International PhD Seminar –
HABITATS IN TIME. Mapping Palimpsest Horizons
Lausanne (VD) 13.14 December 2018

CALL FOR PAPERS

Issue
In the early ‘80s André Corboz, in describing the territory as the result of slow and long processes of multiple transformation, implicitly declares the onset of a new paradigm for understanding cities and territories: a new gaze attentive to the chronological dimension of spaces, aware of the long history of places, interested in that ensemble of signs, traces and voids so real and yet altogether ignored by the paradigm of tabula rasa. In order to theorize this declared complexity, in 1983 Corboz proposes the notion of “territory as palimpsest”, (1983 “Le Territoire comme palimpseste”, in Diogène no. 121, January-March), where the same term of palimpsest was used as a metaphor for the thickness of texts one year before by Gérard Genette (1982, Palimpsestes. La littérature au second degré. Edition Seuil, Paris).

A palimpsest is a two-dimensional writing board that carries a three-dimensional matrix of signs, inscriptions and texts (Marot S., 2013, “Envisioning Hyperlandscapes,” in Harvard Design Magazine, spring 2013, pp. 89-95) and, as a metaphor, it allows a contextual, four-dimensional apprehension of territory, portraying space in its chronological evolution. As a consequence, it allows one to read the construction of space not only as an incremental accumulation of traces, but also as a selection of processes: it shows, through the dimension of time, what has been added, what has been transformed, and what has been erased.

This capacity of reading traces beyond the visible involves an understanding of the notion of palimpsest not only as a methodological question but also as a mapping device, where various materials - visible and invisible - can refer both to cartographic elements - borders, properties, parcels - or to real objects. In 1993 this double dimension of palimpsest - as both real and cartographic - serves as the main hypothesis of the Atlas du territoire genevois, an original atlas performing a mapping comparison between two cadastres (about 150 years apart) that identifies, through single elements - parcels, buildings, road network, etc. -, local and territorial transformations over time according to three main categories: permanence, persistence and disappearance (Léveillé A., Corboz A., Cassani Y., Mayor M.-P., Toumi-Overney I., Hirschi P., 1993, Atlas du territoire genevois, permanences et modifications cadastrales aux XIX et XX siècles. Service des monuments et des sites; Chêne-Bourg, Genève).

While this project certainly plays an important role in reinforcing the notion of palimpsest and the new paradigm it encloses, its diffusion serves as evidence that cartographic operations can lead to important implications not
only in the reading of urban and territorial facts, but also on their governance and planning: the palimpsest simultaneously informs pedagogy, practice, and policy by relating bottom-up existing conditions and top-down initiatives.

Since the ’90s, this multiple power of maps has been reinforced by the rapid evolution of data recording and archiving technologies based on geo-referenced systems, broadening the potentialities of understanding our territories as palimpsests. Indeed, 4D platforms introduce qualitatively different ways of understanding territorial and urban changes, viewing them less as evolving texts constructed by rewriting new sentences upon more ancient ones and more as complex images whose logic is only perceivable by adding a fourth dimension to space (time). The dual nature of the dynamics of palimpsest’s surface -an evolving text and an evolving image- becomes evident as the palimpsest metaphor is operationalized and data streams start feeding computational models.

Nowadays these tools allow for the reconstruction of evolutionary processes on both macroscopic and microscopic scale; they allow an interdisciplinary investigation of hybrid processes, crossing geomorphological, social, mechanical and biological dimensions; they also allow the formulation of new hypotheses between phenomena not traditionally associated. Cities and territories are today confronted with dynamic processes that likely cannot be effectively addressed by static models or immanent systems. The theme of palimpsest and its process of representation calls for exploring the interactions between spatial, social and environmental processes through the prism of the temporal dimension.

**Objectives and themes**

*Habitats in time* is a PhD Seminar addressing doctoral students – in the fields of Architecture, Urbanism, Human and Social Sciences, Geography, Environmental Studies, Landscape, Mobility Space and Infrastructures, Engineering, etc., – with an interest in disclosing the depth of territorial signs; in portraying processes of rationalization as well as of infrastructure construction; in collecting visible and invisible marks from both field and cartographies; in discussing urban evolutionary paradigms as conceptual frames to apprehend, contextually and globally, processes that take place in city and territory; in analyzing and modeling diachronic spatial phenomena; in aligning and segmenting heterogeneous datasets - and finally in representing them through the multiple dimensions of time: the historical (the *longue durée*); the present (contemporary dynamics and flows) and the future (both short and long term scenarios).

The Seminar aims at discussing the operation of “mapping palimpsests”, its tradition and future developments, as a scientific and methodological question. From the thematic point of view, the three categories of permanence, persistence and disappearance could be seen as clues of today’s discourses about preservation, recycling and demolition processes. Within this framework, this call welcomes papers that reflect on the chronological interconnections between: the history of the territory, construction, materials, processes, practices; the cultural heritage (both built and unbuilt); dynamics of mobility, energy, air, hydrology; evolution of land use or land cover (soil and subsoil); territorial infrastructures (visible and invisible). Finally, the understanding of the territory as palimpsest and the related cartographies inspired by it are today part of the renewed systemic and metabolic approaches to territorial phenomena, paradigms that broaden and open new opportunities for a redefinition of the notion of palimpsest as a lens through which to cope with contemporary challenges.
Framework

Initiated by the EPFL Habitat Research Center, the Seminar is organised by the Laboratory of Urbanism (Lab-U, EPFL) and the Department of Geography and Environment (Unige) within the framework of the Swissuniversities Program for EPFL-EDAR. This year’s collaboration with the EPFL-DHLaboratory aims to enrich the discussion about digital methods on eliciting, modeling, and analysing data connected with the notion of palimpsest. This particular direction in the research reflects the methodological focus of the research group “4D Time Machine” at EPFL Habitat Research Center, whose ongoing results will be presented to the participants (see https://habitat.epfl.ch/call-2018). The Seminar will take place at EPFL Lausanne between December 13 and 14 2018 and will include:

- 2 Keynote Conferences;
- 2 Seminars;
- 4 doctoral students’ papers’ Presentation/Discussion Sessions.

15 Doctoral students will be admitted to the Seminar that will give access to 3 credits.

The Seminar’s official languages are English and French.

Admission

The doctoral students attending the Seminar will be selected on the basis of the Abstract of their paper. Abstracts (600 words maximum) should be submitted by September the 10th 2018 to elena.cogatolanza@epfl.ch.

The papers are expected to present a coherent piece of research or a dissertation chapter and to address methodological issues. Each PhD student will present their own paper and will be involved in discussing the paper of one other participant (see Abstract Guidelines below).

The selected papers (3,500 words maximum) must reach the same address by November the 23rd.

Enrolment Fees

150 CHF/student (two nights hotel, lunches and travel are included).

Abstract Guidelines

PhD candidates interested in presenting a paper should submit an abstract of maximum 600 words. Abstracts and papers can be submitted in English or French. The Scientific Committee, taking into account the relation to the proposed topics and the quality of the abstract, will select 15 papers. Each abstract should include the following information (font Times New Roman, 10pt – otherwise as noted): - full name - affiliation - email address - thesis supervisor - date of thesis defense - working title of dissertation (12pt, bold) - abstract (600 words max, 11pt) - main bibliographic references (up to 5 - using Harvard reference system, 10pt).
**Important dates**

**Call for Papers** July 12th, 2018  
**Abstract** deadline September 10th, 2018  
**Notification of acceptance**: September 21st, 2018  
**Full paper due**: November 23rd, 2018  
**Seminar**: December 13-14th, 2018

**Scientific Committee**

- Dr. Chiara Cavalieri, Laboratory of Urbanism, EPFL  
- Dr. Elena Cogato Lanza, Laboratory of Urbanism, EPFL (Chair)  
- Prof. Frédéric Kaplan, Laboratory of Digital Humanities, EPFL  
- Dr. Isabella di Lenardo, Laboratory of Digital Humanities, EPFL  
- Prof. Laurent Matthey, Département de Géographie et Environnement, Université de Genève  
- Prof. Paola Viganò, Laboratory of Urbanism, Director of Habitat Research Center, EPFL