# The end of architecture as we know it, the genesis of tomorrow's tourism

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**Abstract**

**Purpose** – *The purpose of this paper is to inform the reader of some emerging trends in placemaking and digital destination management, while providing a conceptual background on shifts in architectural design.*

**Design/methodology/approach** – *The trend paper is based on a fundamental bibliographic view on evolutions in placemaking, from architectural design to spatial agency, integrated by and contextualized in tourism trends, however possibly anecdotal.*

**Findings** – *The trend paper identifies a fundamental shift from architectural processes to spatial agency as organizing principle for placemaking, discussing how digital tourism trends are formed or forming change in this.*

**Originality/value** – *The trend paper newly relates otherwise distant and unrelated fields, namely architectural design theory and tourism trends, by connecting at the level of IoT and IT digital technologies, exploring the impact and the mutual role played by its two constituencies.*

**Keywords** Internet of things, Multidisciplinary, Destination marketing, Architectural design, Tourism futures

**Paper type** Trends paper

This paper is based on a longer-term phenomenon that characterizes contemporary architecture for a few decades already, namely the dematerialization of the architectural design process due to the introduction of IT tools and techniques. This trend has been initiated with the introduction of Computer Aided Design and the development of dedicated software solutions, back in the 1980s, that has led to outstanding developments, from the Guggenheim Bilbao by Frank Gehry, a structure that could have envisioned only virtually, to the whole development of Parametric Design as an approach, starting from its 2008 inception by Patrik Schumacher, Partner at Zaha Hadid Architects (Poole and Shvartzberg, 2015, p. 1). In line with the neoliberist paradigm in economics, of which Parametricism might be seen as a derivative manifestation, whereas Parametric Design purely lies in the adoption of digital techniques. The impact on Destination Management and Tourism Marketing has been noticeable, as the generation of multiple icons by start architects, or *Archistars*, has been enabled by means of standardized methods and processes, within the intellectual heart of the architectural profession, resulting in scholars and practitioners alike adopting the consequences of this design approach as natural in the context of postmodern economies of cultural and commercial production. This trend paper posits that a fundamental change is in the making, in the whole domain of placemaking, where digital tourism already plays a leading role.

The redefinition of architecture into a new agency based on the evolution of its constituencies, from objects to practices or from buildings to humans, is on the radar of scholars and intellectuals for some time already. As elsewhere explored by the author in a reflection that has lasted along the 2010s: "Stoner acquires from DeCerteau the definition of

'space' as '[…] practiced place', where mobile elements are structured in intersections. While 'place' represents the stability of elements co-existing in mutual relationship according to a clear configuration, 'space' is '[…] a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities' (DeCerteau, 1984, p. 117). Stoner imports from Deleuze and Guattari on Kafka the notion of Minor Literature". (Bevolo, Van Stiphout, 2018, p. 2). Departing from Stoner's vision, inspired by DeCerteau, Deleuze and Guattari, the challenge is to identify a conceptual framework functional to capture and describe "[…] both upon architecture's grammatical constructions of (virtual) power and its physical, material form" (Stoner, 2012, p. 3). Deleuze and Guattari's notion of "Minor Literature" is equivalent to everyday practices in niche leisure networks and alternative lifestyle circles. These practices might be socially marginal, however relevant in the functioning of the creative industries. "Minor Architecture," just like its corresponding "minor literature," might then be described in terms of "deterritorialization/reterritorialization," of "politicization" and of "collective enunciation" (Stoner, 2012, p. 3):

1. the notion of deterritorialization/reterritorialization addresses the privilege of power holders to define and enforce "spatial discontinuities" (Stoner, 2012, p. 31), with the Berlin Wall and its history between 1961 and 1989 as a noticeable urban paradox (Stoner, 2012, pp. 33–35);

2. the notion of politicization addresses the dynamics of power making related to the reification of space as an "object," at worst "cramped space" (Stoner, 2012, p. 54), with a key political factor lying within mobilization of people, "from substrata that may not even register in the sanctioned operations of the profession" (Stoner, 2012, p. 4); and

3. the notion of collective enunciation addresses the "practice of architecture" itself at the very depth of its ideological roots (Stoner, 2012, p. 74), with the resulting consequence that the "destruction of the architect/subject" is necessary (Stoner, 2012, p. 76).

The practical impact of the above theoretical postulates might be captured as follows: "Within this context, ancillary objects, e.g. infrastructures or experiences, e.g. functional lighting or minor events, assume a new narrative potential. Here 'discourse defines identity', starting from spatial and architectural manifestations" (Bevolo and van Stiphout, 2018, p. 3). Such manifestations are mostly neglected by higher cultural or even marketing storylines. Following these reflections, where humanities connect with architecture, a potential future shift in this whole field might result in a change of focus from "the powers that be", those concerned with newly built, iconic objects and vested economic interests, to the actions of those "silent voices", exploring from their vernacular or subcultural positions, unexpected possibilities and opportunities. These actions might range from vocally hijacking spaces, as radical movements did to informally reprogramming places, as migrants might do with informal marketplaces. These actions will increasingly be narratively articulated as forms of resistance, reclaiming the true urban ethos within everyday city life. Accordingly a subsequent new, future-oriented definition of the architectural design practice in line with all enunciations so far is that of "Spatial Agency" (Awan et al., 2011, p. 29), where.

"Spatial" expands the field of architecture from "physical objects"; which are static, be it building or furniture, to "social spaces," which are by nature "dynamic and political" (Awan et al., 2011, p. 29), with the resulting necessity to claim back those networks of practice excluded by earlier description of architecture as sole "building design" (Awan et al., 2011, p. 30).

"Agency" is "described as the ability of the individual to act independently of the constraining structures of society" (Awan et al., 2011, p. 30), where; following theory by Anthony Giddens "structure" identifies "the way society is organized" (Awan et al., 2011, p. 30), resulting in a dynamic dichotomy "agency/structure" that positively creates a perpetual tension in the newly defined design field (Awan et al., 2011, p. 31).

"Spatial Agency" can therefore be seen as the conclusive point where the "design of products, images, signs" of the past is reframed by Tony Fry's "futuring" imperative (Fry, 2011) to take on board those informal networks and intellectual practices captured by Stoner in her synthesis of "Minor Architecture." The notion of "Spatial Agency" is not defined as an "alternative architectural practice," it is not "alternative" because it aims at re-defining the design norms by accumulation and not at rejecting the paradigm in a binary relationship of "norm/anti-norm," from a marginal or "avant-garde" perspective (Awan *et al.*, 2011, pp. 26-27). Similarly, it is not addressing its professional "architectural practice" of origin, as the latter is appraised as unreflective and based on repetition, even when possibly filtered through the analytical lenses of "critical architecture" (Awan *et al.*, 2011, pp. 28-9).

In line with the above conceptual lines of evolution in the architectural theory and practice, an opportunity to shift beyond pure semiotic competition by means of iconic objects might be identified in the development of Internet of Things (IoT) as the next evolution of IT, and how digital technologies contribute to shape space and place. It can be observed, how experiments with IoT solutions are paramount in the management of security at nighttime, from living labs format (Schullenburg and Peeters, 2018), to large scale European Union funded projects exploring metropolitan solutions (VV.AA., 2019). If security is one of the beating hearts of the next generation of smart cities, it is social cohesion and the creation of robust micro-networks of interactions that triggers the IoT-centered urban planning process, as observed in recent green field developments in Brazil, led by Italian scale up firm, Planet Idea (www.planetsmartcity.com/projects/smart-city-laguna/). From social cohesion, security and safety derive, with a fundamental conversion from patrolling to prevention. In this line, experimentation has been recently conducted by the likes of Espereal Technologies, Turin, an Italian start up focusing on the innovation of urban tourism (www.esperealtechnologies.com). Here, the power of storytelling is leveraged and amplified, from what used to be "classic" tourism marketing and journalism to highly interactive and customized information flows. Furthermore, the extension of the IoT technologies to social domains like inclusion and integration of migrants and refugees, enables a whole redefinition of the "tourism product portfolio," expanding the reach of a city to its visitors from the conventional packages promoting the city center to a new, narratively supported appreciation of the peripheries and their citizens, who traditionally have lived at the margins. Through opportunities like gastronomic differentiation, like in the *Eatnico* project located in the Aurora neighborhood in Turin, ethnic groups can join the conversation that postmodern tourism is, enriching the portfolio of the city with new flavors and partaking to the narratives that stimulate destination traffic and tourism (www.eatnico.com). IoT technologies enable fundamental exchange among project partners but especially, are instrumental to the dissemination and valorization of the potential ethnic food experiences across digital networks, reaching potentially interested visitors on one-on-one basis.

In this context, two factors will emerge as more and more impactful, and both factors are related to social cohesion through networking: first, local communities of citizens will emerge as increasingly differentiating and discriminating of the tourism experience offered, hence they will need to be activated and proactive in determining their own storylines (Govers, 2018); second, multidisciplinary communities of practitioners will need to increasingly connect, shifting their focus from generic networking or instrumental bartering, to the generation of "shareables," or actionable packages that offer synthetic learnings to other actors, from cities to actors in the placemaking process. The latter is being redefined by the practice of not-for-profit organizations like Creative Ring, active in Europe (www.creativering.eu) and similar non-architectural entities. Within this context, architects will be indeed actors among actors, however it is architecture that will change its purpose, from top down design to grassroots research.

In conclusion, IoT enabled tourism innovation might inspire a new, citizen-focused Destination Management, functional to change the very experience of tourism from

escapism or exposure to fabricated experiences to immersion in the "contemporary local," in experiencing "the real" in the city. At the same time, this IT evolution, or even revolution, some might say, might re-define the very notion and practice of space, and therefore on the longer term, of architectural design, in line with the theoretical reflections above. It seems key not just to record the phenomenon from a tourism trends viewpoint but to question its depth and its potential, as a fundamental redefinition of "what" placemaking is, and therefore of "how" place branding" works, might be on its way. Tourism might passively follow these trends, or, as in the case of some of the start-up initiatives mentioned above, take the lead in this process of redefinition.

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