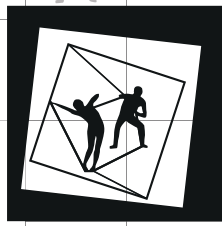


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EURAU - EUROPEAN RESEARCH ON ARCHITECTURE
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**IN-PRESENCE /
THE BODY AND
THE SPACE**

The role of corporeity in the era of virtualization

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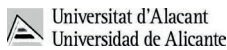
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The Department of Architecture and Urban Studies of the Politecnico di Milano organises at the School of Architecture Urban Planning Construction Engineering (AUIC), EURAU Milan 2024 "IN-PRESENCE / THE BODY AND THE SPACE - The role of corporeity in the era of virtualization", the eleventh edition of the international conference, which takes place from 19 to 22 June 2024.



/ EURAU Milan 2024

11th INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

EUROPEAN RESEARCH ON ARCHITECTURE
AND URBANISM INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

IN-PRESENCE / THE BODY AND THE SPACE

The role of corporeity in the era of virtualization

For those who deal with the city and the territory, space refers to the body
(C. Bianchetti)

The EURAU Milan 2024 Conference aims to unpack the significance of corporeality in contemporary times and its relevance for the upcoming years. Specifically, the focus is on the relation between body and space and how this relates to architecture, the city and the environment, interpreted as physical facts and processes. Within the background of a technological turn, the focus is now on what has changed or will further change in this relationship and what, on the opposite, remains unalterable, inherently bound to the material and impervious to the virtual.

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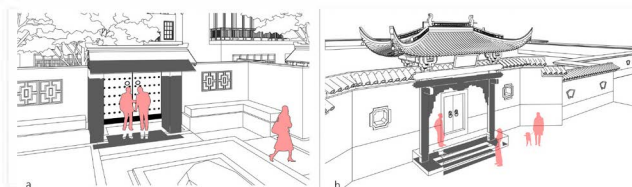
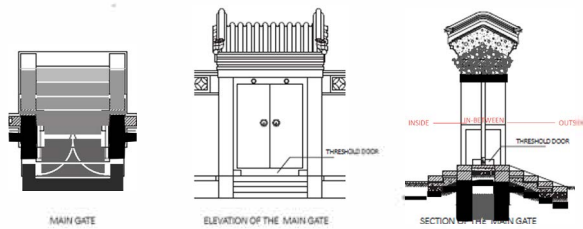
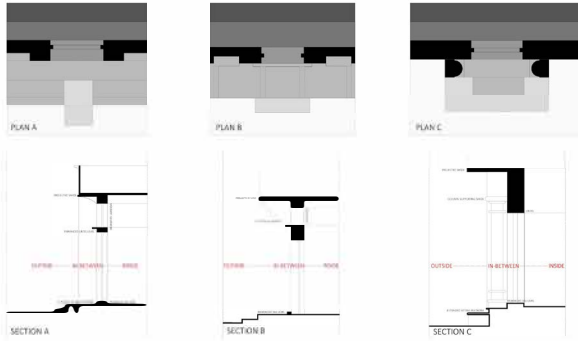
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The [socio-cultural] production of space. Doorstep: Exploring threshold in non-western contexts

Key Words

Socio-cultural space, Threshold, Doorstep, Boundaries, Collective realm

The post-modern era surged a notable interest in the conceptualisation of 'space' across diverse disciplines. Prominent philosophers, geographers, sociologists, and theorists beckoned a new, 'socio-cultural' turn in understanding space. As for Henri Lefebvre (1991), space and society are two inseparable components: "[Social] space is a [social] product" (Lefebvre 1991, p.26). Contemporary architectural discourse integrated philosophical concepts of space, enriching interdisciplinary interpretations and making space an inextricable architectural component. "Any definition of architecture itself requires a prior analysis and exposition of the concept of space" (Lefebvre 1991, p.15). By the second half of the twentieth century, the discourse centralised the social construct of space, moving away from the Euclidean space and aesthetic concerns towards the social nature of space, or space as experienced by humans through uses, activities, inhabitations, appropriations, and the gamut of social and cultural prodigies. Such conceptualisations paved the way for renewed thematic discussions and revaluations of conventional concepts of space, such as new ways of interpreting the relationships between humans, objects, and space while overcoming the dialectics of inside/outside and public/private - through the redefinition of architectural boundaries, "thresholds, and interstices, the dialectics of inside and outside, and the complex relationships among interiorities and exteriorities" (Popov, 2010, p.91).

The overcoming of these polarities, which, in their new blurred relations, still afflict our contemporary condition, was symbolised by the simplest element of transition between public and private, "from street to home: the 'doorstep' by Team 10 (modern) architects" (Marchi 2017, p.156), who expressed their ideas about the archetypical conception of the 'threshold'. Aldo Van Eyck (1962/2008) adopted the *zwischen* (in-between) and transformed it from a non-spatial to a spatial concept. This radical concept was also central to the framework of

the CIAM '53 (International Congress of Modern Architecture - 1953) as "Extensions of the Dwelling" (Mumford 2002). The concept rejects conventional oppositions, suggesting a 'third' space perspective that surpasses polarities without settling in the middle and embracing the tension between inside and outside (Secci & Thibault 2005). The in-between third space fosters a nuanced understanding and encourages creative exploration beyond binary thinking. Hence, the in-between threshold (doorstep) is a space of informal relationships, mediating between the dwelling and the street, whose indefinite limits constitute the third element between the inside and the outside, between the individual and the collective realm.

"The phenomenon of the threshold thrives on spatial ambivalence" (Boettger 2014, p.10), suggesting that the threshold is a transitional space where conflicting spaces intersect and socio-cultural aspects interact. Rather than resolving these tensions, threshold embodies them, highlighting the complexity and continuity of human experiences.

This extended abstract aims to develop a corresponding discourse on the (socio-cultural) production of (threshold) space in the non-western context - (Lahore) Pakistan, and (Chengdu) China. The basis of this research comes from the spatialisation of socio-cultural phenomena, integrating Lefebvre's notion of the social production of space and Van Eyck's conceptualisation of threshold as a socio-spatial relation between the private inside and public outside, particularly 'the home and the street'. When applied to non-Western contexts, these ideas remain highly pertinent, as significant types of threshold spaces have profoundly existed in them, reflecting a similar concept of embodied tension but manifesting distinctively due to peculiar social dynamics and cultural norms. The authors attempted to use a cross-cultural approach, employing 'drawing' as a method of enquiry to illustrate the fundamental disposition of threshold, doorstep, as a socio-cultural process and product.

Tharra in the Walled City of Lahore

In the organic urban layout of Lahore's walled city, the concept of close-knit *mohalla* (sub-neighbourhood) emerges, characterised by the coexistence of extended family members - a joint-family system, aligning with socialist ideals that emphasise shared living, wherein individuals equally enjoy the pleasures of collective life (Nevile 2006). These *mohalla*(s) are usually formed according to the families' ethnicity, religious sects, races or occupations or by different trade groups, "where families reside together for many generations" (Jamil et al. 2022, p.356). The town's layout intricately blends social and cultural activities, interweaving public and private spaces in pedestrian-friendly ways while "nurturing community engagement" (Malik et al. 2017, p.136). The narrow labyrinth street pattern and juxtaposition of houses were initially intended as a defence system against invaders and a strategy against the harsh climate of Lahore; this urban morphology eventually contributed to cultivating a vibrant collective realm. The socio-cultural literal form of doorstep in Lahore's Walled City is called the *tharra* - an extended deck or raised platform at the entrance that intricately links the street to the house. *Tharra*(s) function as mediating spaces between components that regulate their proportions and dialectic and serve as social spaces that facilitate interaction with the neighbourhood at the street level. Through these *tharra*(s), the streets become an 'extension of the dwelling', a safe space for women during the day while keeping 'eyes on the streets' while children play in them. In the evenings, *tharra*(s) become a hub for men to socialise and talk about current affairs, often until late at night. In the early morning, the elderly residents take to these decks to bask in the first rays of sunlight, ensuring they receive their daily doses of vitamin D while reading newspapers. *Tharra*(s) do not align with the binaries (outside/inside and public/private) they connect; instead, they represent the 'third' defining their relationships. Their 'in-betweenness', and conceivably their inherent ambiguity, makes them hubs of multiplicity, rich in varied meanings and functional possibilities, deeply rooted in the cultural norms.

Menkan in AnHui

In Chinese cultures, thresholds are characterised by distinctive and pronounced details. The Chinese doorstep known as *menkan* - extends beyond its physical function and embodies a socio-cultural significance deeply rooted in traditions. The *menkan* is commonly intricately crafted wooden doorsills, usually ranging from 8 to 12 cm in height; however, its elevation may extend up to 20 to 30cm in some instances and is supposed to "protect the inhabitants from evil spirits" (Boettger 2014, p.21). A taller threshold symbolises wealth and power and acts as a functional barrier, preventing tiny pests, rainwater, and strong winds from entering the home. Beyond its practical function of demarcating boundaries and setting the tone for entering a space, the *menkan* also encapsulates a code of conduct - it is a silent yet powerful reminder for visitors to approach with reverence and respect (He 2012). This cultural etiquette emphasises the importance of politeness and gentleness before entering a space—a subtle gesture deeply ingrained in Chinese culture. The *menkan* is not uniform across China; it exhibits regional

variations in materials and colours. Stone thresholds are standard among economically modest households, while affluent families opt for expansive materials like mahogany wood. For example, within the Palace Museum (formerly known as the 'Forbidden City') in Beijing, the doorsills are intentionally painted red, symbolising imperial power. They are believed to bring good fortune, aligning with the historical and cultural significance associated with the site. While urbanisation has diminished its prevalence in cities, traditional villages and specific architectural contexts (like Hui-style structures), maintain the cultural importance of thresholds (Nie et al. 2023). The doorstep in Hui-style architecture is an integral component of the crucial structure called 'Pailou' (the main gate of the building). These robust stone-crafted thresholds are crucial beyond mere aesthetics (Cen et al. 2023). Their primary function is to shield the wooden doors from moisture, ensuring their longevity in a climate prone to dampness.

Conclusion

The 'doorstep' is a threshold space with a purpose, where meaning flows through, transforming mediation volumes into actual places. Distinct spatial characteristics make it a 'third' space, which embraces the tension between opposites (inside/outside and public/private). It unfolds socio-cultural possibilities of collective living, constructing a unique experience as one crosses, pauses, or uses it. It is a space that is intermediate and indeterminate (or ambiguous) but possesses specific social constructs and particular cultural meanings. The research on cross-cultural meanings and significance of doorstep is intriguing due to its depth and multifarious complexity, illustrating the rich diversity of human culture and traditions. In Western contexts, the doorstep primarily implies a boundary between the private inside and the public outside, marking the transition from the individual domain (home) to the collective realm of the street. Whereas, in non-Western contexts, the doorstep carries additional cultural significance - serving as a gathering place for collective engagement, as a space for cultural practices such as storytelling or communal meals, or where rituals and ceremonies are performed to protect the home from negative influences, or which simply signifies the social status of the residents. The article provides insights into the varied perceptions, uses, cultural significance, and linguistic nuances associated with threshold space (doorstep) in two non-Western but dissimilar contexts. The socio-cultural manifestation of the doorstep in Lahore, the *tharra* enriches the urban fabric as mediating spaces, extending dwellings onto the streets. *Tharra*(s) serve as dynamic hubs for social interactions and cultural practices, daytime activities for women, and evening gatherings for men - a modest element that personifies various meanings and performs several functions - epitomising accessibility and inclusivity of the collective realm. Meanwhile, the *menkan* in Chinese culture goes beyond its practical function, symbolising the significance of solitude and traditional Chinese culture's hierarchical order. It symbolises wealth and power and serves as a silent code of conduct, emphasising politeness, whereas it is not utilised as a space for sitting or engaging in activities, as it is believed to bring about bad fortune. Regional variations in the doorstep's size, materials, and colours reflect economic and socio-cultural differences.

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FIGURES

Fig. 1 - Plans and sections of typical forms of Tharra (doorstep in Lahore's Walled City—raised sitting platforms at the entrance level with gradations of publicness from outside, in-between, to inside.

Fig. 2 - Socio-Cultural Production of the Tharra: (a) informal space for social interaction; (b) Interaction between inside and outside; (c) 'eyes on the street' while children play (d) appropriation by street vendors; (e) movement and connection; (f) extension of the dwelling on to the street.

Fig. 3 - A typical plan and section of Chinese Menkan (threshold space)—a traditional doorsill representing wealth and power.

Fig. 4 - Socio-Cultural Meanings of the Menkan: (a) connection between inside-outside with columns and shades in traditional Chinese architectural vocabulary of symbol of power and wealth with elaborate roof details.

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