Cultural Ideology and Socio-Spatial and Environmental Justice in Planning and Design in Times of Planetary Crisis

Summary of Burcu Yiğit Turan's trial lecture for appointment as docent

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Urban landscapes are increasingly shaped by intersecting crises. Accelerating climate breakdown, deepening socio-spatial and environmental inequalities and injustices, racialised segregation, housing financialisation and political polarisation are just a few of these crises that are manifested in cities. Further ecological degradation, climate change vulnerabilities and violence over the extraction of resources and labour, both human and non-human, in the peripheries, set the scene behind urbanisation processes. In this context, urban greening and social sustainability have become the dominant frameworks guiding urban planning and landscape architecture. These disciplines are often argued to be socio-political agents in the transformation towards just and equitable socio-spatial and environmental futures.

The critique of the neoliberal urbanisation and sustainable urban development paradigm, particularly in the context of the rise of authoritarian, far-right, anti-immigrant politics and the scrutiny of racialisation processes in the Nordic context, has developed considerably over the last decade, particularly within critical cultural geography scholarship. However, the role of cultural (racial) ideologies and imaginaries in perpetuating socio-spatial and environmental injustices, and their influence on urban landscape planning and design, has been obscured. This is particularly true in the context of sustainable urban development, despite social justice being an important component. In this context, I view planning and design as realms and structures that perpetuate or counter injustices. Accordingly, my postdoctoral research responds to the urgent need to shed analytical light on how racial, class-based and gender-based segregation and injustices are perpetuated in the realm of planning and design and how they can be countered.

In this lecture, which is based on in-depth qualitative research and case studies from various geographical contexts, including Istanbul, Copenhagen, Uppsala and Malmö, I will present some of the findings from these studies. I will focus particularly on the Nordic context, analysing and theorising different modalities of 'white' socio-spatial epistemology. I will explore the role of planning and design in the racialisation of cities and landscapes and the reproduction of segregation within the broader context of racial capitalism, neoliberalisation and a far-right, anti-immigrant political climate. I delineate the cultural ideologies that infiltrate socio-spatial ontologies and epistemologies when defining sustainability and various temporalities in urban planning and landscape architecture, including conceptualisations, theories, methods, analysis,

representations, and participatory processes. I also explore how these ideologies are experienced and challenged by marginalised groups and practitioners.

However, I will further explore how these studies in the Nordic context and Istanbul provide a basis for understanding planetary urbanisation by considering different historical trajectories and exploring scholarly pathways for reclaiming the conceptualisation of sustainable urban development within a planetary ethics and justice framework. My studies draw on critical urban and environmental sociology, cultural geography, migration and cultural studies (especially critical whiteness studies), Black geographies and sociology, urban political ecology, and feminist, anti-racist and de/anti-colonial perspectives, all of which are underrepresented in planning and design research.

Finally, I will briefly outline my future research agenda, as well as the theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical considerations for urban and environmental justice studies in planning and design research within the Nordic context. This agenda will focus particularly on how emerging cultural (racial) ideologies of space and environmentalism intersect with matters of climate politics and justice. I will argue for the need for deeper ethnographies of planning and design to explore how planners and designers navigate such cultural ideologies within larger ecosystems of actors, power structures and epistemological injustices/justices.