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Writing Urban Places

The Training School on Local Stories, and the Story of the Home of EKA

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PROCEEDINGS

**Estonian Academy of Arts
Faculty of Architecture**

- I COST ACTION: WRITING URBAN PLACES.
NEW NARRATIVES OF THE EUROPEAN CITY
TRAINING SCHOOL: LOCAL STORIES AND
VISUAL NARRATIVES

- II CONFERENCE INNOVATION AND DIGITAL
REALITY: IDEAS, REPRESENTATIONS/
APPLICATIONS AND FABRICATION

11-12/2023

PROCEEDINGS 11/12

I TALLINN: WRITING URBAN PLACES
II INNOVATION AND DIGITAL REALITY

**I TALLINN:
WRITING URBAN
PLACES**

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COST ACTION “WRITING URBAN PLACES. NEW NARRATIVES OF THE EUROPEAN CITY” (WRITING PLACE)

TRAINING SCHOOL: LOCAL STORIES AND VISUAL NARRATIVES

15 – 16 September 2021
Tallinn, Estonian Academy of Arts

The training school focuses on the use of local stories in urban research, taking the city of Tallinn as an example. Participants will engage in site visits, analysis workshops, discussions and lectures. They will discuss historical, semantical and archetypal settings of the narratives.

The knowledge from the local stories will be compared with stories related to the knowledge and ongoing research investigations of participants.

Central to the training school is a reflection on Methods, Visuals and Stories.



TRAINING SCHOOL PROGRAM

Day 1, 15 September 2021

09:15 Opening of training school
Andres Ojari, dean of Department of Architecture, Estonian Academy of Arts (EKA)
Jüri Soolep, director of PhD programme, Department of Architecture, EKA

09:30 Introduction of participants.

09:45 Presentation: COST Action Writing Urban Places, urban research through narratives. Klaske Havik, Action Chair COST Writing Urban Places.

10:30 Introductory presentations to local stories: Old Man from Ülemiste Lake, Mart Bread, Bronze Soldier. Jüri Soolep and Estonian poet and thinker Hasso Krull.

11:30 Discussion and questions

12:30 Lunch

13:30 Field work with the locations of the local stories. Bus 13:30 – 15:30

17:00 Presentations and discussion: Methods, Visuals and Stories. Tasks for Day 2.

17:30 – 19:30 Keynote lecture: Postmodern Semiotics. Mark Gottdiener, professor of sociology at University of Buffalo, U.S.

Day 2, 16 September 2021

09:00 Analysis workshop of the stories. Historical, semantical and archetypal settings of the narratives. Comparison of local stories with stories related to the knowledge of participants.

10:30 Presentation: Urban Discourse. Analysing the Social Production of Space through Narratives. Panu Lehtovuori, professor of Urban Theory, Tampere, Finland.

12:00 Group work: Second analysis of workshop stories. Preparing presentations by participants.

13:00 Lunch

14:00 Presentation of PhD work by participants. Introduction to individual projects.

14:30 Work on individual projects. Consultation in small groups for individual projects.

17:30 Presentations and discussion

18:00 Round-up of local stories and individual projects. Discussion of publication. Scheduling and tasks. Closing of training school.

19:15 End of Day 2, tram tour and dinner

WRITING URBAN PLACES: THE TRAINING SCHOOL ON LOCAL STORIES, AND THE STORY OF THE HOME OF EKA

Klaske Havik
Action Chair COST Writing Urban Places

The training school at EKA in Tallinn was organised within the framework of the European COST Action *Writing Urban Places*, an international and interdisciplinary network that explores how narratives can offer tools and methods for urban planners and architects. It focuses particularly on the potential of narrative methods for urban development in European medium-sized cities. The COST Action forms an innovative research network of researchers and practitioners in urban planning, architecture, comparative literature and other fields investigating the use of narrative in the study of urban culture. The network studies how communities perceive their urban environment, how they find meaning in it, how they appropriate their environment and how different social groups can be integrated. Narratives can play a crucial role in understanding these intricate relations between communities and their urban places and understanding these narratives offers potential for socially inclusive and site-specific design strategies.

At a theoretical and methodological level, the *Writing Urban Places* network connects ongoing investigations regarding new methodologies for architectural and urban research and design, developed by researchers, educators and practitioners who investigate narrative as a cardinal element in urban culture. Outcomes of these investigations include

the *VADEMECUM 77 Minor Terms for Writing Urban Places* (2019)¹, a book harvesting a variety of intriguing theoretical concepts to discuss urban narratives, and the *REPOSITORY 49 Methods and Assignments for Writing Urban Places* (2022)² which brings together concrete methods and assignments to conduct fieldwork to unveil, understand and even create urban narratives. Further, the network has advanced discussions on narrative methods, on the notions of meaningfulness, appropriation and integration, on fieldwork and on the parameters of the mid-size European city in working group meetings and, in times of covid-19 pandemic, through online webinars. Academic articles deriving from these discussions have been collected in a series of issues of the *Writingplace Journal for Architecture and Literature: Writingplace journal #5 Narrative Methods for Writing Urban Places* (2020)³, *Writingplace #6 City Narratives as Places of Meaningfulness, Appropriation and Integration* (2021)⁴ and *Writingplace #7 Taking Place. Reflections on Fieldwork* (forthcoming 2022).⁵

On a practical level, the network participates in site-specific studies in European mid-size cities with local stakeholders as well as scholars and PhD students of architecture, urban planning, literary studies and other fields, testing the theories and methods developed in the network, while learning from the

1 Edited by Klaske Havik, Kris Pint, Svava Riesto and Henriette Steiner

2 Edited by Dalia Milán Bernal, Carlos Machado e Moura, Esteban Restrepo Restrepo, Klaske Havik and Lorin Niculae.

3 Edited by Lorin Niculae, Jorge Mejia Hernández, Klaske Havik and Mark Proosten

4 Edited by Soja Novak, Susana Oliveira, Angeliki Sioli and Klaske Havik

5 Edited by Slobodan Veleviski, Luis Santiago Baptista, Aleksandar Stanicic and Klaske Havik

specificity of each city. Meetings, training schools and events have been held in Limerick, Almada, Porto, Tampere, Skopje, Osijek, Canakkale and Tallinn. This approach not only generates new insights regarding urban narratives and their role in creating meaning, appropriation and integration in urban projects but also makes it possible to conduct comparative analyses between different European cities.

The COST Action brings together different scientific disciplines that are involved in the investigation and development of future urban policies and inclusive development of medium-size cities. Based on a shared ambition to define the role of narrative in relation to urban processes, researchers interact in an inter-disciplinary debate that enables the transfer of knowledge and evolves new forms of expertise, enhanced by real-life experience. Early Career Investigators (ECI) are involved in all activities of Action, stimulating their creativity and increasing their knowledge and experience through a first-hand involvement in case studies and training schools. The close coordination and interaction of the fieldwork events and the Training Schools of the COST Action enables a fruitful integration of the scientific work and methodology into education and research carried out within academia.

The training schools have a particular character: they offer PhD students and early career researchers theoretical knowledge developed by the network, while simultaneously participating in site-specific studies, applying and testing appropriate instruments to understand and use urban narratives. The involvement of young researchers in the network is of crucial importance, because these are future practitioners, researchers and policy makers. They will address future challenges and research on urban narratives throughout Europe, in the acknowledgment of the importance of meaningfulness, appropriation, and integration of individuals and communities in relation to their built environment.

The Training Schools thus connect PhD researchers of the participating institutes through a series of workshops and peer reviews. The first training school of this COST Action Local Stories and Visual Narratives took place on Sept 15-16, 2021 in Tallinn,

Estonia. Originally, it was planned in March 2020, but it was postponed due to the covid-19 pandemic and became the first activity after 1,5 years without any in-person meetings. The training school focused on local urban stories, taking the city of Tallinn as an example.

Tallinn with its intriguing political history and geographic position was an appropriate city to discuss this theme, the local stories related to different eras and different social and spatial questions. From the medieval story about the lake, laying focus on Tallinn's geographical conditions and the idea of the city that is never finished to the story of the Bronze Soldier that laid bare delicate social and ideological contradictions in the way in which Tallinn's history is seen from the point of view of different communities. Departing from such local stories, presented through a number of lectures, participants engaged in site visits, analysis workshops and discussions on historical, semantical and archetypal settings of the narratives. As the next step, knowledge from the local stories was compared with stories related to the knowledge and ongoing research investigations of participants.

The department of architecture of EKA was an excellent host for this event, providing knowledge and space encouragement. Also the school itself is full of spatial stories related to the local architects who have taught and practiced architecture during different societal models and related to the very building of the school. While earlier, EKA, the Estonian Art Academy, was located near Viru Square, one on the main squares in what is now the commercial centre of the city, but also the square that saw one of the first modern high-rise buildings in Soviet times, Viru Hotel. In the early years of the 21st century, the area around the school transformed drastically. High-rise buildings grew like mushrooms, the concrete facades of Soviet buildings were covered with shiny glass facades and the empty square became filled with a bus station and shopping mall. Meanwhile, an ambitious international competition was held for the new building for the Estonian Art Academy, at the same site. The existing building was demolished, but the new building that came out of the competition was never realized due to many controversies. EKA moved to the Old Town, where the Art Academy originated in 1914, in the medieval

building of Kanuti Guild. After decades of neglect, the historical Hanseatic city centre had now, in the years since Estonia regained independence, been re-appreciated and carefully restored – almost to the extent that it has become an open-air museum. The move of EKA to the Old Town gave a bit of life back to this beautiful but somewhat deadened city centre – the art and architecture students sitting in the windowsills of the Kanuti Guild building, at times presenting art works on the doorstep, roaming the streets and frequenting local bars made the Old Town more inspiring and more alive. Only recently, the Art Academy relocated to a new building of its

own, somehow following the interest of the artistic scene to Kalamaja and Telliskivi – two quickly developing neighbourhoods on the edge of which the new EKA is located. The former textile factory Suva, renovated by KUU architects (former students of the school), became the new EKA home, suitable for a school that includes fashion design and architecture. In this way, the story of EKA's building is a local story, related to a particular community, to particular sites and to particular conditions of government and urban development over several periods of time. And that is but one of the many intriguing stories that Tallinn has to offer.

PROCEEDINGS



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