

# Introduction to the Fourth International Symposium on Platial Information Science

– Editorial –

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The fourth edition of the International Symposium on Platial Information Science (PLATIAL'23) is themed *Transforming Places*. This motto can be read in two ways: as a status describing places in flux, and in imperative form, echoing a proactive human role in changing the physical, social, economic, cultural, and other conditions of our immediate and wider surroundings. Such transformations can affect different geographical parameters and they can take place at different scales. Some processes of place transformation, like urban shrinkage (e.g., Meng and Long, 2022; Wolff and Wiechmann, 2018) and gentrification (e.g., Frank, 2021; R erat et al., 2010), are spatially confined and affect single cities or neighbourhoods. Others are linked to national or supranational policies or other large-scale processes and thus affect societies as a whole. Examples of the latter are infrastructural changes affecting everyday practices (e.g., Sonea and Westerholt, 2021; Taylor and Pettit, 2020), cultural changes (e.g., Mocnik, 2018; Neff, 2005), to name but a few. As one of the largest post-industrial landscapes in Europe, the German Ruhr has undergone many of the types of transformations outlined above simultaneously. Starting with coal mining in the late Middle Ages and driven by steel milling and other heavy industries during the industrialization of the 19th and 20th centuries, the region was confronted with various, often simultaneous changes that affected economic, cultural, social, political, and other societal domains. These changes continue to this day, slowly transforming the Ruhr from heavy industry and coal to a service-oriented economy. The scale of these changes makes the Ruhr a perfect location for this year's symposium hosted by TU Dortmund University.

The twelve papers presented at the PLATIAL'23 Symposium reflect a broad spectrum of engagement with places and place information. One session is on place and narratives, and it includes three text-related contributions. With a view to better understanding individual and collective nature-related values, Teurlinx et al. (2023) discuss a case study on extracting social, cultural, and ecological perspectives on nature from place descriptions. In a related approach, Steiner et al. (2023) set out a way of extracting sense of place from narratives that involves a novel kind of representation called spatio-textual regions. Williams et al. (2023) close the session with a paper looking at in situ engagements with places by walkers. The latter work connects to the session on place and movement. Kremer and Wagner (2023) present an approach that also focusses on walking, but with an emphasis on providing place-related material in the field. In contrast, Novack et al. (2023) focus on perceptual aspects of physical environments and how these influence the place impressions of walkers. Since movement data usually also implies revealing one's location, Liu et al. (2023) present a location privacy approach. The environments in which we move are often planned. Zhao and Sun (2023) therefore discuss tactics of public engagement in the context of street experiments conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic that produced deliberate changes in street use. Kaminski et al. (2023) also address the issue of participation and presents work that combines participatory GIS with scenario planning, focussing on rural areas. A third planning-oriented contribution by Cobs-Mu oz and Slivinskaya (2023) expand the perspective

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on the teaching of the concept of place in the context of planning degrees. A fourth session offers insights into conceptual aspects of place. Egorova and Bae (2023) discuss the nexus between citizen science and place using the example of urban imaginaries of refugee children. Top et al. (2023) use an analogy-based approach to argue for the interplay between spaces and representations of place paralleling the duality between conceptual extent and intent. Finally, Mocnik (2023) presents the idea of assembling a corpus of place representations to allow for their systematic empirical study.

The symposium also comprises two keynotes, two workshops, and two excursions. The two keynotes were presented by Agnieszka Leszczynski (Western University) and Juliane Czierpka (Ruhr University Bochum). Agnieszka Leszczynski's keynote added an important additional aspect to the symposium: the impact of virtuality and platforms on places. This perspective of digital geography was underpinned by three examples from North American cities, showing how the digital influences the way we perceive, imagine, and use urban spaces. The keynote proposed platforms as a new class of amenities alongside traditional and emplaced amenities. The keynote by Juliane Czierpka took a historiographical perspective and outlined historical developments in the Ruhr and how these have influenced the ways in which people both internally and from the outside understand and mentally represent the area. Thereby, the focus was on the role of women in the deindustrialization of the Ruhr. This talk was complemented by an excursion to Dortmund's North End (in German: 'Nordstadt'), a neighbourhood now dominated by immigrants that initially benefited from the rise of the nearby steel industry and was later greatly affected by its decline. In addition to the keynote lectures, the workshops also offered additional focal points: Slivinskaya and Cobs-Muñoz (2023; both TU Dortmund University) introduced the audience to the Place Standard Tool, which has been developed by a Scottish consortium of public and private actors. Further, Velazco-Londoño (2023; TU Dortmund University) offered a spatial analytical perspective on the study of urban areas. Overall, the symposium programme offered three rich and insightful days that stimulated plenty of platial discussions!

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