GeoAgenda

Building Urban Studies in Switzerland
Chère lectrice, cher lecteur,

Le premier GeoAgenda de 2020 est dédié aux études urbaines en Suisse. Le Focus est coordonné par Sven Daniel Wolfe et Julio Paulos, leaders du groupe « Études urbaines », l’un des six groupes thématiques de l’ASG. Ces auteurs cosignent l’introduction du numéro, dont l’objectif est de présenter la diversité de la recherche urbaine réalisée dans les départements de géographie des universités suisses ainsi que dans les écoles polytechniques fédérales. L’ambition de cet inventaire en 2020 est aussi d’encourager la mise en réseau des chercheuses et chercheurs qui partagent un intérêt pour les problématiques urbaines en Suisse.

Neuf articles sont consacrés aux départements de géographie dans les Universités de Berne, Zurich, Neuchâtel, Bâle, puis de Université de la Suisse Italienne, de Genève et Lausanne. Finalement le laboratoire de sociologie urbaine de EPFL et les études urbaines à l’EPFZ sont présentés.

Le Focus est enrichi par un article de Thomas Ingold dans la rubrique « Autre contributions » : il propose une réflexion autour de l’utilisation des Systèmes d’informations géographiques (SIG) dans le cadre de l’enseignement de la géographie.

Bonne lecture,
Isabelle Schoepfer

Chère lectrice, cher lecteur,


Neun Artikel sind den geographischen Instituten der Universitäten Bern, Zürich, Neuenburg, Basel, Genf und Lausanne sowie der Universität der italienischen Schweiz gewidmet. Zudem werden das Laboratorium für Stadtsociologie der ETH Lausanne und die urbanen Studien der ETH Zürich vorgestellt.

In Ergänzung zum Fokus erscheint in der Rubrik « Andere Beiträge » ein Artikel von Thomas Ingold mit Überlegungen zum Einsatz Geographischer Informationssysteme (GIS) im Geographieunterricht.

Viel Vergnügen beim Lesen,
Isabelle Schoepfer
Locating urban research in Switzerland

“More than half of the world’s population now lives in urban areas.” This simple phrase has been employed around the globe in order to explain and justify the value of urban research. But what do we actually mean when we say “urban”? This equally simple question has spawned debates in countless publications, conferences, workshops, and art exhibits. The urban question spans disciplines and languages, and in many ways our attempts to engage with this question are as diverse and contradictory as the many cities we study around the globe.

Here, we do not espouse any given theories or approaches to the urban, nor do we argue for or against any of the litany of epistemologies or ontologies in urban theory that have inspired change, established careers, or garnered praise or opprobrium. Instead, we favor open discussion and a recalibration of what we as academics and urbanists consider important. Ultimately, we espouse a collaborative approach to problem-solving, one that transends boundaries – whether disciplinary, institutional, linguistic, professional, status-oriented, cultural, racial, gender, and beyond. This is not a call for pluralism, per se, but rather a plea for a flattened ontology, one that de-emphasizes hierarchy and makes possible new ecologies of theories and practices.

In other words, we aim to increase the diversity of urban research. Moving towards that aim, we aspire to offer a platform through which we could – to whatever extent possible – render visible and begin to consolidate the diverse landscapes of urban studies in Switzerland. In so doing, our intention is to disrupt disciplinary boundaries, identify common theoretical approaches, and monitor new avenues of possible collaborations to tackle what we call, in reference to Ola Söderström, “urban novelty”. This issue of GeoAgenda is a first step towards these goals.

We have two ambitions in putting together this issue. First, we both noticed a curious circumstance regarding urban studies in this country: strangely, we found ourselves knowing more about institutions in Russia, Germany, England, South Africa, and the United States, than we did about nearby universities in Switzerland. Having now had the good fortune to work on both sides of the Rötschgraben, we can attest firsthand to the existence of a pervasive institutional silo-ing effect between researchers who might, we maintain, benefit from increased domestic connection and collaboration.

For this reason, the first ambition of this issue is to push against those institutional silos by providing an introductory directory of sorts. We present here contributions from nine institutions working on the urban, from all across Switzerland. Think of them as a collection of snapshots that – while necessarily partial and incomplete – nevertheless provides a convenient view of urban research going on in this country. And like any snapshots, we cannot pretend to be comprehensive. There is much that we have been unable to capture and convey, so we would like to offer apologies if there are individuals or trends that we have overlooked. We will make amendments in a future edition, and intend this issue of GeoAgenda not to be the final word, but rather only a starting point.

Our second ambition is somewhat less tangible but no less important. We state an intention to establish, nourish, and grow what we conceive as caring infrastructures for urban researchers across Switzerland. In a time of widespread political, economic, and environmental upheaval, we think it is vital to increase solidarity within the academic circuits that sustain us and our work. This is particularly true for younger scholars and early career researchers who might be facing more precarity and uncertainty than their more established peers, but in truth we think this applies to everyone, at every stage, and in every capacity.

Again, we can attest to this in our personal stories. It is no exaggeration that we, as early career researchers, are only able to work here (and attempt to establish sustainable careers) because we have benefited from the care shown us by many others. Is it, we think, incumbent on us to continue and increase that caring tradition and, in so doing, attempt to destabilize the processes that might pit us against one another for ever scarcer research funding and job prospects. As before, we maintain that collaboration is a more viable, more beneficial, and more ethical path.

To that end, as chairs of the newly-established Urban Studies thematic group in the Swiss Association of Geography, we have launched the Contemporary Cities Collaboratory. This is a multifaceted project that we hope, bring together urban researchers from across Switzerland. Targeted specifically at PhD students and early career researchers, we aim to connect them with more senior scholars from different institutions, and thereby put into practice our hopes for trans-institutional mixing. Through this annual workshop, we want to advance and solidify our common goals, while simultaneously offering guidance on analytical urban research tools, as well as collaboratively rethinking the urban scholar in the interdisciplinary academic landscape of urban studies.

Finally, regarding this issue of GeoAgenda, there are several omissions that we must address. Due to time and resource constraints, we were unable to provide a complete tally of every institution that conducts urban research. For instance, we did not involve the Fachhochschulen at all, although most of them in Basel, Bern, Geneva, Lucerne and Zurich do considerable work on urban-related issues. There really are too many institutions to do justice here, although we aspire to resolving this issue in a subsequent project.

Instead, we limited our search to the ten cantonal universities and two federal institutions. Of these twelve, only three are not represented here: Fribourg, Luzern, and St. Gallen. We were unable to locate sufficient urban research occurring at those institutions, but are happy to be educated on the matter.

“In the pages that follow, you will get a glimpse of the diversities and commonalities of urban research across Switzerland”
The other nine institutions are represented here, however. We found authors by approaching them either in person or over email, explaining our desire to provide a snapshot of urban research at their institution, and then haranguing them into writing within our short timeframes. We engaged as wide a range of authors as possible, from PhD students to seasoned academic veterans, and although we grounded ourselves in geography, we did not restrict ourselves only to this discipline.

In the pages that follow, you will get a glimpse of the diversities and commonalities of urban research across Switzerland. In Bern, for example, Miriam Hug details how urban research may not be as prioritized as in other institutions, but that the work that does occur there focuses on land use planning, housing policy, and the political dimensions of producing urban space. Similarly, Tanuja Thurairajah and Konchok Gelek explain how urban geography at the University of Zurich is relatively underemphasized, though this is expected to change with the appointment of a new professor with a focus on planning and urban geography.

In contrast, Ola Söderström and Francisco Klaus- er share Neuchâtel’s longstanding, theoretically rich, and empirically diverse history with urban research. Similarly, Basel hosts a wide range of research interests, both international and interdisciplinary, collaborative, engaged, and sensitive to context – as illustrated by Kenny Cuper, Sophie Oldfield, Manuel Herz, Laura Nikula-Wenz, and Emilio Distretti. And in Lugano, Gian Paolo Torricelli describes how GIS is used for urban development and planning with an array of innovative tools and applications.

Jörg Baliger, Armelle Choplin, Bernard Debar- bieux, Frédéric Giralt, and Laurent Matthey portray urban research in Geneva along two axes: modes of producing the city and the modes of living in the city, with work grounded across the Global South and North. And Nadja Irtho and Sven Daniel Wolfe explain the heterogeneity of urban research in Lausanne, ranging from everyday mobilities to mega-events, from more-than-human cities to the undertheorized Global East.

And finally, the federal institutions. Guillaume Drevon, Vincent Kaufmann, and Yves Pedrazzini discuss the Laboratory of Urban Research at EPFL, predicated on interdisciplinarity and advocating for innovative methodologies at the intersections of engineering, architecture, and the social sciences. And ETH is represented by Lindsay Blair Howe and Matthew Skjonsberg, who explain the close links between research, design, and practice, aiming towards equity and sustainability with approaches that take stock of global processes and local specificities.

These authors all performed under pressure, with some of them toiling over the holidays, in order to produce these texts. We thank them earnestly for participating in this project, and we hope that this is the first step in inspiring a new wave of trans-Swiss collaboration. We’d also like to thank Isabelle Schopfer and Francisco Klauser for their support at the Swiss Association of Geography, and for giving us this opportunity with GeoAgenda’s first issue of the new decade. And of course we thank you for reading, and we invite you warmly into these collaborations as well.

Where is the urban at the Geographical Institute in Berne?

At the Geographical Institute in Berne, the urban is less present than let us say in Lausanne or Basel, where negativities and theorizing of urban issues are highly popular. In Berne, the research unit Political Urbanism and Sustainable Spatial Development (Politishe Stadtforschung und nachhaltige Raumentwicklung, Urbanisme politique et développement spatial durable) focuses on the political dimension of producing urban spaces, while the Economic Geography unit, with its research projects on small and medium-sized towns, researches the urban economy.

The first research group, led by Professor Jean-David Gerber, is one out of four human Geography research units, and certainly the one that more directly deals with urban issues. J.-D. Gerber’s research is interested in actor-centered analyses of planning processes, whereby planning is conceptualized as a political negotiation process among various actors where power relations play a crucial role.

The unit works with an approach combining new institutionalism, which analyses the rules of the game (Noelle 1994, p. 361) governing the use of natural and man-made resources, and political ecology. In a nutshell, political ecology is about critically examining mainstream environment-society narratives (e.g. Robbins 2012, p. 67). It focuses on power relations and negotiation processes implied in the claim for natural resources. New institutionalism (also neo-institutionalism) “…explores how institutional structures, rules, norms, and cultures constrain the choices and actions of individuals…” (Breuning & Ishiyama 2015). Or in other words: institutions, actors and resources with their intra- and interrelations are central categories of analysis (Figure 1, next page).

From this perspective, land-use planning is one of the main mechanisms through which land and related resources are regulated. Land-use planning is therefore the object of constant negotiations among actors and has a direct impact on resource sustainability. This is exemplified by current political debates relating to more or less coercive ways to promote building densification, to the role of the state in supporting affordable housing, to forms of spatial developments that reduce fossil energy consumption, or to the allowed amount of building activity in agricultural zones. The neo-institutionalist approach invites us to go a step further and to examine which other norms influence the use of land and related resources. Among these norms, property rights and ownership play a crucial role and are perhaps even more important than land-use planning. Ownership theories systematically examine the emergence and justification of ownership as a social institution (Waldron 2016, Wikipedia 2019). A central question explored by the research group of J.-D. Gerber concerns the effects of varying forms of ownership on spatial development and on the more or less sustainable use of land and related resources.

Hence the main research topics of the group: land policy, large-scale land acquisition and housing policy (Universität Bern 2019). Case study areas are not only located in Switzerland, but also in the Netherlands, in Denmark and in the Global South (e.g. Ghana and Malawi). In her research on the social acceptance of densification in the residential segment, Gabriela Debrunner (PhD student) draws on Swiss examples (Debrunner & Gerber forthcoming). Andreas Hengstermann (postdoc) also focused on Switzerland in his analysis of policy instruments for preventing urban sprawl (Hengst-
the conditions under which spatial planning can lead more effectively to increased densification while re-
taining urban quality for all, including more vulnera-
tble socio-economic groups (Universität Bern 2020a).
With this research project, which compares case stud-
ies from Switzerland and the Netherlands, three new
PhD students and one postdoc researcher are going
to join the group.
Turning back to the initial question, where is the
urban at the geographic institute in Bern? This has
been to say that one can also find some research on topics
involving the urban in the Economic Geography unit.
While the main study areas are currently peripheral
and mountain regions, the latter are never conceived
as isolated, but as related to and interconnected with
urban areas and their economy. This urban economy is
also the research focus of a recent investigation on the
ecological role and development of small and medium-
ized towns in Switzerland. Moreover, the group’s research on entrepreneurship and innovation
as well as on regional policy (Universität Bern 2020b)
intersects with issues discussed in urban studies.
Acknowledgement: I would like to thank Profes-
sor Jean-David Gerber and Gabriella Debrunner for
introducing their work to me and sharing their time
and knowledge.
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Research on the urban at the Geography Depart-
ment of the University of Zurich (GIUZ) is underrep-
resented, with currently no unit dedicated to urban
studies. This will soon change with the arrival of Han-
na Hilbrandt from the department of International
Planning Studies at TU Dortmund. With her research
interests on urban planning and urban geography,
among others, she will lead the Social and Cultural
Geography Unit as Assistant Professor from March 2020,
and bring a stronger urban focus into GIUZ. Some of
her recent publications highlight themes such as ur-
banism and the state, real estate and the neoliberal
imagination in India as well as on critical urban aca-
demic practice (Hilbrandt 2019, 2016; Haid and Hil-
brandt 2019; Fraeser, Hilbrandt et al. 2018).
Currently, GIUZ is divided broadly into Physical
Geography, Human Geography and GI-Sience / Re-
mote Sensing, conducting research on diverse topics
on the environment, borders, migration, resource ex-
traction, and more. But within this institutional frame-
work at GIUZ, there is very little that is explicitly ur-
ban. Still, academic inquiry involving the urban does
take place, though it is relatively diffuse.
For example, in the Political Geography unit, Kon-
chok Gekle is conducting a doctoral study supported
by the University Research Priority Programme &
Global Change and Diversity - a package of interdis-
ciplinary projects in seven statistically important ar-
eas for global change and biodiversity. This project
looks at how urban administrative promotion, urban
space expansion, and rural to urban migration takes
place under the contemporary wave of urbanization
across China in one of these important areas, the Ti-
betan Plateau. This research analyzes China’s rural
and urban transformation in its Tibetan periphery as
a process of frontier expansion, raising questions of
how urbanization on the Tibetan plateau affects the
political economy of agricultural land in the urban
fringes. This question not only frames the research,
but also helps investigate the formation of urban ad-
ministration, the mechanisms of urban expansion,
and rural-urban migration.
Tanuja Thuraiarajah, along with senior researchers
Pia Hollenbach and Rina Alluri, were part of a NSF
funded project (2017 – 2019) that looked at the Tamil
diaspora in Switzerland and their post-war engage-
ment in their homeland of Sri Lanka. Specifically,
it looked at post-war engagement and agency taking
on the issue of the urban in the context of return migra-
tion (Thuraiarajah, Hollenbach, Alluri, 2019). The end
of the violent conflict in 2009 and subsequent polit-
ical changes in Sri Lanka post-2015 opened a window

Figure 1: An illustration of the theoretical framework of the research unit Political Urbanism and Sustainable Spatial Development (Illustration by Miriam Hug, based on Gerber et al. 2009).

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PhD student in the Economic Geography unit at the Geo-
graphic Institute in Bern. Her master’s work entitled
“Planmed Intervention - The Rail Redevelopment Project
Neugasse Zürich” covered planning large urban develop-
ments in an increasingly com-
plex and uncertain environ-
ment. Her current project is in
its very beginnings and ex-
going the role of fringe places for a socio-economic trans-
formation toward a fu-
ture beyond the growth im-
perative.

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Mushrooming condominiums overshadow old neighbourhhoods in Wellawatte, Colombo, Sri Lanka. Photo by Tanuja Thuraiarajah.
Despite the relative lack of institutional support for urban research, both of these projects draw on urban literatures and contribute to debates in urban studies. They reveal different dimensions of the processes of urbanization and socio-spatial transitions, from the urban expansion in the Tibetan plateau that seizes space previously occupied by either farmland or residential housing, to the ‘vertical living’ in apartments inhabited, owned, or managed by the Tamil diaspora in Wellawatte. In the Tibetan plateau, urbanization expands uniform governance over a large territory and population, swallowing up agricultural land in the urban periphery for spatial expansion projects and inevitably clashing with farmers’ interests in land property rights and land ownership. And in Wellawatte, neighbourhood interactions reveal a place of contested co-living – different expectations, visions, and aspirations – as life within the condominium apartments has been affected by the emergence of ‘private space’, mimicking hostland lifestyles imported back to the homeland, and lending insight into the social challenges and transitions that are part of the return migration process into dynamic urban spaces.

In the near future, research at the University of Zurich will elaborate on these and other topics, and it is hoped that with the arrival of new staff and a dedicated research unit, a renewed and more explicit focus on the urban will result.
Urban Studies at the Institute of Geography, University of Neuchâtel

The University of Neuchâtel has a more than 20-year long tradition of research in urban studies. Early research in the late 1990s dealt with sustainable urban development, regimes of urbanization and urban sprawl. In the early 2000's the institute worked on the first overall study of gentrification in Swiss cities. This project led to collective work on emerging forms of gentrification, such as new-build gentrification.

More recently, our work has been organized within three axes:

1. Relational urban development in the Global South

The central argument in this research axis is that the analysis of urban development cannot be enclosed within easily definable spatial units, but must today be approached as a relational process.

We have studied this urban relationality mainly in terms of translocal processes and mainly (but not only) in the Global South, i.e. how changes in the built environment, in urban policies and everyday lives are constituted by connections, flows and exchanges between cities.

One of the main research foci here is the study of mobile urban policies which is an important dimension of policymaking in a global urban age. Studies in smart urbanism – one such mobile urban policy – is another strand of research in this axis (also related to the third axis below). In a first step, we explored a few years ago the discursive logics and rationalities at work in the emergence of smart city policies as well as alternatives to dominant smart city narratives.

More recently, in a project together with Ayona Datata at University College London, we started analyzing the ‘provincialisation’ of this urban policy in India and South Africa. In other words, we study both how this global narrative ‘lands’ in those contexts and how it takes quite original and specific forms, such as right to the city claims by civil society empowered by the use of digital platforms.

Researchers

Ola Söderström, Prof
Jennifer Barella, PhD student
Evan Blake, PhD student

Selected References


2. Urban precarities

Since 2014, the Institute of Geography has developed studies in the field of urban precarities, and more specifically on the forms of urban living experienced by precarious social groups. Urban mental health and the still largely unknown mechanisms accounting for the higher prevalence of psychosis in dense urban areas has been the focus of a recently completed interdisciplinary research, involving geographers, psychiatrists and linguists, based on mixed methods – from video-recorded go-alongs to a survey.

This research has recently led to the formulation of a therapeutic strategy in urban mental healthcare and will be pursued by a forthcoming collaborative research proposal including an urban living lab project. It has also led to more general reflections on contemporary forms of precarious urban lives developed with Hester Parr and Chris Philo at the University of Glasgow. A forthcoming applied project in and with the Canton of Neuchâtel will expand this research strand to an analysis of elderly people’s social resources and access to public space.

Researchers

Ola Söderström, Prof
Zöd Codeluppi, Dr.
Marc Winz, PhD student

Selected References


3. Urban public space and power

A third research axis to highlight revolves around issues of power and control, related to urban public space. On the one hand, this theme is being approached from a specific security, policing and surveillance viewpoint. The aim here is to study and question the influence of contemporary policing and securitization strategies with regard to the transformation (re-generation, splintering, commercialization, privatization, etc.) of urban public space and life. This research not only examines how specific techniques of policing and surveillance are being set up, transferred, negotiated and put into practice by relevant stakeholders, but also focuses on the individual and societal experiences and perceptions of the techniques of power deployed and of the spaces concerned.

On the other hand, and connecting with the aforementioned research focus on smart urbanism, current research conducted at the Institute of Geography at Neuchâtel explores the role of (smart) digital technologies in the management and regulation of everyday urban life more broadly. Think of the use of RFID chips in tickets and goods, of location- and user-aware smartphone applications, differing tracking and profiling devices, drones and CCTV cameras, or of the development of increasingly “smart” urban infrastructures, from transport systems to electricity grids.

The point here is to investigate critically the power issues surrounding the software-mediated, digital city in terms of social inclusion-exclusion, privacy, security, civil rights and social justice for example.

Researchers:

Francisco Klauser, Prof
Dennis Pauschinger, Post-Doc SNF
Sunčana Laketa, Post-Doc Ambizione
Silvana Pedrozo, PhD student

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Urban Studies at the University of Basel

Urban Studies at the University of Basel was established in 2016, built from approaches rooted in geography, architecture, and history, and with perspectives from critical heritage, postcolonial studies, political science, and anthropology. Speaking from a regional focus on Africa, Europe, and the Middle East, our research and teaching explore the contradictory ways of knowing that shape cities, territories and built spaces.

Our research has developed through individually intellectual trajectories, outlined below, as well as through collaborative interdisciplinary research. Our Masters of Arts in Critical Urbanisms, launched in 2017, has engendered an exploratory space for pedagogy that traverses disciplinary purviews on the city, linking the University of Basel with the African Centre for Cities at the University of Cape Town. Working together on the curriculum design and teaching has shaped our intellectual agenda and a strategic approach to interdisciplinary urban studies.

A key anchor of our research is a focus on Southern urbanisms, inspired by the complex and rapidly changing realities of Southern cities worldwide. In this context, Sophie Oldfield's research engages empirical and epistemological questions central to urban theory. Her work reflects on political practice and everyday urban geographies, analysing the ways in which citizens and organized movements craft agency to engage and contest the state. Anna Selmecki's work builds on social and political theory and participatory research to substantiate the connections between orders of knowledge production and urban space, and how practices of popular politics contest and change these orders. Laura Nikula-Wenz works on the nexus of cultural production and urban change in Southern African cities, focusing on the transformation of urban governance and the construction of local political agency through international accolades, urban experimentation and interurban knowledge networks. In "Cities of Integrity", a Dfid-funded research project together with planning theorist Vanessa Watson (University of Cape Town), she also works on rethinking common anti-corruption measures in the context of Africa's rapid urban expansion, exploring ways in which the professional integrity of local planners can be activated and promoted.

Our work on the relationship between housing and the state stretches across Southern and Northern cities, foregrounding how the materiality of home making and the multiple forms of housing expertise shapes inhabitant contestation as well as state transformations. Focusing on the banlieue, Kenny Cuper's work on the banlieue, Kenny Cuper's explores how dwelling serves an object of modernization, analysing the ways in which citizens and organized movements craft agency to engage and contest the state. Anna Selmecki's adopt a collaborative research approach, built with partners engaged in a mix of Cape Town-based debates, struggles and practices around housing and land access. Projects – regularly involving our Masters students as active participants in the research process – track state-funded housing initiatives and how they produce uncertainty for ordinary residents that aspire to, and become, homeowners. In analysing the contingent and often surprising encounters evident in housing projects, and by examining the struggles and afterlives of ordinary urban dwellers in these contexts, this work challenges reductionist assumptions that formality leads to security of tenure, reworking instrumental and technical understandings of the relationship between (in)security and (in) formality in practice.

"A key anchor of our research is a focus on Southern urbanisms."

Another cluster of research focuses on postcolonial infrastructure and how built heritage shapes political and urban geographies. Manuel Herz analyses and documents how architecture is witness to, and provides evidence for, the complexities and contradictions of decolonization and nation building in Sub-Saharan Africa. He is currently preparing a sec-

Conclusion

Beyond these three axes of research, the urban studies group at Neuchâtel, which includes the above-mentioned 10 persons, but also former members of the Institute now active elsewhere, is interested and engaged in the development of an urban studies network in Switzerland. The importance of the urban phenomenon as a scientific question and as a political issue is, as yet, not matched by the existence of an organized research community in urban studies. There is no Swiss Centre for Cities and no National Centre of Competence in Research on cities in Switzerland. Swiss urban studies scholars should collectively try to change that in the years to come.

Written by
Kenny Cuper,
Sophie Oldfield,
Manuel Herz,
Laura Nikula-Wenz,
Emilio Distretti.

A growing area of research explores how design shapes urban, transnational, and planetary politics. Kenny Cupers’ research and forthcoming book focus on German colonialism to reveal how conflict over land in Africa and the borderlands of central Europe shaped the modernist belief that the world can be governed by design. Manuel Herz’ construction of modernist architecture rethinks the practice and implications of design in a Southern context. Future work on this theme includes, in collaboration with Claudia Mares (HWW Academy of Art and Design) and Ortí Halpern (Concordia University, Montreal), Kenny Cupers’ new project analyzing how design - in its broadest sense - influenced and changed political thinking and governance in the second half of the 20th century. Funded by an SNF Sinergia grant and starting in spring 2020, the project brings together over a dozen researchers with the aim to open a new field for interdisciplinary design research. As a postdoctoral scholar on the project, Laura Nakula-Wenz will build on her experience researching the diverse and situated expressions of creative cities in Cape Town to explore ‘design for development’ as an emerging governing paradigm in post-apartheid cities. Michelle Weitzel will focus on resilience in Israel/Palestine security design, and Kenny Cupers on African architectures in infrastructure design and governance. Taken together, these threads weave an exciting research tapestry that is underpinned by a set of shared values, which celebrate collaborative, engaged research in the public good. These threads also inform our common pedagogy, collective work which will be reflected in a forthcoming exhibition at the University of Basel in March 2020, accompanied by the publishing of an edited volume later this year.
The Spatial Development Observatory (OST – Osservatorio dello Sviluppo Territoriale) is a research unit of the Architecture Academy in Mendrisio (University of Lugano – USI), working since 2007 on spatial observation and geoinformation in southern Switzerland. From the beginning the laboratory has been conceived as a scientific support for the Cantonal Master Plan Office’s activities (Ufficio del Piano Direttore, Sezione dello sviluppo territoriale) and it is funded by the Ticino Canton.

Research: spatial observation and GIS for urban planning and architecture

Through the use and development of GIS technologies, over the years OST has collected a large amount of information and geodata regarding urban development and planning. Those geodata are especially useful for the evaluation of Ticino Canton’s territory development at different scales and according to different characteristics and perspectives. Some examples are the spatial impact of economic activities, estimation of the valley floor’s free spaces, monitoring of working areas, the evaluation of citizen’s accessibility to main services or even transnational comparisons between Switzerland and Italy based on thematic maps and complex data-models. In the last few years, OST has trained several young people in the field of geo-information technologies applied to urban development. For example, Dr. Simone Garlandini’s EPFL dissertation (co-directed by Gian Paolo Torricelli and Jacques Lévy) was successfully carried out at OST thanks to a study funded by the Conference of the Rectors of Swiss Universities.

OST has also implemented mandates for the Federal Office of Spatial Development for, in 2018 developing a methodology for analyzing the spatial effects of the new Alp Transit Gotthard railway infrastructure, which is currently being implemented for monitoring the Gotthard axis.

During the last years, the improvement of GIS technologies has allowed the development of a new

Map 1 - Switzerland and Northern Italy. Change in Population Density (Municipalities) 2010-14. The choropleth map was realized considering the average annual variations of population density per municipality (inhabitants per square kilometer) between 2010 and 2014. This simple indicator lets represent the population increases and decreases across the municipalities in a more relevant way than the percentage variation, since the resident’s number is commensurate with the municipality areas. If the map is made with the appropriate scale, the indicator allows to visualize - in a simplified way - the spaces of the metropolitan expansion, i.e. in Switzerland (Swiss Metropolis) and central-northern Italy (Megalopoli padana), and the phases of population expansion or concentration around the main centers.


Map 2, Ticino Canton: Internal Municipalities Migratory Balances, 2014 – 2017. The map shows the internal migratory balances and the migratory flow balances (difference between arrivals and departures among pairs of municipalities) between the municipalities of Ticino Canton. Between 2014 and 2017 an increase of migratory movements from Sottozosini (Sottoceneri areas) can be observed, in particular towards Bellinzona agglomeration, which appears the most attractive urban area of the canton during this period of time.


University teaching at the Academy of Architecture: Urban Geography and Spatial Development

Urban geography course (MSC)
The course is conceived as an in-depth reflection about contemporary global urbanization, comparing actors, strategies and problems in European, Latin American and African cities. The aim is to offer architecture students theoretical and empirical insights about spatial problems related to cities — public space, citizenship, right to the city — with a comparative perspective and through an assessment between European and global South cities.

Spatial Development Course (MSC)
The Spatial Development Course (MSC) started in 2010; it is a seminar in which the student must show commitment and imagination. The goal for the student-architect is twofold: a) to acquire the basics of spatial planning in Switzerland and Italy; b) to master GIS tools for project implementation (practical work in groups).

At the University of Geneva, urban research is carried out at several departments and institutes, especially the Department of Geography and Environment, the Institute of Environmental Governance and Territorial Development and the Institute of Environmental Sciences. Relevant research at the Department of Political Science and International Relations and the Department of Sociology is focused on governance and urban sociology.

Within the Department of Geography and Environment, urban research can be divided into two main categories:

This includes research on neoliberal city-making (Erné, 2014), the material economy of urban production (Choplin, 2019), real estate and the housing sector (Lagouillón, 2017), the transformation of modes of governance in urban mega projects (Matthey and Maguet, 2016), the political space (Pieroni, 2013), the advent of an event regime of urban production (Erné and Matthey, 2018; Matthey, Erné and Gaberell, 2016), the construction of topographic and toponymic landscapes in metropolitan contexts (Girot and Housay-Holzschuch, 2016; Wanjoy and Matsubara, 2016), and urban planning linked to artistic intervention in public space (Maeder, 2014). Other works, linked to the sociology of professions (Maeder, Merie, Matthey and Matthey, 2014), develop an ethnography of the art of city-making, seen from the point of view of the skills different actors mobilize (Levy, 2013). Urban transformations are also analysed through the lens of early 19th and early 20th century exhibitions (Huetz, 2019). Research in this category further includes analysis of urban models and their international circulation (Green/Sustainable Smart City) (Berger, Kim, 2018); European transnational dynamics, diversity and border effects with a focus on metropolitan contexts (Michèle, Grairat, and Giorsen, 2019); and the measurement of urbanisation and access to centrality.

An analysis of the modes of living in the city

Research in this category has focused on the residential trajectories of inhabitants in metropolitan areas (Debarbieux and Petite, 2014), and, more broadly, on the social imaginaries of the city (Debarbieux, 2019). The uses of urban resources by migrant populations (see works by Del Biaggio and Matthey), highlights the transformations of urban practices caused by an ageing population and adaptations in urban planning (Durollé, 2016) and analyses bottom-up innovating experiences through participatory mapping, digital and low-tech technologies used (Choplin and Lowsi, 2020; Roquer, 2019). Finally, research also is conducted on urban resilience from the perspective of violence and urban memory (Naef, 2018; Lehe, 2019).

Urban Research at the University of Geneva

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Urban Research at the University of Geneva

Selected References
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Urban research at the University of Lausanne exists across many disciplines, including anthropology, sociology, and geography, but here we restrict ourselves to discussing the Institute of Geography of Sustainability. This is an interdisciplinary institute composed of six groups, many of which engage with the urban in some degree. Of these, we focus here on the Urban Studies Group, with the caveat that this is only a partial and incomplete representation.

Within Urban Studies, research is undertaken along five broad thematic lines: sustainable urban development, mobility, cities and dynamic networks, regional analysis, and strategic urbanism. These themes are organized roughly into research groups around a professor or group leader, but they are seen more as common associations, rather than as discrete categories. Researchers must belong to their living spaces every day. The University of Geneva pays close attention to the dialogue between urban theory, urban studies, and urban planning, at all scales, based on empirical case studies and using a systemic and diachronic approach.

"Urban researchers use mixed methods, including ethnography, visual studies, statistical analyses, cartography, GIS and geoinformation, in order to grasp the complexity of urban transformations."
employs a multi-level approach to understanding urban resilience (Rogov & Rozentzblit, 2018), focusing in his dissertation on Russian cities during the recent economic crisis. Another person with a connection to Russian cities is Sven Daniel Wolfe, who works in the post-socialist spaces of the Global South and has written on the 2018 men’s Football World Cup in Russia (Wolfe, 2019: Wolfe & Müller, 2018). He is part of Martin Müller’s group, who share a theoretical approach to the urban where cities emerge as socio-material entanglements, as past histories, present practices, and future potentials combine – inclusive of human and more-than-human perspectives. In her PhD project, Nadja Imhof examines how cities and citizens enact their relationship to nature through multiple practices towards rats, while Müller’s current project focuses on mega-events with a three-year project unpacking sustainability in the 2024 and 2028 Olympics in Paris and Los Angeles.

Finally, Jean Ruegg and his group deal with the implementation of public policy in spatial planning and its effects on territory and professional practice, aspiring to better inform decision-makers and public practitioners. PhD students in this group are working beyond Swiss borders: Hendrikje Alpermann’s dissertation involves an ethnographic analysis of the reasons for demolishing or preserving buildings in France, while Irem Ince’s thesis project deals with the socio-spatial effects of a law passed in Turkey to prevent risks in urban areas subject to seismic hazard. And Maurice Kwang-Chung Yip has just started a PhD project on land lease issues in Hong Kong.

Urban research in Lausanne is diverse, reaching from urban networks and flows to far-reaching global influences, from high-density networks of people, politics, and economic power to the green spaces urban nature and the non-human creatures who share our cities. There is more work at the institute that can be shared here, defining group and even disciplinary boundaries, but it is our hope that the future we will see many fruitful collaborations, both in Lausanne and with other institutions across Switzerland.

Selected References

A focus on ordinary territories

For about twenty years, LASUR has progressively designed a singular vision of the urban context, in scientific perception with commitments that led its researchers to propose a new “trans-local” vision of the fabric of cities. This has taken shape through research projects, various expertise, and PhD theses – with case studies not only realized in Switzerland but also in countries as different as France, Spain, Ethiopia, China and Venezuela. Incorporating all the lessons from worldwide investigations, some years ago LASUR launched an innovative and critical analysis of “ordinary territo- ries,” with a special focus on its ordinary “neighbors” who aren’t habitually considered by the academy. This research ambition allows us to address the asymmetry between global research with huge media reach, and local and very ordinary situations frequently situated under the radar of scientific research. That is the reason why LASUR is currently exploring Swiss marginalized spaces. Based on ethnographic methods, these explorations aim to reconsider the metropolitanization process and the concept of the global city.

Under the direction of Prof. Vincent Kaufmann since 2003, the Laboratory of Urban Sociology (LA SUR) comprises around twenty researchers and PhD students united towards the comprehension of urban experiences within a social science perspective. A unique case in Switzerland and a lot of countries of the world, LASUR is situated within the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Lausanne (EPFL), in the ENAC Faculty (Architecture, Civil and Environmental Engineering) and the Interdisciplinary research and teaching. Multidisciplinary itself, LASUR researches the social conditions that produce and appropriate cities or territories, collaborating intensively with its partners in engineering and architecture. LASUR confronts urban phenomena through the mobility capacities of its actors. In this perspective, the principal research themes are daily mobility, residential capacities of its actors, and teaching. Multidisciplinary itself, LASUR researches the social conditions that produce and appropriate cities or territories, collaborating intensively with its partners in engineering and architecture. LASUR confronts urban phenomena through the mobility capacities of its actors. In this perspective, the principal research themes are daily mobility, residential capacities of its actors, and teaching. Multidisciplinary itself, LASUR researches the social conditions that produce and appropriate cities or territories, collaborating intensively with its partners in engineering and architecture. LASUR confronts urban phenomena through the mobility capacities of its actors. In this perspective, the principal research themes are daily mobility, residential capacities of its actors, and teaching. Multidisciplinary itself, LASUR researches the social conditions that produce and appropriate cities or territories, collaborating intensively with its partners in engineering and architecture. LASUR confronts urban phenomena through the mobility capacities of its actors. In this perspective, the principal research themes are daily mobility, residential capacities of its actors, and teaching. Multidisciplinary itself, LASUR researches the social conditions that produce and appropriate cities or territories, collaborating intensively with its partners in engineering and architecture.

In the frame of the Swiss academic landscape and public policies, “ordinary territories” escape the researcher’s gaze because of their spatial, social and symbolic marginalization. In actuality, few researches and academic training are considering “ordinary territories” as an important issue. Yet, recent analyses of Swiss ordinary territories underline complex significations which switch from seriousness to casualness. LASUR’s approach employs experiential methods to reframe the perspective from connected “hyperspaces” to “ordinary territories.” This approach is based on exploration protocols which bring together different disciplines (architecture, urban sociology, geography, urbanism, anthropology), and by crossing epistemologies and collecting techniques (interviews, observations, photography, spatial analysis). LASUR’s theorization of ordinary territories claims a Frugality

Lasur/enac/eplaboratory of urban sociology

Written by Guillaume Dreux, Vincent Kaufmann, Yves Pedrazzini

La Chaux-de-Fond, March 2017. Photo by Y. Pedrazzini

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La Chaux-de-Fond, March 2017. Photo by Y. Pedrazzini

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The landscape of urban research at the ETH Zurich

The past several decades have been marked by a sharp increase in environmental and social challenges. Ranging from the fields of geography to planning and policymaking, urban research has been at the forefront of debates on climate change, uneven development, global migration, economic crises, and social conflicts. Current work at the ETH Zurich emphasizes how urban and rural landscapes are the key sites in which these challenges are stalled and negotiated today. The ETHZ’s diverse research pursuits are conducted across a wide range of scales — by many different chairs and institutes — but they share two common threads: first, uncovering new possibilities for sustainable human settlements and landscapes; and second, emphasizing the importance of engaging in transdisciplinary research.

Urban research at the ETHZ is conducted by an affiliation of institutes entitled Network City and Landscape (NSL). Several Institutes from the ETHZ Department of Architecture, the NSL includes the newly formed Institute of Landscape and Urban Studies (LIUS) as well as the Chair for the History and Theory of Urban Design (gta). LIUS focuses on contemporary issues of urbanization and rural regional transformation, housing a broad spectrum of research pursuits from landscape architecture and urban design, to planning, ecology, housing, and sociology.

Creating more equitable and sustainable planning — in the face of climate change, resource scarcity, and population growth — requires approaches addressing the manifold range of human conditions found globally, while simultaneously remaining adaptable and flexible enough to account for local specificity. As such, one of NSL’s explicit goals is to frame possibilities for sustainable human settlements through research that is closely linked to design and practice. For example, the newly launched LIUS Doctoral Program uses both quantitative and qualitative methods to cultivate a critical discourse on the urgent environmental challenges of today. By engaging with the processes of urbanization and civic transformation with respect to their cultural and historical contexts, the program addresses current design and development of research methods, bodily experience, and disciplinary boundary crossing. Even if ordinary territories are often considered as negligible territories, these spaces seem essential for research studies on urban, rural and mountain regions in Switzerland. Beyond the research issue, ordinary territories teach us about everyday life urbanity as much as Zurich or Geneva in the context of global and extraordinary world cities world. LASUR, therefore, would like to be a leader in researching the social dimensions of urbanism in ordinary cities as much in Mexico City or Shanghai, Glasgow or Napoli, as in Courgenay, Payerne or Saint-Imier.
practices while also providing innovative solutions for the future.

Linking science and design with the specificity of the built environment to meet these challenges requires engaging in such transdisciplinary research at the ETH Zurich. Working with a broad range of stakeholders – the crux of transdisciplinarity; integrating people otherwise situated outside of academia – from governance and planning experts to civic actors and “everyday” people – in both research and in the dissemination of research. For example, a recent collaborative research project and exhibition by Christian Schmidt’s Chair of Sociology and the ETH Wohnforum – ETH CASE explored the transformation of Zurich’s infamous Langstrasse, conducting a series of discussions and workshops with stakeholders such as the street’s residents, business owners, urban planners from the City of Zurich, artists, and local academics.

This project posited that a deeper dialogue between policy, design, and people was necessary, in order to better understand specific urban qualities and development challenges for this unique space (Kretz and Küng, 2016). As this approach revealed, the threat of development challenges for this unique space (Kretz and Küng, 2016). As this approach revealed, the threat of development challenges for this unique space (Kretz and Küng, 2016). As this approach revealed, the threat of development challenges for this unique space (Kretz and Küng, 2016).

Each of these endeavors contributes to the ETH Zurich’s stated mission to conduct research into future settlements and landscapes. This stance recognizes that the purpose of the constitution is “to ensure the dignity of living beings” (ECNH, 2008).

Urban research is also being conducted at the NSL-affiliated Future Cities Laboratory (FCL) Global in Singapore and Zurich (beginning in 2020), as well as the Institute for Science, Technology, and Policy (ISTP) in Zurich. FCL projects include applied research into high-density, mixed-use cities that improve environmental sustainability; responsive cities relying on cutting-edge IT tools; and linking “archipelago” cities to improve resilience in the ASEAN+ region. ISTP includes several “research incubators” into topics such as e-mobility, urbanization, and mineral extraction. Each of these endeavors contributes to the ETH Zurich’s stated mission to conduct research into future cities, creating adaptive responses in their landscape and infrastructural systems to address the urgent challenges of climate change.

Appropriate policy and adaptable design underlie this array of research practices at the ETH Zurich: concepts that can continue to address the changing needs of people and places long into the future, by focusing on inclusive processes for a wide range of stakeholders and landscapes. This stance recognizes that rapid urbanization is a global phenomenon, yet profoundly shaped by local cultures and regional specificities. As such, it is intrinsically connected to the effects of one’s own actions on the environment, and it is also effectively predetermined by policy and space. By linking spatial practices to the uneven geographies of global urbanization and new forms of rurbanization, urban research at the ETHZ reveals possible moments where social transformation can begin, and what kinds of material strategies can improve communities’ resilience from both a local and global perspective.

Selected References


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MATTHEW SKJONDBERG
Architect, landscape and civic designer with a long history in both the academy and private practice. He was a project leader at West 8 urban design and landscape architecture in New York and Rotterdam, and studied at Taliesin, the Frank Lloyd Wright School of Architecture, ETH Zürich, and EPFL Lausanne. He is currently a post-doctoral researcher in the TheoryLab at Christophe Giror’s Chair of Landscape Architecture at ETH Zürich where he focuses on curriculum development, and he is program coordinator for the Institute of Landscape and Urban Studies doctoral seminars.

A gallery view of the point/cloud video and audio installation in Einfach Zurich permanent exhibition at Landesmuseum Zurich – opened in 2019. While the technology comes from urban studies, this method of proactively engaging in public discourse focuses on storytelling and narrative. Credit: Pointcloud animations and story, SCANNSION (Dennis Häusler, Johannes Rebsamen, Matthias Vollmer) - ETHZ, Chair of Prof. Giror; Sound composition: Ludwig Berger - ETHZ, Chair of Prof. Giror. Concept, content and design: Holzer Kobler Architekturen and Heller Enterprises. Image courtesy of Landesmuseum Zurich.
Mit GIS reale Probleme im digitalen Lebensraum analysieren

Mit der digitalen Revolution und dem Klimawandel erleben wir zwei unwiderrufliche Entwicklungen. Die nächste Generation löst Problem primär auf die digitale Art und ist um die Gesundheit unseres Planeten besorgt. Wie reagiert die Schule darauf, insbesondere das Fach Geografie?

Digitale Geodien stellen eine Möglichkeiten dar, diese Brücke zwischen der realen Welt der Lernenden und der digitalen Welt zu schlagen.


Ein GIS ist ein Computersystem, das hilft räumliche oder geographischen Probleme mittels Daten zu erfassen, bearbeiten, analysieren, und darzustellen.

M – Modellieren der Frage: Am Anfang steht das geographische Problem, welches sich in eine Fragestellung äussert. Beispielsweise könnten sich Lernende mit der Lärmmessung und der Beanspruchung der Stadt konfrontiert sehen, um für die Zukunft gerüstet zu sein.

V – Verarbeiten der Daten: Danach sollen die Daten kartografisch so visualisiert werden, dass sie näherungsweise gemessen werden können. Im GIS würden Standorte mit einer hohen Lärmschutzlauflänge umgesetzt. Somit beispielsweise mit einem grünen Dreieck dargestellt werden.

A – Analysieren der Daten: Dieser Schritt beinhaltet die Auswertung und Interpretation der Daten. Somit haben wir die Möglichkeit, die einzelnen Lärmmessungen zu interpolieren, um eine Lärmmatrix zu erhalten.


Somit deckt GIS eine Vielzahl von Kompetenzbereichen ab, die in der Geografie eine entscheidende Rolle spielen. Wichtig ist dabei jedoch, dass GIS nicht einfach nur theoretisch vermittelt wird, sondern als Unterrichtsmethode angewendet wird, mit welcher man räumliche Inhalte anders vermitteln kann. Dies hebt auch Marcel Engel hervor, der GIS seit einigen Jahren im Geografieunterricht am Freien Gymnasium Zürich einsetzt: »GIS ist ein integrales Werkzeug des Unterrichts.«

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Wie sieht konkret der Einsatz im Unterricht aus und wie finde ich Blogs oder Unterrichtsszenarien zum Thema GIS Einsatz im Unterricht?

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Über Mittag im Lichthof häppchenweise die Aktivitäten des GIUZ kennenlernen: Ausstellungen, Diashows, Experimente, Interviews, Vorführungen, etc.

**Seminare & Podiumsdiskussionen**
Erfahren Sie, wie die bewegten 80er Jahre an den Fundamenten des Instituts kratzten und diskutieren Sie mit uns über aktuelle interdisziplinäre Forschung.

**Feiern & Get-together**
Alte Bekanntschaften auffrischen, neue entstehen lassen: In diesem Jubiläumsjahr gibt es dazu mehrere Gelegenheiten, auch ein Fest am 16. September!

**Save the dates!**
5. März 2020
14. Mai 2020
16. September 2020
November 2020

Weitere Infos: www.geo.uzh.ch/125
Urgence climatique et Anthropocène: quelles implications pour l’école?

Une conférence de Daniel Curnier
Docteur en sciences de l’environnement de l’UNIL

Mardi 3 mars 2020,
18 h 30 Aula des Cèdres
Avenue de Cour 33 bis, Lausanne
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tr>
<td>03.03.2020</td>
<td>18h30</td>
<td>Urgence climatique et Anthropocène : quelles implications pour l'école ?</td>
<td>Conférence de Daniel Curnier UNIL, Aula des Cèdres Avenue de Cour 33 bis, Lausanne</td>
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<tr>
<td>04.03.2020</td>
<td>14h15 – 15h15</td>
<td>Sonic Spaces: Voices, Intimacy and the Politics of Sound</td>
<td>Conference Luis Velasco-Pufleau Wednesdays, Room 324, Mittelstrasse 43, 3012 Bern</td>
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<td>05.03.2020</td>
<td></td>
<td>Geographie in Aufruhr</td>
<td>Uni Irchel, Zürich <a href="http://www.geo.uzh.ch">www.geo.uzh.ch</a></td>
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<td>18.03.2020</td>
<td>14h15 – 15h15</td>
<td>Small data (Deutsch) NutzerInngenerierte Daten und Partizipatives Kartieren, Flurina Wartmann</td>
<td>Room 324, Mittelstrasse 43, 3012 Bern</td>
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<td>20.03.2020</td>
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<td>Assemblée des délégué(e)s de l’ASG</td>
<td>Neuchâtel <a href="http://www.sciencesnaturelles.ch/organisations/swissgeography/portrait/meetings">www.sciencesnaturelles.ch/organisations/swissgeography/portrait/meetings</a></td>
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<td>25.03.2020</td>
<td>14h15 – 15h15</td>
<td>Ethnography of social media</td>
<td>Online and offline ethnography to research social media, Elisabetta Costa</td>
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<td>28.03.2020</td>
<td></td>
<td>Fachtagung Schulmuseum Bern Lernen im umbruch: wie verändern materialität und neue medien den unterricht?</td>
<td><a href="http://www.smb-konkret.ch">www.smb-konkret.ch</a></td>
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<td>08.04.2020</td>
<td>14h15 – 15h15</td>
<td>Geographies of film, Digging Deep – Erforschung von Geografien des Heimischen, Alex Gerbaulet</td>
<td>Room 324, Mittelstrasse 43, 3012 Bern</td>
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<td>15.04.2020</td>
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<td>Délai rédactionnel GeoAgenda 2020/2</td>
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