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Document Version
Final published version

Citation (APA)
Natarajan, A. N., & Goncalves, J. E. (2025). Weathering the Urban: Exploring the material implications of climate imaginaries for urban future-making. In *Urban Future-Making: Situating Agency Within the Built Environment: Book of Abstracts* (pp. 43). HafenCity University Hamburg.

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HafenCity University Hamburg

05–06 May 2025

URBAN FUTURE-MAKING: SITUATING AGENCY WITHIN THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

International conference

Book of Abstracts

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TUHH Hamburg University of Technology
URBAN FUTURE-MAKING

Institution: 1 Istanbul Technical University, Graduate School, Architectural Design Doctorate Program, Istanbul, Turkey 2 Istanbul Kent University, Faculty of Art and Design, Department of Interior Architecture, Istanbul, Turkey
Keywords: agency; agential realism; construction site; intra-actions; materiality; post-Humanism

The traditional architectural discourse often conceptualizes the construction process around partial and anthropocentric hierarchies, systematically diminishing the (in)visibility of various bodies. The paper focuses on a specific case study to investigate the construction site as a post-human phenomenon in which the material elements (human and non-human bodies, materials, tools, etc.) and discursive practices (regulations, decisions, evaluations) involved in the construction process mutually influence one another. The paper employs Karen Barad‘s concept of “Agential Realism” as a theoretical framework for discussion. Barad‘s approach (2007) provides an innovative perspective that enables the questioning of epistemological and ontological assumptions within the discipline of architecture, offering a more holistic and relational understanding of construction site dynamics. According to Barad (2007), agency is not a pre-existing attribute of specific entities but emerges through intra-actions, which constitute the ongoing relational entanglements through which human and non-human entities come into being and acquire their specific capacities. This meta-theoretical endeavour of conceptual reading builds on the situated knowledge I have developed as a researcher through regular observations at a construction site in Istanbul, Turkey. My situated body (Haraway, 2016) as a researcher actively engages in this process, contributing to acts of remembrance and reconstruction. As Butler (2016) emphasizes, the research process emerges from the interplay of diverse macro and micro actors, highlighting the collaborative and relational nature of knowledge production. In the case study, the neighbouring building begins to lean toward the construction site due to prolonged structural deterioration. Despite a demolition order for this adjacent structure, legal disputes among stakeholders impede any action. Within this context, various elements - including the material body of the deteriorating building, the temporal processes of decay, the ground conditions of the site, and the regulatory frameworks governing construction practices - can be interpreted as agents. The unforeseen behaviour of the neighbouring building disrupts the construction timeline, necessitating intervention. To proceed with the project, the heavily deteriorated wall of the adjacent structure is partially removed using a concrete breaker. During this process, deeper material realities emerge: a seashell embedded in the wall of the neighbouring building becomes a site of narrative and material significance. This discovery highlights the agency of the ground itself, revealing the system‘s inherent vulnerabilities (Butler, 2016) and its entanglement with political phenomena in Turkey, such as zoning amnesties and urban transformation policies. The embodied body of the construction site offers a distinct field of inquiry, enabling a deeper understanding of how agency is constituted and reconfigured within a complex phenomena of human and non-human bodies, varying scales and times, living and non-living entities, and the interplay of material and discursive forces.

Weathering the Urban: Exploring the Material Implications of Climate Imaginaries for Urban Future-Making

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Keywords: climate imaginaries; materiality; medium; participatory planning; urban futures; weathering

As climate change poses a new existential and epistemological crisis, many have now turned to the future to look into ways to imagine and foster an alternative to the current methods of doing business as usual. Alongside this steady rise of attention towards future/futuring and imaginaries, attention has also been paid to matter and materiality within the broader social sciences. In this paper, we explore the material implications of urban climate imaginaries as sites of weathering in the context of urban planning. This paper has two objectives: first, to extend the understanding of mediation performed by materialities of climate imaginaries as embodied and situated and second, to illustrate the implications of this conceptual advancement for urban future-making. For this, we build on previous research to conceptualise materialities of climate imaginaries as normalising, circulating and producing climate imaginaries, thereby forefronting structural inequality inherent in its mediation. We further this discussion to situate embodied encounters of the climate as rooted in the mediation performed by materialities of climate imaginaries. For this, we borrow from feminist theoretical lens of weathering to understand the inseparability of structural inequalities from the bodily experiences of weather challenges dominant climate imaginaries. By doing so, we can understand the role of materialities of climate imaginaries as actively mediating or weathering situated weather relations of bodies. We demonstrate the implications of this re-framing in the context of participatory planning to illustrate the inter-implicated nature of planning for the future - where activities of practitioners materialise and shape embodied climatic encounters. We also illustrate the broader implications of understanding the materialities of climate imaginaries and possible future trajectories for researching the weathering effects of mediated climate imaginaries. Understanding climate imaginaries as sites of weathering allows us to deconstruct the complex web of enmeshed weathering activities that make the weather different for diverse bodies, reconceptualising future-making as bound in the present and the past. This paper thus offers a critical lens to account for embodied and materially situated ontologies for advancing justice-centred planning interventions for the future.