

Research Project

Art/articulations: Art and the formation of Social Space in African Cities

Third-party funded project

Project title Art/articulations: Art and the formation of Social Space in African Cities

Principal Investigator(s) Förster, Till ;

Project Members Siegenthaler, Fiona ; Unseld, Frederik ; Jenni, Franziska ;

Organisation / Research unit

Departement Gesellschaftswissenschaften / Visuelle und politische Ethnologie (Förster)

Department

Project start 01.02.2015

Probable end 31.01.2019

Status Completed

Art practices in African cities are as diverse as urban life itself. They foster the articulation of distinct social and cultural imaginaries, addressing plural audiences. Research in African art, however, tends to either emphasize art production with a long local or regional history or art that is embedded in and speaks to the contemporary international artworld, targeting a transnational or global rather than a local audience. This division results in two separate bodies of research; anthropological and art historical. This project aims at overcoming these shortcomings by adopting a thoroughly interdisciplinary approach addressing multiple art practices and the formation of social spaces as one.

Art as practice is unavoidably embedded in a social context and creates a social space. Whether this space is more local or more international or bridges the two is an open question that only empirical research can answer. Some artists embrace an activist position; others demonstrate social sensibility while still others see their art as an aesthetic intervention in public and private spaces. All these art practices may reflect social realities and in turn shape the formation of social and cultural spaces: Urban images are perceived, conceived, and lived through art and social spaces created through artistic practice. The dialectic relationship between artistic articulation and social space transgresses dichotomies such as private-public or local-global. At an empirical level, this project hence aims at understanding aesthetic practice and processes of artistic articulations as part of the creation and transformation of social spaces in urban Africa. Its central question is:

– How does art as a part of expressive culture inform the formation of social space?

This question will be examined from three complementary perspectives: 1.) How do artists aesthetically articulate images of the social within these spaces? 2.) How do these images and practices inform social imaginaries, and how do the latter inform those of the artists? 3.) What are the dialectics between social imaginaries and imageries, and their visual and performative forms of expression?

Our **empirical approach** is based on an understanding of art as social agency that unfolds in urban life-worlds and that shapes and is shaped by the urban. Methodologically, this project thus focuses on artists, their art practices, their audiences, and the interrelation between physical sites and virtual spheres as social as well as political spaces. We will address the interaction of individual artists, artists' associations and art practices with specific social actors, representing different social strata and groups. Therefore, we also need to examine art practices that apparently do not take place in public places but address urbanites in other, sometimes secluded social and political spaces.

Based on **long-term field research**, the research team will engage in a comparison of four African cities: Kampala (Uganda, Siegenthaler), Kisumu (Kenya, PhD student to be announced shortly) in East Africa and Bamako (Mali, PhD student to be announced shortly) and Korhogo (Côte d'Ivoire, Förster)

in West Africa. The researchers start from existing contacts to artists and associations and will enlarge the scope of their inquiries as defined by specific milestones. The comparative approach will generate general knowledge about the production of social space through art in Africa and theoretical insights in how the formation of social space is related to imageries and imaginaries of the social.

The project is also a **network of exchange and cooperation** with African artists and art institutions, including the Research Group on Visual Culture at the Institute of Social Anthropology Basel and university departments of art and anthropology at the Universities of Cocody, Bouaké, Kampala and Eldoret.

Keywords African art, contemporary art, urban art, articulation, Kenya, Uganda, Mali, Côte d'Ivoire, urbanity, visual art, performing arts

Financed by

Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF)

Add publication

Published results

3329825, Siegenthaler, Fiona; Förster, Till, Re-imagining African cities. the arts and urban politics, 0253-3952, Publication: Authored Book (Verfasser eines eigenständigen Buches)

Add documents

Specify cooperation partners

ID	Kreditinhaber	Kooperationspartner	Institution	Laufzeit - von	Laufzeit - bis
2794923	Förster, Till	Akindès, Francis, Professor	Université de Bouaké	01.10.2014	31.07.2022
3342742	Förster, Till	Nyairo, Joyce	Moi University, Eldoret	01.02.2015	31.07.2022
3342744	Förster, Till	Nakazibwe, Venny, Dr.	Margaret Trowell School of Industr. and Fine Arts, Makerere University, Kampala	01.02.2015	31.01.2018
3342745	Förster, Till	Kasule, Kizito Maria	Margaret Trowell School of Industr. and Fine Arts, Makerere University, Kampala	01.02.2015	31.01.2018
3342746	Förster, Till	Macamo, Elisio, Prof. Dr.	Center for African Studies, Basel	01.02.2015	31.07.2022
3342747	Förster, Till	Cissoko, Moussa, Dr.	Point Sud, Bamako	01.02.2015	31.07.2022
3342748	Förster, Till	Konaté, Yacouba, Prof. Dr.	Université de Cocody Abidjan	01.02.2015	31.07.2022
3342750	Förster, Till	Kasfir, Sidney Littlefield, Prof. Dr.	Emerita Emory University	01.02.2015	31.01.2018
3342752	Förster, Till	Vierke, Ulf, Dr.	IWALEWA-Haus, Bayreuth	01.02.2015	31.01.2018
3342754	Förster, Till	Siegert, Nadine	IWALEWA-Haus, Bayreuth	01.02.2015	31.01.2018