219

Sessions
ouvertes

Pedro Gomes, Margot Pellegrino



This Atelier of the “Open sessions” of Lab’Urba is organized around two presentations, each examining, from its own perspective, the transformation of how built space is produced and conceived in response to contemporary crises—housing shortages on the one hand, and territorial and climate challenges on the other. The first adopts a critical political economy perspective to question the capacity of modern methods of construction to meet social housing targets in the UK, while the second is grounded in research-by-design, exploring the potential of urban design as a tool for knowledge production and anticipation within the Venetian città diffusa. While the former emphasizes sectoral and productive logics and their limitations, the latter advances a more exploratory, situated, and project-oriented approach focused on territorial and cultural dynamics. A common thread emerges around the need to rethink the frameworks—whether industrial or conceptual—that shape spatial practice.

Rachel Macrorie

Ph.D, Research Fellow, Centre for Sustainable Construction & Retrofit, Nottingham Trent University, UK.

Addressing the UK social housing crisis through Modern Methods of Construction? : a political economy critique.

Despite a series of high-profile insolvencies in volumetric modular housing in the UK, persistent housing supply challenges are leading to renewed attention around the promise of modern methods of construction (MMC) of residential buildings for sectoral transformation. The government is committed to building 1.5 million new homes over the course of this parliament (Labour Party, 2024), yet there are multiple structural, economic and political reasons as to why the current housing system is considered inadequate to reliably deliver on this target. MMC advocates claim that industrialisation removes unwanted variability and waste to improve performance and productivity with higher levels of certainty and it can therefore reform industry practice to enable accelerated delivery of high quality, social rent homes fit for a changing climate (Homes England, 2023, Housing Festival, 2024). Adopting a critical urban political economy lens, and informed by documentary evidence, site visits, industry tradeshows, and academic workshops, this article appraises claims around MMC for UK housing delivery. A comparative framework is used to analyse why previous industrialised construction drives failed to take hold, the re-emergence of MMC, and its integration within the dominant residential construction sector. Analysis gives rise to key principles for policy and practice reform.

Luca Velo

Ph.D, Architect, Associate Professor, Department of Architecture and Arts, University luav in Venice

Doing Research in Urbanism: Cultures, Experiences, and Trajectories

Grounded in the cultural tradition of urbanism as a design discipline, this contribution reflects on over a decade of investigations into how theoretical and concrete frameworks become operative through critical thinking and design production. Focusing specifically on the peri-urban condition of *the città diffusa*, the research utilizes the Venetian mainland and its Lagoon as privileged sites to test spatial options, potentialities, and anticipatory themes concerning mobility, the environment, and social justice. By interrogating the future as a tool for representation and inquiry, specifically through mapping and redesign, multiple knowledge layers place space at the center of conceptual and operational dynamics. In response to the challenges posed by climate change, the reflection explores new investigative postures and tries to define further research trajectories for the contemporary territory.