

Keynote:

International perspectives on Higher Education Space Development

By Prof. Dr. Lindy Osborne Burton (AUS) und Prof. Dr. Katja Ninnemann (DE)

Moderation: Dr. Martin Viehhauser

Higher education space development typically frames itself through European and North American precedents, with the assumption that frameworks generated in those settings transfer naturally to other contexts. Drawing on architectural education in South Africa, professional practice as an Architect in Australia, and current academic practice as Professor and Head of Architecture at Charles Darwin University in the Northern Territory of Australia, Lindy Osborne Burton brings a Global South perspective to questions of how university spaces and places hold their inhabitants, and how those inhabitants hold the architecture in return. Based on her experiences in research and practice of hybrid learning and working environments as well as her professorship Digitalization and Workspace Management at HTW Berlin, Katja Ninnemann contributes her perspectives on the relevance of learning space organization and spatial competency in context of higher education. In a dialogue between Lindy Osborne Burton and Katja Ninnemann, the session “International Perspectives on the Development of Higher Education Regions” opens a comparative exchange across geographical boundaries.

1. Perspectives from the Southern and Northern Hemispheres
2. Learning environment and organizational development in Higher Education
3. Experiences and examples
4. Questions that look to the future, may be thought-provoking, and encourage discussion

The keynote format is designed as a dialogical exchange in which each speaker presents image-based impulses, starts elaborating, followed by a discussion with the auditorium.

Outline of Lindy Osborne Burton´s theoretical framework:

The Architecture of Mutual Holding (Burton et al., 2026) is an emerging theoretical framework proposing that built environments emerge from three relationships of mutual constitution: 1.) Space, Place + Body; 2.) Building + Promise; and 3.) Architect + Inhabitant. The first holding consolidates ten established theories from environment-behaviour research into four foundations: Nature + Restoration; Inclusion + Access; Health + Space; and Behaviour + Belonging. The second draws on contextual ethics, including enacting of a Pedagogy of Kindness in higher education (Grant and Pittaway, 2025). The third positions co-design with inhabitants as primary evidence rather than secondary consultation. This theoretical framework is universal in structure and contextual in resolution.

Lindy’s perspectives in the Northern Territory of Australia ground this work in tropical and arid climates, vast distances, remote Aboriginal student populations, and Country as a body of knowledge with which architectural practice must engage seriously. These conditions sharpen rather than narrow the framework’s relevance to other geographic locations, including the central European setting in which the HESD symposium is taking place.

Outline of Katja Ninnemann ´ s theoretical positions:

Based on an understanding of space as a relational concept, learning environments do not simply emerge or exist, but are the result of ongoing social negotiation processes. This implies, that users and stakeholders need spatial competency to understand, select, use, operate and connect physical places on and off campus effectively and efficiently to enhance teaching and learning in-person, online and hybrid as well as to reflect and transform learning spaces from a subjective and institutional perspective of learning space organisation (Ninnemann et al. 2024). Building on this, an emerging theoretical framework of spatial competency proposes four central dimensions from an interdisciplinary perspective (Ninnemann, in press): I) places & symbols, II) mindset & awareness, III) practices & routines, and IV) culture & rules.

Drawing on her professional background in architecture and urban planning, Katja Ninnemann bases her work on an interdisciplinary understanding of spaces and places. With a research focus on organisational processes and institutional practices she emphasizes the shift from learning space design to learning space organisation and the need of evidence-based strategies regarding learning space development in higher education.

Literature:

Ninnemann, Katja (in press): Spatial competency. Expanding theoretical frameworks with an interdisciplinary perspective on learning spaces, In: Mahat, M., Aldridge, J. & Fisher, K. (Hrsg.) International Handbook of Research on Learning Environments. Springer.

Ninnemann, Katja; Celik, Pelin; Piehl, Jona (2024): The relevance of learning space organisation. Insights from a real-world laboratory for hybrid and student-centred learning and teaching. In: Andrew Smith, Alasdair Reid, Mina Jowkar, Suha Jaradat (Hrsg.) Transdisciplinary Workplace Research. Proceedings of the 4th Transdisciplinary Workplace Research (TWR) Conference, 4th – 7th September 2024, Edinburgh Napier University, UK. S. 523-536
<https://www.twrnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/TWR2024-Proceedings-Final.pdf>

Additional information:

The Architecture of Mutual Holding framework will be elaborated on in Lindy’s afternoon session through the Student Voice and an active participatory workshop.

The perspective of learning space organisation will be elaborated on Katja’s afternoon session at the block “Dialogs on special learning spaces” at the first day of the conference