
Moving Cities: Contested Views on Urban Life

Editors' Introduction

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The book *Moving Cities: Contested Views on Urban Life* is a publication promoted by the European Sociological Association Research Network 37 – Urban Sociology. As members of the coordination and board of this research network, our aim is to establish bridges throughout Europe and beyond, by contributing to the dissemination of relevant research in our field. These bridges link researchers interested in participating in the European scientific debate on cities and urban life, but they are also bridges between cities, favouring contexts of discussion and further comparative analysis between several urban settings and social configurations.

This book project started during the Midterm Conference of the RN37 – Urban Sociology held in 2016, in Krakow, Poland. The conference theme, *Moving Cities*, provoked scientific discussion about the dynamic changes of urban realms induced by the overpowering process of economic globalisation, and by bottom-up practices and social movements. How do these factors determine the challenges that local communities, institutions and cities already have to tackle and will face in the future? How can we develop sociological concepts, methods and interdisciplinary approaches for better understanding unstable, changing urban realities?

The response to the Midterm Conference Call for Papers was overwhelming, and the debate during the meeting was so productive that we decided to bind this project on paper, by creating a book that could hold the international discussion that took place during the conference. Therefore, and most of all, in planning this book, we were trying to open a space to continue the debate on the contested views on urban life arising from different research projects.

This book seeks questions and answers arising from scientific research – mainly sociological, but also in dialogue with other social sciences such as anthropology and architecture. From this interdisciplinary dialogue emerges the field of urban

studies, nurtured by different theoretical concepts and methodological approaches to urban settings and the social forces creating cities in everyday life. The twelve chapters of the book introduce us to very different research projects developed in diverse spaces and scales.

Saskia Sassen's chapter focuses on the practices that constitute economic globalisation, mobilising the categories of production and place. This perspective allows us not only to grasp the diversity of the work that is at the basis of the global economy, namely the most disadvantaged jobs usually forgotten in the narratives about this process, but also to focus on the role of global cities as the places where many of the resources necessary for the global economy are embedded.

The author identifies a “dynamic of valorisation” that widens the distance between the over-valorised and the under-valorised sectors of the global economy. This is viewed as an issue of perception and narrative: certain types of work, activities and workers are not acknowledged as part of the global economy. Sassen also points to the different profit-making capabilities of these different sectors of the economy and the corresponding consequences for the lives of low-wage workers, namely immigrants and women, as well as addressing the urban economy of global cities and what she calls the “geographies of centrality and marginality”.

The polarisation of the global economy on the urban scale creates an increasing divide within major cities that corresponds to a “new geography of centres and margins that not only contributes to strengthen existing inequalities but also sets in motion a whole series of new dynamics of inequality”.

In this context, many low-profit businesses have difficulties in succeed, even when there is demand for their services, and often become informal. These informal businesses constitute opportunities of work and entrepreneurship for immigrant women, who are the labour supply that facilitates low wages under bad working conditions. They become situated at the confluence of two different dynamics: on the one hand, they constitute a disempowered class of workers, but on the other hand their participation in the labour market brings changes in their gender relations and their place in society, enhancing the chances that their voice might be heard.

Building on this example, the author suggests that the global city – as the place both where global economic functions are centralised and where local transnational sub-cultures are re-territorialised – is a contested terrain where claims arise from global corporations and the disadvantaged immigrant sectors as well. This creates the possibility of new forms of citizenship practices and a new politics that goes beyond nationality.

Talja Blokland's text focuses on community as a classical but also modern term to understand the challenges of urban life patterns, shaped by diversity. With a relational approach to doing community, Blokland is able to provide a better un-

derstanding of community and urbanism under the conditions of diversity and inequality as new challenges of cities in the Global North. Therefore, the author discusses, based on long-term experiences, ranging from research on the basis of *Urban Bonds* (2013) and *Community and Urban Practice* (2017), the challenges of diversity and fluent identities within cities for concepts like belonging, embeddedness or the institutional framing of inter-personal interactions. It becomes clear that the concepts of diversity and community need to be questioned and redefined. Neither classical approaches, like the work of Elias and Scotson (1965) about established and outsider relations, nor class-based approaches (Mazlish 1989) explain the relationship between belonging and boundary making within diverse cities. Here, it is necessary to understand community as culture, which indicates a relation focused on practices, symbols and identities. Such a community as culture is not stable, and furthermore needs to be constructed and shaped by an ongoing process.

Joan Pujadas and Gaspar Maza, experienced anthropologists and ethnographers working on the bridges between anthropology and other disciplines of the field of urban studies, bring to the debate a very relevant feature of urban settings: mobility. In our daily activities devoted to work, study and provisioning, and in non-daily pursuits (leisure, cultural activities, etc.), we are increasingly seeking better ways and styles of mobility. The authors mobilise the concept of *space of life* from human geography to analyse how home and the residential space are no longer the main centre of urban life, having been replaced by the places where our daily activities unfold. The role of information and communication technologies in mobility are at the centre of the discussion.

Apart from the discussion on mobility and urban life, the reader can access methodological advances of mobile ethnography in the Metropolitan Region of Barcelona. Mobile ethnography is a very specific way of operationalising urban ethnography, where participant observation, deep interviewing and field diaries are key methods, but also the *scales game*, where the ethnographer jumps from the conversation with a train passenger to criticising urban planning, understanding the city in a broader way, as a node of nodes: a metropolitan region. The authors address two big challenges in this text. Firstly, by studying mobility in the city ethnographically, they question the place as an ethnographical shorthand (Cordiro/Vidal 2008) and show the need to develop a multi-scale analysis, close to the idea of the ethnography of urban flows (Ferro 2015). By reading this chapter, the reader will learn why mobility cannot be understood solely as a product of social relations, but also as a strong element that produces them.

Inspired by Henri Lefebvre's thoughts on space and time, **Ray Hutchison** develops a kind of archaeology of the "lost history" that "permeates" the urban centres of contemporary cities. Hutchison's text deconstructs the idea that cities always cul-

tivate their historic memory and patrimony. Remembering and highlighting urban historical memories is part of a selective process. The text addresses the significant social phenomenon of erasing historical memories of cities, namely by destroying the morphological settings where historical moments of conflict took place.

Hutchison's reflections contribute to the theory of urban studies by showing that municipal and governmental powers can erase or hide some historical spaces. This "lost history" is also an "empty space to call attention to places in the urban fabric where history abides but is not marked, where events of the past have been lost in the continuous cycle of destruction and reinvention of the contemporary city". The author explores this concept by focusing on three events from Chicago that were very important historical moments: the Great Railroad Strike of 1877: the political meeting on Market Street where Albert Parsons delivered his "Grand Army of the Starving" speech; the police attack on the Vorwärts Turner Hall, and the confrontation between armed troops and workers at the Halsted Street Viaduct. By focusing on these moments of social effervescence, Hutchison marks the need to recover empty spaces "that figure prominently in the labour protests and struggle for workers' rights of the early capitalist era".

Heitor Frúgoli Jr.'s chapter focuses on the theme of urban mega-events and how they change cities, momentarily, but also permanently. The author chose Pétonnet's floating ethnographic method (Pétonnet 1982) to assess the impacts of the 2014 World Cup on his own neighbourhood, Vila Madalena, in São Paulo, Brazil. His previous knowledge of the site and intense fieldwork enabled him to provide a vivid portrayal of the social interactions and of the uses of public space during the event.

Vila Madalena became a space of confluence for people attending the World Cup games, dividing the attention with the official spaces of the competition. The existing networks of leisure, consumption, and inhabitation became juxtaposed with those connected to the event and "the collective and festive dimension intensified already existing conflicts among residents and frequenters". Some of the conflicts resulted in repressive actions from the police, and the author claims that for these events to amplify the right to the city instead of originating repression practices and prohibitive actions from the authorities, better public management and mediation between the different actors involved and their diverse interests are imperatives.

The chapter also comprises a theoretical approach to the importance and meaning of public spaces in contemporary cities and insights about the specific field of urban ethnography. This was complemented with reflections about the ethnographer's own position in the field and the challenges of turning something familiar into something strange, following the path indicated by one of the most prominent Brazilian urban ethnographers, Gilberto Velho.

The chapter authored by **Maxime Felder and Loïc Pignolo** proposes a comparative analysis of shopping streets in three different French-speaking cities: Geneva, Paris and Brussels. The research draws on a strong line of research in urban sociology and urban studies on consumption in the city, including a comparative perspective. Sharon Zukin, for instance, has been working on this issue for several years (Zukin et al. 2009, Zukin 2012, Zukin/ Kasinitz/Chen 2015). In this text, the shops are viewed as “key elements of the objectification of a place identity”, where it can be negotiated and manufactured. Through observation, formal encounters and interviews with shop owners, shopkeepers and shop users, the authors build a story of each street, mobilising buildings, everyday practices, representations and the context and history of surrounding neighbourhoods. In each street, we get to know some businesses and some local actors.

In all the portrayed cases, the authors argue, shops are fundamental elements of the narratives about local identity, constituting physical markers of its different aspects. Felder and Pignolo share with the reader three ways in which shops may be interpreted as the “bricks-and-mortar of place identity”: as material components of the streetscape, designed by the owners whose decisions can affect the street’s look and feel; as symbolic means used to objectify place identity, and finally by allowing or restricting interpretations, through their mere presence.

Some shops might not cohere with a certain attempt to make sense of a place, and thus force the person or group to adjust the narrative and corresponding practices. The authors conclude by asserting that shops help narratives on place identity to retain coherence and stability, suggesting, however, that not all shops have the same urban influential capacities.

The chapter “Measuring Deprivation in the City of Barcelona: Incorporating Subjective and Objective Factors” by **Riccardo Valente** brings the reader to research on inequality in the city. The author specifically discusses the concept of “social insecurity”. This concept is part of the latest theoretical advances arising from the need to seek new ways to understand inequality and its consequences. The author wants to take into account both dimensions (the objective reality and the subjective perspective of the actors) that produce every configuration of a collective situation. To a certain extent, this idea is linked to the previous reflections on job insecurity by Robert Castel (2000), who studied the phenomenon of inequality and urban exclusion. Here, though, the concept would replace the term “resource deprivation”, developed within the theories of capacities, which defines situations of inequity in relation to the capacity for independence of individuals in their social lives.

The issue considered here is that the urban environment in which one lives could reduce this capacity when some places (neighbourhoods) collect problems

of physical unsafety, fear, illness and precariousness (unemployment, low level of education and low purchasing power).

The main contribution of this paper is an operational framework of the concept in four dimensions suggested by the literature: objective, subjective, health and ecological. In addition, the author applies this concept empirically in a big European city: Barcelona. Moreover, at the end, the article relates types of insecurity within geographical areas of this city, just as other pieces use different indicators of poverty and other indicators. Valente's proposal therefore allows further studies of this nature.

Rising social inequalities have a variety of effects on neighbourhoods in our cities. Demographic and migration shifts, structural change of labour economy, and neoliberal policies drive processes of socio-spatial (re)sorting that lead to either the decline or the ascent of neighbourhoods. For urban sociology, issues of social and ethnic mixing, downgrading, neighbourhood effects, and gentrification are at stake. Taking into account the development of the city as a whole, these contrary processes can often be observed side by side. The chapters authored by **Nunzia Borrelli**, **Teemu Kemppainen** and **Sonja Lakić** discuss these challenges.

Nunzia Borelli focuses on the relationship between social cohesion and competitiveness in Chicago. She analyses the Pilsen Mexican neighbourhood, at the edge of the Chicago loop, combining qualitative interviews with photographs and documents and providing an insight into the struggle with urban policy and gentrification in a classic immigration neighbourhood of Chicago. Obviously, urban policy strategies reinforce gentrification in the Pilsen neighbourhood by tax-based benefits for local entrepreneurs and cultural and tourist development of the neighbourhood infrastructure. However, the residents were not passive, and acted against the beginning of gentrification. They were able to go against the top-down policy of the municipality, and highlighted the long history of the neighbourhood as a tool to create cohesion. Another tale of the protest was the feeling of exclusion and the impression that the ongoing process of gentrification in their neighbourhood is nothing they can participate in. The author shows first that culture is an ambiguous tool to attract to a neighbourhood. On the one hand, it can promote life quality, while on the other it can lead to gentrification. Second, she discusses the role of civil-society enterprises, cultural institutions and social organisations in fighting gentrification.

Teemu Kemppainen's chapter also discusses the challenges of the aforementioned contrary processes from a different approach. He focuses on another type of neighbourhood: post-World War II housing estates in Finland. The reputation of these estates is that they are poor – and a lack of physical quality is observable in many blocks – but also their good shape and the social mixed background of the residents. The author criticises the unilateral view of these estates and analyses

their character through a representative survey in Finland. The database used in the research is provided by two research projects about perceived social disorder in Finnish housing estates built in the 1960s and 1970s. The author discusses the differences of perceived social disorder in these neighbourhoods, and also if the tenure structure of the neighbourhood is related to perceived social disorder. In addition, he looks at normative regulation within the estates. With multivariate regressions, he found that the perceived social disorder does not differ from other multi-storey areas, which means that the public discourse about the poor reputation of the estates is misleading. Finnish estates also show a high diversity in respect of tenure structure and socio-economic situation. If a neighbourhood has a high share of rental housing, the perceived social disorder is higher. Furthermore, normative regulation partly mediated the association of disadvantage and disorder.

Sonja Lakić focuses on the “self-managed” and “illegal” practices of house transformation by homeowners in the former social housing neighbourhood of Starčevica in Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Similar practices of transformation by city dwellers have previously been the subject of research in other cities. However, the analytical originality of this chapter relies on the relationship established between these practices and the socio-political context, in particular with the post-socialist process of transition in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In particular, this process led to privatisation of housing in Starčevica, which affected the social structure of the neighbourhood. Lakić proposes an understanding of ways of inhabiting urban space (private and public) and how they are a mirror of the individualism and privatisation processes dominating the post-socialist transition dynamics in this country. The research shows how macro-sociological forces and processes are expressed very clearly in the everyday lives of people living in the city. By doing interviews and entering the interstitial spaces of the neighbourhood inhabitants, Lakić tries to understand the complexity of this process through multi-scale lenses, analysing this social reality from up close and within, but also from outside and far away (Magnani, 2002). As the author’s approach examines the process of transition, historical data plays a very important role in the analysis. She therefore simultaneously develops a diachronic and a synchronic perspective of the sociological practices and discourses in order to grasp this reality.

In the interplay of Borrelli’s, Kemppainen’s and Lakić’s studies, it becomes clear that the challenges of neighbourhood can differ significantly within the same city, even if the first impression is that the social structure is similar. A detailed and informed look at a neighbourhood and its relational position to other neighbourhoods can provide information about the challenges for urban life. Besides the social market and practices of the residents, the tenure structure as well as the social opportunities within the neighbourhood need to be taken into account to paint

a broader picture of the ongoing development of the neighbourhood. For urban policy, these characteristics are essential for understanding how decisions impact a neighbourhood and which strategies can be helpful for further development, which is only possible with the real participation of the local population. Urban sociology should analyse how the “neighborhood strikes back” (Sieber/Cordeiro/Ferro 2012) in diverse urban settings.

Participation – a key term of the conception of urban civil society – has a long tradition in urban sociology. After 2009, in the context of the global crisis, its explanatory potential became much more powerful in studies on urban communities. The term “participation” – as presented in **Jennifer Morstein**’s paper on urban gardening – does not relate to the “classical” role of citizens who support formal institutions; instead, it relates to the citizens’ agency and their ability to create their city across or behind the institutional order. Urban gardening could be analysed as a mode of the regeneration of urban brownfields, as a way toward the “naturation” or “aesthetisation” of the city. But what is interesting for Morstein is the interconnections between the bottom-down and the top-down visions of the city. As she notices, urban gardening is a form of local self-organisation and a form of symbolic politics on a micro-scale level. The ideological basis of such symbolic politics is defined as the opposition to economic principles of city planning. The results of Morstein’s exploratory study conducted in Germany in 2015 provide a picture of the interdependences between urban community garden projects and their social and political context. The research also shows the unexpected consequences of urban gardening – gentrification – by the gardeners, seen as a negative effect of their activity and the opposite of their aims and vision of the city.

The global crisis in 2009 had an impact on the economic, social and political challenges for urban communities and institutions. Earlier, at the stage of the 20th-century deindustrialisation, many European cities encountered the problems of unemployment and social exclusion. The answers were new models of the post-industrial city (many of them based on the neoliberal economy, like the creative city or the smart city model). The case of Detroit, analysed by **Eve Avdoulos**, illustrates the new paradigm of urban crises – where formal institutions are not able to find solutions and the neoliberal models cannot be adapted to. The answer from Detroit is the pop-up city – emerging from bottom-up activities and micro informal actions. Transformation of unused land into neighbourhood gathering places, urban farming, community and school gardening – these initiatives respond to the basic needs of the urban community as an example of self-organisation. They also prove the need to develop the concepts and methodologies which let us describe and explain the vibrant, informal and hidden dimensions of the city. Avdoulos also raises the important question of the real impact of pop-up initiatives. Even if they are able

to answer the current needs, their instability and disintegration within political and economic structures mean that they are unable to pull the city out of the hole.

For us, as editors, the main interest of this book lies in the thematic breadth, the variety of the scale approaches, but also in the methodological diversity that the authors have used and created. It is very interesting for us to edit research pieces from Europe and beyond, authored by young and senior researchers. This is why we believe that *Moving Cities* embodies the incipient, but already robust trajectory of the European Sociological Association Research Network 37 - Urban Sociology. We are confident that this work will arouse the interest of the scientific community and the general public, as well as help to bring together an increasing number of researchers under the umbrella of the ESA Urban Sociology Research Network.

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