# NEEDS 2021

5th edition of the Northern European Conference
on Emergency and Disaster Studies

Östersund / online 21–23 September

Abstracts from the panel

## The interplay of crisis and art

RCR Risk and Crisis
Research Centre

# Architecture as a Material Social Record: Drawing an Atlas of Athenian Crises

**Corresponding Author:**

Konstantinos Avramidis

University of Cyprus Cyprus

avramidis.konstantinos@ucy.ac.cy

**Author(s):**

The surfaces of Athens are privileged sites upon which crises have historically been inscribed. During periods of crises, the phenomenon of wall writing intensifies, both in terms of numbers and content, turning graffiti into both a visual synonym and a material embodiment of crises. Yet, specific edifices seem to be more prone to graffiti than others due to their placement, appearance and use. In a sense, the [writings on] architecture reflect[s] the social and political changes happening in different moments of crisis.

This presentation focuses on the Athens Polytechnic, an emblematic site that has been the epicentre of historical ruptures during which it is extensively graffitied.  It is based on a corpus consisting of graffiti writings from the particular building during three moments of crises: the Axis occupation of Greece (1941-1944) during which the site operates as a student hub cultivating resistance spirit and liberation morale;  the Military Junta (1967-1974) when the Polytechnic plays a pivotal role in the student uprising against the Dictatorship;  and the contemporary crisis (2010-2015) during which the building becomes a site of recurring political expression. This talk critically re-examines a series of architectural drawings of graffiti writings on the Athens Polytechnic produced as part of the author's design doctoral thesis.

The presentation aims to reflect on the design methods followed to produce the drawings that fastidiously record all the writings of the building's façades. By resituating the graffiti written in different times on the walls of the Polytechnic, the talk registers the various responses to the overwhelming forces of crises. It questions what it means to represent crises and how crises can challenge our means of representation. The drawings are theorised as atlases, sort of tableaus akin to Aby Warburg's unfinished 'Mnemosyne Atlas' project. Ultimately, the presentation introduces a design method that allows us study and reconceptualise the interplay of art and crisis.

# Exploring how crises are visualized in design activism campaigns

**Corresponding Author:**

Karina Göransson

Mittuniversitetet, Institutionen för design Sweden

karina.goransson@miun.se

**Author(s):**

Anna-Sara Fagerholm[1] and Linda Thompson[2]

[1]Mittuniversitetet, Institutionen För Design, Anna-Sara.Fagerholm@Miun.Se, SWE
[2]Mittuniversitetet, Institutionen För Design, Linda.Thompson@Miun.Se, SWE

In recent years, graphic designers around the world have become increasingly interested in how to make a difference in society (Bennet, 2006). According to Papanek (1985), designers have a moral responsibility to improve the society, and all design should be socially and ecologically conscious.

Throughout the history of design activism, visual strategies are used to express and ground a critical discourse. In 1964, twenty British graphic designers signed the First Things First-manifesto, by Ken Garland. The manifesto, called for a return to a humanist aspect of design and was a protest against the trivial productions of mainstream advertising (Garland, 1964). In 2000, The First Things First Manifesto 2000, was published, and the rebirth once again created discussion about graphic design and social responsibility (Garland and Poyner, 2000).

In previous studies, design activism is described as challenging the role of design as a marketing tool (Bichler and Beier, 2016). One example is the activism group Extinction Rebellion, a movement that encourages people across the world to act and stop the impact human intervention has on the planet (https://rebellion.earth). Here, visual strategy is that all art work is to be used non-commercially.

In research, visual strategy is discussed as a tool to influence opinion (Wong, 2016), change attitude and behavior (Frascara, 2006) and for transformation and social change (Buchanan, 1998; Bichler and Beier, 2016). Against this background, the purpose of this paper is to explore how environmental risks and crises are visualized in contemporary design activism campaigns. This is done by visual content analysis of international activist-campaigns produced during a ten-year period.

# Art/Science Collaboration as a Critical Technical Practice in Disaster Research

**Corresponding Author:**

Robert Soden

University of Toronto Canada

soden@cs.toronto.edu

**Author(s):**

ICTs are a central component of how society understands and responds to the threats posed by disasters. However, the design and predominant approaches to deploying systems have come under increasing criticism in recent years for prioritizing knowledge produced by technical disciplines over other ways of knowing and failing to adequately incorporate the priorities of vulnerable or affected communities. Prior work in fields such as science and technology studies (STS) and human-computer interaction (HCI) has pointed to art/science collaboration as one approach for helping to explore such questions. As an attempt to draw on this potential, we have conducted three studies of settings in which art and science are brought together. First, we designed and facilitated two events - a 2-day "artathon" and a weeklong art/science worskhop. Each brought together artists and scientists to create new works of art based on disaster and climate data. Second, we studied artist-in-residency programs at several science or technology organizations where climate or disasters were an object of focus. Drawing on these studies, we contribute two sets of findings. First, we articulate opportunities, based on a review of the various artworks produced, for expanding research and design in climate and disaster informatics. Second, we offer suggestions for researchers seeking to stage successful art/science collaborations or similar inter-disciplinary events.

# "Barricades, Blocks, and Borders: Lines of Division and Lines of Communication in Contested Urban Spaces"

**Corresponding Author:**

Todd Lowery

Drury University United States of America

tlowery@drury.edu

**Author(s):**

"Barricades, Blocks, and Borders:

Lines of Division and Lines of Communication in Contested Urban Spaces"

Todd Lowery

Professor of Art, Department of Fine and Performing Arts

Drury University, Springfield, Missouri, USA

tlowery@drury.edu

Barricades that repel and obstruct. Walls that surround and exclude. Cartographies with lines that divide and fragment. Graffiti and street art with lines that communicate and express. This contribution and body of work will investigate the visual relationships of barriers, boundaries, lines, and expressions based on observations and interpretations of spatial-cultural and socio-urban dynamics in three eastern Mediterranean contested urban spaces. The artwork is ultimately intended to serve as 'experience maps', interpreting pieces of, and moments in, Beirut, Jerusalem, and Nicosia.

While these three cities are often referred to, or imagined, as urban corpora that in earlier iterations existed as composite socio-urban structures, their (hi)stories betray pasts and presents of frequent and persistent divisions and fragmentations. Movement, flow, and communication, or lack thereof, of people, ideas and goods are constantly defined and redefined by numerous layers of seen and unseen barriers. The work will interpret these layers and lines that are comprised of natural and human-made structures and coexisting ambient information, with an attempt to connect and recreate experiential findings during fieldwork visits to the three cities.

This contribution and body of work intends to speak about lines: Lines that are drawn on maps, lines that are drawn in our minds and lines that are drawn on the ground. Lines that delineate, that differentiate, that exclude. Lines that form space and lines that form meaning. Lines that divide, segment and contain, but also lines that facilitate, communicate, and unite.

# Street Art and the 'Right to the City' in a Fragmented Metropolis: The Case of Beirut

**Corresponding Author:**
Dimitri Ioannides
Mid-Sweden University Sweden
dimitri.ioannides@miun.se

**Author(s):**

Evangelia Petridou[1]

[1]Mid-Sweden University, Evangelia.Petridou@Miun.Se, SWE

In this paper, we examine how the demand of the citizens of Beirut for their 'right to their city' played out during the major popular uprising, which began on the 17th of October 2019. We focus on various forms of street art that had already been in place before the uprising as well as the large number of pieces that emerged during the days that followed the beginning of the demonstrations. Our intent was to flesh out how drawing on the walls of the Lebanese capital manifested itself as one of the key activities through which people, regardless of their sect, engaged in their struggle to improve their city and transform it to a space where leaders are corrupt-free, people's living standards are much improved, the environment is cleaner and the human rights of everyone are respected. To perform this study, we conducted a group interview of Lebanese (street) artists to contextualize the city's street art scene. The core materials for this consist of 147 photographs of street art, which we took during a weeks' stay in Beirut in October 2019. We performed thematic narrative analysis on the material, which revealed five distinct themes. All of them reflect demands for a 'right to city' in nuanced ways. In this paper, we flesh them out with the use of one illustrative image per theme. While some images project overt political slogans and images others transmitted their message in a much more subtle manner. The study reveals that graffiti and other forms of street art are powerful means through which groups and individuals can project their messages in order to assert their self-preservation and, ultimately, their 'right to the city' in contested urban spaces.