

This Is Not A Gateway

Creating a forum for new ideas on urban citizenship

Overview

This Is Not A Gateway encourages people to step outside of professional and academic silos to discuss and shape the future of our cities.

This Is Not A Gateway (TINAG) was founded in 2007 by urbanist Trenton Oldfield and Deepa Naik, an artist and curator. Their vision was to make it easier to access and share new ideas about cities and urban issues. The organisation is a forum for 'emerging practitioners' – those who are in the early stages of their professions, either because they are young or because they have switched from another career. TINAG also seeks out perspectives from non-professionals who have first-hand experience of issues that affect urban citizens, such as migration and discrimination.

TINAG holds regular 'salons' where participants from a range of disciplines and backgrounds discuss pressing urban questions. The salons are informal, with an emphasis on interaction and networking. TINAG's first annual festival took place over three days at the end of October 2008 and the group is also developing an online archive of work on urban issues by emerging practitioners.

Trenton says: "By 2030, around 60 per cent of the global population will live in urban areas. We need to develop new forms of urban citizenship and it's important that we look outside of conventional academic and policy circuits to do this. It's a lot more complex than is currently understood." Some of the 'missing voices' that TINAG has already introduced into the urban issues arena are young artists and urban theorists working in the UK and individuals who were involved in the Paris riots of 2005.

Summary

- 70% of the global population will live in urban areas by 2050
- More than 2,500 people have signed up for the organisation's email updates
- Between 50 and 75 people attend each salon event
- More than 650 people have downloaded post-salon essays
- The online archive and library will launch in 2009

Background

Creating a platform

After moving to the UK, urbanist Trenton Oldfield noticed that there was no straightforward, reliable way for emerging practitioners to share their ideas with others working in related urban arenas. Since mainstream conferences and publications tend to focus on the work of established practitioners, Trenton felt that it would be useful to have a forum dedicated to the knowledge and experience of emerging practitioners. Several

years later, a conversation between Trenton and artist and curator Deepa Naik brought the idea of setting up a forum to the surface once again and together they decided to set up This Is Not A Gateway (TINAG).

The group's name refers to the Thames Gateway project and other 'gateways' that tend to crop up in regeneration initiatives. Trenton explains: "It's a playful reference – I was intrigued by the fact that these often ambitious 'gateways' really only exist on a theoretical level."

Establishing networks

In July 2007, TINAG formed a partnership with the Institute of Contemporary Arts through the Cultural Leadership Programme, a Government-funded scheme for building leadership skills across the creative and cultural industries. TINAG is run on an entirely voluntary basis and the partnership with the ICA provides the co-ordinators with support in areas such as event organisation and media relations.

Jaffer Kolb, Features Editor of the Architectural Journal, says "What distinguishes This Is Not A Gateway from mainstream lectures and symposia are the participants involved. Rather than the predictable set of architects, urban theorists and sociologists that dominate the cities circuit, TINAG brings less exposed voices, creating a platform both more original and democratic."

The Impact

Valuing different perspectives

TINAG's salon events explore urban issues from multiple perspectives. For example, at the November 2007 salon How Vermin Are Shaping Our Future Cities, the discussion was led by an academic, a zoological archaeologist and a pest controller. The informal atmosphere at salon events encourages participation, as Deepa explains: "The gaps in between presentations and sessions at conferences are often the most productive, with people chatting and networking over tea or lunch. At our events, these informal, self-organised gatherings take centre stage."

The first TINAG festival took place from 23-27 October 2008, with around 30 events taking place in cafes, cinemas and other community-based settings in Dalston, east London. During the three-day festival, emerging academics, activists, regeneration professionals, artists, politicians and others will get together to discuss issues relating to cities and urbanism. After the festival, TINAG will publish a book that collates discussion papers, commissioned essays and images from the event.

Disseminating ideas

Information and ideas shared at TINAG events are disseminated to a wider audience through the group's website and email list, which has more than 2,500 members. TINAG is also developing an online archive of research on urban issues by emerging practitioners. The archive will bring together work from a wide range of disciplines, so that a search on housing, for example, might produce results from artists, engineers and urban planners.

This approach is based on the idea of complexity and interconnectedness, providing multiple rather than singular results.

To extend its reach, TINAG is establishing partnerships with cultural organisations that share its ethos. Its UK partners include the Institute of Contemporary Arts, while its European network includes the Romanian Cultural Institute.

Good Practice

TINAG brings work from emerging practitioners to the attention of a broad audience, including established academics and policymakers. More established practitioners are welcomed at events to take part in the exchange of ideas and experience.

The group's salons and events place an emphasis on informal discussion and networking. Presentations last no longer than 10 minutes and are followed up with time for audience discussion. The fluid structure and relaxed atmosphere at the events makes them accessible to people who are unlikely to attend conventional conferences.

People from a broad range of professional disciplines are involved in TINAG. The interdisciplinary approach means that issues can be explored from a number of perspectives and interaction between professionals from different fields creates interesting opportunities for networking and collaboration.

Taking part in TINAG events gives emerging practitioners valuable experience of presenting their ideas to public audiences and responding to questions about their work. The organisation also helps emerging practitioners develop new skills through practical workshops on topics such as how to get published and writing proposals.

Members of the group's steering committee are drawn from different disciplines and countries. Steering committee membership is reviewed twice a year in order to keep it fresh and relevant to the group's programme of work.

Reference

Contact details

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Project Images



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