

# Welcome to the Third International Space Syntax Symposium!

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From its origination twenty five years ago, space syntax has emerged as a clearly identifiable theory and method to link rigorous formal analysis to the study of the social functions, the cultural significance and the behavioral understanding of built space, in contemporary and historical contexts. Space syntax has also been used to explore, evaluate, and predict the likely effects of design alternatives, and more recently, to study design styles and the intelligibility of spatial form. Thus, “space syntax” has come to interact with a variety of fields of inquiry and to support a plurality of theoretical developments. This is clearly documented in a cumulative record of publications, but has also been amply demonstrated by the breadth and depth of contributions at both the First and Second International Space Syntax Symposia. Precisely because space syntax has sought to contribute to the knowledge base of architecture in a distinctive manner, it has also been able to contribute to interdisciplinary efforts and has been found to be useful in related fields, such as urban and transportation planning, archaeology, cultural studies, history, and environmental psychology. It is with the intent to build upon and extend this contribution to interdisciplinary efforts that this symposium was organized. Special plenary sessions with invited papers have been scheduled to engage questions of application in design/planning practice, in modeling formal principles of design, in understanding cognitive function, and in applications to urbanism. As always the heart of the symposium will be constituted by the excellent body of 50 selected papers from over 15 countries, 30 universities and other organizations, academic and professional.

The first symposium celebrated the coming of age of a research paradigm that had already had two unusual successes: It asserted itself with consistency and rigor over an extended period of time, so that one could already track not only some keystone hypotheses that had stood the test, but also the growth of new theoretical ideas; in addition, it confirmed that reflexive knowledge originating in the research laboratory can systematically interact with reflexive practice around the drawing board. By the second symposium it was already evident that the multiple questions engaged using syntactic methodologies require us to continuously map the research field afresh; also to recognize the tension between a common descriptive language with the generic models that underpin it, and the multiple substantive issues explored, or the particular theories tested or developed. It is natural that we should look at the third symposium as an opportunity to discuss work in progress, but also as an occasion to recognize, to formulate and to rethink questions and research agendas. This is done better

with a little help from our friends. The main innovation of this symposium is to have invited papers by some of the most significant people in the fields of inquiry engaged by space syntax. That the response was so positive is surely the most obvious, but also the most gratifying confirmation that space syntax is now part of the intellectual landscape.

We have not tried to protect ourselves either. Invited speakers are likely to raise challenging questions. These most obviously include: How is the significance of physical space affected by the expansion of virtual space and electronic communication? What is the relevance of the architectural point of view in a world where geographies become increasingly globalized and cultural spaces increasingly complex? What is the contribution of a configurational paradigm, one that focuses on global patterns of connection, in criticizing and possibly changing the regulatory frameworks and the operative policies that govern current forms of urbanism one development at a time? Perhaps a little less obviously: how can a descriptive and explanatory model of space and spatial possibility interact with the growing field of computational design? In other words, how can descriptive models talk to formal languages applied to the generation of design? A different but most fundamental question: how can the intelligibility of spatial patterns be approached from the multiple points of view of cognitive theory, spatial morphology and design? Finally, to what extent can space syntax engage architecture with regard to formulation, over and above evaluation? These are certainly not easy questions. They can easily lead to vague conversations. The task is to find specific and fruitful ways to engage them, not just during the symposium but also after. If space syntax symposia are here to stay is it not appropriate that they should continue to be animated by the spirit of curiosity, contest, and intellectual excitement that is always associated with the generation of ideas, as well as by the rigor, precision and critical attitude that is always associated with the testing of propositions?

The relevance of these questions is highlighted by two trends in the development of research in Space Syntax that can be discerned since the second symposium at Brasilia. First, there has been a tendency from within the field itself to take a self-reflective look at its own foundations. Papers in the sessions on Compositional Strategies, Computational Methods & Formal Description, and Models & Descriptors of Urban Space show an increasing preoccupation with refining tools and methods of description and reassessing some basic assumptions. This has naturally led syntax researchers to collaborative work in related areas—computation, geography, and cognitive science—and makes the theme of this conference as an interface event even more apt. Second, research in space syntax has continued to broaden its empirical basis and the bulk of the new empirical work reported in this volume comes from Brazil, Sweden, Turkey, China, and Korea—countries which are fast emerging as places of significant space syntax research. The socio-cultural concerns of this research, and the backgrounds and training of the researchers represented, have extended what has always been a strength of syntax research, to give it richer texture and greater depth of involvement in practical affairs.