

Thematizing Public Informal(s)

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The 2024–25 *CHORO-grafies special issue* is conceived as an editorial endeavor, aimed to introduce us into the *informal* within public space. Intersecting between theory and design commentary, it seeks to un-establish a singular definition of *informality* and highlight multiple epistemological, social and ideological implications. *Informal public space* is not discussed as a clearly defined phenomenon, but as an interpretation tool for revealing multiple contradictions, transitions and tensions, traversing contemporary urban space. In contrast to institutionalized public space, *informality* is understood through practices of everyday appropriation, forms of collectivity, regimes of ownership, use or access that become transitional, contested or ambiguous. The architectural concept of *informality* encompasses deep fields of interaction within public spheres of the present, the future and the past. This issue initiates upon the *informal* as occupied or used by individuals who do not formally own or control it. This questions space relativity, ranging from investigations between owners-users relationships, to public space definitions.

This editorial briefly guides us through the contributions to this special issue. It is structured in two parts. Part A includes five (4+1) essays presenting different perspectives. The last one stands as an *afterword*, offering an overview and critical reflection on the emergence of the *informal* in the 21st century. Part B presents 4 selected student diploma projects approaching the *informal* as a challenging design experimentation.

4 + 1 DISCUSSIONS: PART A

In *Konstantinos Athanasiou's* article, the evolution of the *informal* is the public space evolution in Thirasia (part of the Santorini-island complex – Greece). This is a discussion about the organic and the ad-hoc gradually shaping local communities' practices and needs. This *informal* is a slowly discovered spatiality displaying levels of adaptability and reflecting community.

Eirini Koumparouli's article discusses the *informal* as in-between spatialities found in events and rituals during the three-day Easter celebration on the island of Folegandros (Greece). The *informal* emerges as a threshold, between the private and the public. It activates cultural practices, ritual and performative actions, inhabiting, shaping, and re-establishing communal space. The *informal* is the community identity, arguing for periodic activation of urban events.

The article by *Ayşe Eda Adıgüzel, Ahmet Bender Uğurlu* and *Serim Aygen Kıştin İşcan* shifts the discussion to the metropolitan scale of Istanbul (Turkey) and examines the role of the city's historic walls as a site of shifting boundaries that host small-scale interventions and informal or ad hoc uses of public space. The tectonic structure of the walls enables the formation of small-scale inhabitable spaces, transforming the historic edges of the city into a palimpsest. Using mapping and collage as methodological tools, the authors highlight the multi-layered character of these boundaries, where the informal public sphere is constituted through micro-narratives and ephemeral occupations.

Charikleia Pantelidou's article brings forward a theoretical discourse on the typology of contemporary collective housing, examining the collective quality of shared space within such housing (internationally) and its potential to contribute to the enhancement of public space. It addresses the introverted nature of many contemporary forms of collective housing and, in contrast, proposes the conception of their communal space as an open and permeable field, engaged in a dialogue with the city's public space, informed by Sennett's analysis of the notion of cooperation, as well as Bakhtin's concepts of polyphony and the carnivalesque.

A concise overview of the broader *informal* theoretical framework is offered in *Charis Christodoulou's* afterword. The author poses a key question: Is *informality* a possibility? Her text delves into the role of informality in urban public spaces, challenging conventional urban design ideals that favor order and formality. She discusses the concept of “loose space” developed in 2007 by Karen Franck & Quentin Stevens as the space that exists between organized systems—spaces that invite play, freedom and diversity. She also explores the idea of the “malleable city” argued in 2014 by Luc Gwiazdzinski, which can adapt to informal change without significant disruption, as well as the role of *urban density* analyzed in 2019 by David Sim in his book “Soft City”, in fostering informal forms of coexistence. Through these concepts, Christodoulou argues that embracing informality is essential to navigating the complexities of contemporary urban life.

4 EXPERIMENTS WITH THE INFORMAL: PART B

The present *CHORO-grafies* issue hosts 4 student diploma projects from different schools, discussing cases of urban, architectural and landscape design, developed between 2017–2024.

Nikolaos Antonoulis' "NAOS" presents a design for worship space (a temple) as a starting point to invite visitors in exploration. He presents us with a field of ontological inquiry and introspection, which carries social implications and allows for personal meanings. Remote and “isolated”, like an ancient temple, NAOS awaits to stimulate and be discovered. Referring to Edward Soja's concept of “Thirdspace”, he encourages appropriation and flexible reflection. NAOS serves as a “shelter” within protected zones.

Spyridon Anemogiannis presents “1-UP: Simulation of a Fantasy (for an island which could be Paxos)”. He highlights the *informal* through dynamic interaction, constantly generating new narratives. The island of Paxos is a reference point and a case for analyzing three representative objects called “TOKENS”. The project transforms into a video game, creating both individual and collective meanings. It explores methods to perpetually reshape memory by creating new informal narratives.

“Strip in Transition” is a project by *Konstantinos Itskos*. It refers to an era of energy transition, focusing on the lignite mining sites used for electricity production and supply in the Kozani region. As the mines gradually cease their operation, the area enters a post-transition phase. Its greatest challenge is to restore the relationship between humans and nature. This project describes a “Virtuous Strip” six kilometers long, which cuts through “...urban fragments, highways, industrial ruins, forested areas, lignite zones, and renewable energy parks”, designing and programming an informal public redefinition.

“Kerkini Wet Shelter: Strategic Plan & Interventions in the Port of Kerkini Lake” by *Maria Tsesmetzi* deals with a landscape in a dormant state. This is a current state of disorganization, poor design, half-ruins, under-exploitation, dis-functionality and un-sustainability due to neglect. But, at the same, it is of exceptional natural beauty and regional significance. The project presents a strategic plan that focuses on new priorities, protective approach and public space restoration, in a great informal terrain.

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