CONFERENCE DETAILS

Conference: SPT 2017 – The Grammar of Things
Track title: <u>Questioning the Grammar of 'Critical' Infrastructures</u>

Abstract:

Cities today rely on the effective functioning of Critical Infrastructures. These infrastructures' incapacity can lead to debilitating impacts affecting individual nations and occasionally cascading across borders (Clinton;1996). The concepts of resilience, (inter-)dependency and risks have been central in categorizing infrastructure as 'critical' (Katina & Hester;2013). Hence, in order to deepen the understanding of 'Criticality', questions need to be raised on the grammar of infrastructures in Socio-technical System (STS).

STS theories of infrastructure focused predominantly on the global north implicitly assign 'critical' to *networked system*s that supply water, wastewater, energy, communications, and transportations services (Moteff et al., 2003). However, this implicitness varies due to the different everyday realities of the Users that contribute to the social shaping of infrastructure (Oudshoorn 1996). Earlier research in contrast emphasises the predominant role of governments in defining when, how and to what degree an infrastructure is considered critical (Moteff et al., 2003). This is further accentuated by the ongoing debate on what and whose needs are to be met in the existing technological arrangements of people and things.

Therefore, this thematic track invites reflections on the technological norms and standards of 'critical' infrastructure. The intention is to examine the conditions and qualities that have defined infrastructure as 'critical' in existing debates. Furthermore, the track can include investigations on when infrastructure should/could be defined as 'critical'. The objective of the track panels is to gather varied impressions/insights on incorporating contextuality when assigning 'critical' as a prefix to infrastructure.

Hence we welcome contributions from varied perspectives with the aim of initiating a discussion on the realities and temporalities of 'critical' infrastructures and its translation/transferability from a concept to implementation.

Suggested themes, topics and questions that can be explored:

Themes & Topics

- Everyday contestations and negotiations surrounding infrastructure
- Concepts of Redundancy (with)in Technological systems
- Infrastructure challenges faced in the Global South
- Infrastructural Configuration, Stability and Transition
- Co-existence within Socio-technical Systems
- Co-production of Safety for Critical Infrastructure
- Increased vulnerabilities due to Infrastructural Violence
- Infrastructural Injustice- Rights to the City
- Geographies of power: Who, for/by whom
- Historical trajectories: Postcolonial debates
- Translation and adaptation of the concept of 'criticality'
- Role of governance and governments
- Threats to National Security
- Socio-environmental Resilience
- Interplay between systems of oppression: Gender, Race, and Class

Questions

- Within the grammar of 'critical' infrastructure, are there specific elements which could be more "critical" than others?
- How is 'critical' translated for precarious and hybrid infrastructure conditions present in the global south?
- Can debates on criticality lead to new questions being raised on universality of single dominant infrastructure networks?
- Can criticality be measured, ranked and prioritised? Do the factors of criticality differ contextually?

Submission of abstracts

Proposals for contributions to this track can be made by sending 350-word abstracts by December 5, 2016.Please make sure to submit to the special track 'Questioning the grammar of 'Critical' Infrastructures'.

Track organizers

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References

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