

EDITORIAL

## Urban Commons and the Right to the City

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In the increasing cosmopolitan condition of our cities inclusionary urban commons are becoming more and more relevant as civic institutions for encounter, dialogue and collaboration. Their non-commodifiable asset experiences increasing issues of social inclusion, participation, privatisation and universal access. The papers included in this issue of *The Journal of Public Space* are focused on the development of the commons' capacity firstly to contingently relate and articulate heterogeneous values and paradigms, personalities, spheres of thought and material and intangible elements; secondly to sustain equity, diversity, belonging by transforming conflicts in productive associations that counter conditions of antagonism to set up critically engaged agonistic ones (Connolly, 1995; Mouffe, 1999, 2008). They include analytical studies, critical appraisals and creative propositions—part of which documenting the City Space Architecture's event at Freespace, the 16<sup>th</sup> Venice Architecture Biennale—which address the power of the inclusionary urban commons to support the constitution of free, open and participatory networks that enhance social, cultural and material production of urban communities by reclaiming, defending, maintaining, and taking care of the “coming together of strangers who work collaboratively [...] despite their differences” (Williams, 2018: 17).

The community production discussed in this issue is crucial for the political mobilization aimed at the reappropriation of the urban space that has been alienated, financialised and controlled by closed circles of expert managers (Butler, 2012: 141–143). It concerns and integrates multiple spheres that construct a safe, healthy, resilient, pluralistic, and democratic society founded on principles of freedom, equality and solidarity (Borch & Kornberger, 2015; Flusty, 1997: 11; Garnett, 2012: 2012–2018): the civic realm that includes justice, law, and morality of the political, the economic domain that encompasses trade and exchange of goods and services, and finally the epistemological field for intercultural intellectual engagement and discourse. By forming context-specific organisational formats, this production enables “self-forming publics to appear, to represent themselves, to be represented” (Mitchell, 2017: 513) in an integral socio-spatial relationality that promotes citizens' participation, responsabilisation and conscious decision making (Villa, 1992). These processes sustain effectively collectivities in the everyday query for political identity and affirmation of citizenship, liberating their relationality from externally imposed constraints. They empower both local and translocal communities in their own relevant contexts, balance power structures and strengthen the exercises of the

fundamental ontogenetic right of citizens to participate in the creation of their own material, cultural, and social spaces, both at the individual and associated levels.

The discussion of problems affecting urban commons has progressively grown in the last three decades and concentrated on the critique on the decay of their public agency (Hardt & Negri, 2009; Harvey, 2011, 2012; Kristjansdottir & Sveinsson, 2016; Lefebvre, 1991 [1974], 1996; Manfredini, 2017, 2019; McQuire, 2008; Purcell, 2002, 2014; Stanek, 2011; Susser & Tonnelat, 2013; Sennett, 1977, 2008, 2018; United Nations, 2017). Fundamental references in this discussion are theories on the modern crisis of political sphere and citizenship rights that have addressed how the market economy has transformed public space into a pseudo-space of interaction (Arendt, 1958) and how the passive culture of consumption has led the state and private sectors to colonise the public sphere and alienate citizens from their political dimension (Calhoun, 1992; Habermas, 1991 [1962]). Key elaborations have addressed the specificity of the contemporary urban condition of increased segmented publics and counterpublics (Benhabib, 2000; Fraser, 1990; Harvey, 2007) with critical stances individually articulating crucial questions concerning spatial control (Dehaene & De Cauter, 2008a, 2008b; Foucault 1995; Harvey, 2003), privatisation (Dawson, 2010; Lee and Webster, 2006; Low, 2006; Minton, 2012; Soja, 2010;), spatial justice (Low & Smith 2006; Mitchell, 2003), socio-spatial segmentation (Dawson, 2010; Harvey, 2003; Hodgkinson, 2012), consumption and alienation (Debord, 1983 [1967]; Firat & Venkatesh, 1995; Miles & Miles, 2004), and selective deprivation of public space (Davis, 1990; Harvey, 2003; Mitchell, 1995, 2003; Sorkin, 1992).

Furthering this discussion, the articles of this issue provide innovative insights into one of the major socio-spatial challenges to urban-resilience building, the test related to the recent transformation of the socio-spatial and technological frameworks of the commons: the development of both physical and functional redundancy in emerging mobile and digitally augmented spatialisation patterns of associative collaboration, *vis-à-vis* the augmented vulnerability of their infrastructure, consequent to its expanded control, displacements and financialisation. Arguing that their novel spatialisation patterns have the potential to make the commons *bounce forward* from the crisis caused by the withdrawal of direct state involvement and their subsequent private colonisation, these papers disentangle the complex changes in power relations that affect the exercise of the Right to the City (Harvey, 2008; Lefebvre, 1996 [1968]; Purcell, 2002) and the related Right to Difference, shedding light on the capacity of urban communities to reverse the decay of their own political agency and gain full control their production processes and protocols in the pursuit of an open, pluralistic and collaborative Freespace for the sustainable development of the physical, social and cultural dimensions of our cities.

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