

Site Responsiveness (Vienna, 11–13 Jun 26)

University of Vienna, Jun 11–13, 2026

Deadline: Feb 2, 2026

Christoph Chwatal

Conference: "Site Responsiveness: Translocal Interdependencies and Heterogeneous Temporalities in Art and Architecture", at the University of Vienna, June 11–13, 2026.

It is a widely shared diagnosis that translocal connectivity and interdependence of events and processes are defining characteristics of the present. Beyond the development of increasingly powerful infrastructures for the transport of goods and data – which have led to the globally synchronized information sphere – it is the destabilization of the planetary, and of countless local ecosystems that shapes this condition. Against this backdrop, the concept of the site requires a fundamental revision. Sites can no longer be defined as fixed anchor points or stable stages for events. They are nodes and overlapping zones of diverse interdependent processes, and thus themselves dynamically determined. What happens locally is linked to conditions and events in countless other places by processes of the most diverse kinds – from the movement of digital data through fiber-optic cables to the drifting of plastic waste in the ocean. Even inert geological foundations are affected by planetary transformations ranging from melting permafrost and rising sea levels to globalized extraction and supply chains.

The conference aims to explore how art and architecture over the last decades have responded to this dynamism and translocal interdependence. Since at least the 1960s, in relation to the crisis of modernist planning concepts and of the artwork's formal autonomy, architects and artists have developed a range of explicitly "site-specific" approaches. The evolution of these approaches – from a "literal" understanding of the site in terms of spatial and material conditions, through "social" definitions emphasizing institutional and symbolic registers, to more recent conceptions foregrounding ecological and infrastructural embedment – has been extensively discussed. The conference will focus in particular on cases in which the complexity of the site becomes fully operative: where the multiplicity and heterogeneity of the factors and processes that constitute a site – while simultaneously opening it onto a wider translocal network – come to the fore.

Shifting the emphasis from site specificity to site responsiveness is meant to further draw attention to practices that do not primarily adapt to their sites, but instead reconfigure the weave of processes that constitute them – by creating new couplings, blocking or accelerating processes, by exposing and sharpening tensions and contradictions among site-defining factors, or by seeking forms of mediation and recalibration. The notion of responsiveness – resonating with current debates on responsibility and "response-ability," which extend beyond human-centered politics toward the cohabitation of multiple species on a fragile planet – encompasses both poles: critical exposure as well as mediation and recalibration. We thus consider as responsive both, projects

that seek, for example, to balance the imperatives of climate adaptation for buildings or urban structures with competing economic, social, or heritage-related interests; and projects that trace and map histories and present configurations of exploitation and capital accumulation within a global economic system through their concrete effects at specific sites. A responsive engagement always operates within this tension between a critical inquiry and a dialogical or polylogical exchange with the diverse factors that constitute its site. The aim of the conference is to test responsiveness as an analytical category for artistic, architectural, and urban practices. Special emphasis will be placed on translocal relations and on the heterogeneity of the processes that shape places and with which responsive practices interact.

The conference also seeks to foster comparison and exchange between architectural and urban practices—often deeply shaped and constrained by economic and social conditions – and the exploratory, experimental character of semi-autonomous artistic interventions. We are convinced that this divergence in structural conditions can be illuminating for both sides: it sharpens self-reflection, helps identify blind spots, and challenges taken-for-granted assumptions.

We welcome contributions from the areas of art, architecture, urbanism, and landscape architecture that combine theoretical reflection with concrete case studies. We invite submissions that explore questions such as:

- How do artistic and architectural practices register and intervene in the interactions among ecological, technological, social, and legal processes? Which means, tools, and procedures do they employ to coordinate or reconfigure the weave of relations that constitute a site?
- How do these practices account for translocal relations, long-distance dependencies, and the interferences between geographically dispersed sites?
- How do they address heterogeneous temporalities, from slow geological and material rhythms to high-frequency communicative and infrastructural processes?
- Which procedures do these practices use to detect, articulate, or expose the tensions and contradictions that shape their sites, and how do they subsequently mediate or recalibrate the heterogeneous processes involved?
- How can responsiveness be theorized in ways that go beyond efficiency, adaptation, or sustainability?

Please submit an abstract (300 words) and a bio (100 words) to Christoph Chwatal (christoph.chwatal@univie.ac.at) and Ludovica Tomarchio (l.tomarchio@udk-berlin.de) by February 2, 2026. Selected speakers will be notified by March 2, 2026. We can provide funding towards travel and accommodation expenses.

The conference is organized by Sebastian Egenhofer, Susanne Hauser, Stefan Neuner, Christoph Chwatal, and Ludovica Tomarchio. It serves as a foundation for a future publication within the framework of the NOMIS Foundation-funded research project “Site Complexes: Responsive Practices for the 21st Century” (University of Vienna/Berlin University of the Arts).

Reference:

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<<https://arthist.net/archive/51338>>.