

Luxury - Spatial Politics of Comfort



Urban Design Guest Lecture
Kick-off: Thursday, 20/10/16, 6:30pm, Café HCU

Cities in Western Europe are characterised by an increasing lack of affordable housing vis-à-vis a growing luxury sector marketing high-end office and living spaces. Albeit the notion of luxury is highly contested, it is generally connoted with extravagance, excess and pomp. Sombart (1922) famously described luxury as above and beyond the necessary. This raises questions not only around justice and the criteria for distribution of resources – e.g. goods, jobs, access, space and time – but also about the city itself as a resource. Clearly, luxury builds on distance: it entails a form of access to resources that are available to the few, but equally refers to the many without access. Following Bourdieu (1982), luxury thus refers to a maximum distance to needs. In order to function, this distance between the few and the many produces two modes of compensation: the many either develop their small everyday surrogates for luxury or acquire an ascetic and affect-laden political narrative that charges luxury with negative values, such as decadence. These mechanisms of distancing call for a spatio-political conceptualisation of luxury that provides the tools to analyse social demarcations and their underlying

politics, in Rancière's (2006) words, the partition of the sensible.

In many places, luxury has become commonplace in architecture (Condello 2014), something which the Paris Commune decried as early as 1871 when they demanded a *luxe communal* in their manifesto. While the spirit of challenging the distribution/partition and modes of distancing has arguably been picked up by a number of contemporary protest movements, it possibly surfaces most prominently in architecture with Lacaton & Vassal's (2007) call for 'luxury for all!' Contrary to conventional perspectives, they understand social housing as epitome of a luxury for all: Luxury isn't related to money, it's the condition of achieving above and beyond what was imagined to be possible'.

Urban Design is pleased to announce the first event of a series around our annual theme 'Luxury – Spatial Politics of Comfort' that inquires into ways of seeing and understanding luxury beyond the seemingly obvious. Our guests **Luna Glucksberg (LSE)** and **Yuca Meubrink (HCU)** present research perspectives into the luxury sector of contemporary housing politics and share insights and methodological approaches to studying the housing crisis from the top.