Silvija Shaleva, PhD, research fellow
University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Architecture, Slovenia
silvijashaleva@gmail.com

URBAN COMMONS AND COLLECTIVE APPROACH TO PUBLIC SPACES IN CONTEMPORARY CITIES

Abstract

The urban settlement arises from the basic need of man to protect his life from natural disasters and to establish his order in the cosmos, to oppose the power of nature. Since then, it has been constantly transformed, but still contains the elements of the ancient and the primordial. Transformation, transience and variability are the keywords for the continuous development of an urban fabric. Such changes do not mean the loss of urban values and the authenticity of the urban place, but their improvement and adaptation for the future. Change does not mean demolition and re-construction from the beginning, but continuous upgrading of the existing one. Urban commons or commoning in today's urban life is an intriguing topic, as experts and professionals are seeking a way to bring up all possible ways to accomplish commoning in urban societies. Urban commons are created with temporary processes continuously appearing and disappearing, depending upon the need of people. By adopting interdisciplinary methodology and creating a temporary use of open public spaces, where architects in the process of planning can contribute to promoting urban commoning rather than commercialisation on space. Knowing that cities and communities are in constant change, and for this reason, permanent design isn't always an immediate solution. Thereby the role of architects is to promote or support commoning, variations, opportunities and flexibility in the design processes, to promote more livability in urban spaces.

Keywords: Urban commoning, common space, urban quality of life, temporary use

PUBLIC SPACE AND ITS USERS

Urban planning is still a relatively young profession globally. As it developed more intensively in the 19th century and since then, much attention has been paid to controlled planning, construction and development of cities. From the beginning, the emergence of urban planning has been linked to the need to bring order to the city. The uncontrolled construction and building made it difficult to control the space. Also, it was an obstacle to achieving common needs, from basic infrastructure to a better quality of life. The tension between the private and common interests is recurring since. Urban commons, is a notion associated with the work of David Harvey (2012), focusing more closely on public spaces and their design, including the use of public space as places of commemoration. Besides, common interest must take in account the diversity of the urban population. In terms of languages, religions, nationality and citizenship, Europe is certainly more diverse today than half a century ago. In that sense, we may speak of progressing pluralisation. Any new type of diversity and every new wave of experienced difference will inevitably provoke debate among planners and architects. The sociology of space seems to offer a useful starting point for a relational approach to promoting and managing urban commons.

Building on Lefèbvre's (1991, 2004) theory, there are numerous scientific studies redefining and specifying the concept of space to provide a new theoretical basis for the urban theory. 'Questions of the commons', writes Harvey (2012: 71), are contradictory and therefore always contested. Behind these contestations lie conflicting social and political interests. Professionals representing public interests have increasingly raised concerns that due to expanding social diversification, their mandate is becoming uncertain. The problem is obviously how to design public places in a 'city meant for all'. The different motions of users regarding public spaces, as well as dissimilar aesthetic preferences depending on social milieus are putting pressure on urban planners, for whom these interests all too often appear to be mutually exclusive.

Even priorities are a matter of controversy: should the focus primarily lie on designing public space for as many different interest groups as possible in a single space, or is aesthetics the key factor, and whose aesthetics? Is it more important to promote local businesses or to counterbalance social inequality? In the end, it appears that particular social groups that are more powerful, are always in a better position to define the "public interest".

The common land and an overall discussion of urban voids are describing places that are overlooked by the main actors and activists, we can immediately relate them to the concept of 'heterotopia'. This term was originally coined by Michel Foucault (1967) to describe places that are 'in relation with the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralise, or invent the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect'. Urban voids, thus recode functionless areas in a city. Urban voids are all areas in a city, whose functions and designs have not yet been decided upon conclusively. All these areas do not fulfil any concrete function in the urban system. They have lost their original function, being in some kind of in-between stage. In that way, the urban voids can be given a new meaning. As spaces for temporary use, or spaces for new social opportunities we can treat them as urban commons. Authors like Richard Sennett (1990) have applied this concept to urban theory, pointing out the possibility of 'liminal spaces' to bring together a diverse range of people and

activities, resulting in valuable exchanges and connections between them (Carmona 2010). Such diversity in ethnicity, culture and religion tend to create separate and different public spaces.

Knowing that through the years is the past expansion of migration in Europe has increased rapidly, followed by ethnic diversity, overpopulation and so on has increased urban divisions and land take (see: figure1). Expanding or open common space explicitly expresses the power commoning must create new forms of life-in-common and a culture of sharing.
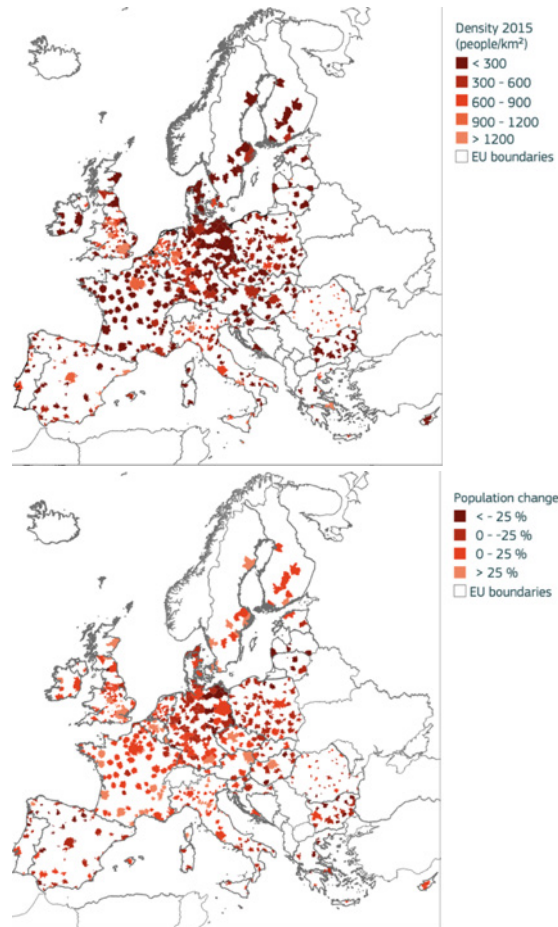

Figure 1. (left): urban population density in 2015 for European FUAs in inhabitants/km2; (right): population changes between 2015-2050 in European FUAs. The future of cities, opportunities challenges and the way forward by the Joint Research Centre (JRC), the European Commission's science and knowledge service. Available at: https://publications. jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC116711 (Accessed 20 October 2021)

Threshold spatiality, a spatiality of passages that connect while separating and separate while connecting, will be shown to characterize such spaces produced in common and through commoning (Stavrides 2016). Common space admits no criteria; it is open to all in the same way. What is often missed in the appreciation of common space is that it has the quality of being given to humans. Furthermore, a common space is not a public space, for it is not a human construct (Henaff M and Strong T 2001). Common space can be considered as a relation between a social group and its effort to define a world that is shared between its members.

TEMPORARY OCCUPANCY ON PUBLIC SPACE AND URBAN COMMONING

The urban space is the most complex framework of human activities and reflects the needs, values and aspirations that society possesses at a certain time. This multi-layered medium is conceived and materialised through architecture. The physical structure of the city reflects the idea of social, economic, natural, technical and technological structures, it is an expression of urban life.

It is created in the long run from cultural, sociological and architectural considerations and urban planning marked by relative consistency and liveliness. Moving from the Antique period to the present, public space and democracy provide both historical accounts and a comparative analytical framework for understanding public space (Henaff M and Strong T 2001).

Architecture and physical changes in space are not only material forms but also bearers of deeper social meanings in a community. According to De Graff (2017), public space is used to accommodate defiance of prevailing powers; today it defines the notion of "the public" itself. Public Space is characterized as an area within a city that is accessible to all, excluding no one based on their background, gender, race, ethnicity, or socio-economic background.

In the book "Insurgent Public Space: Guerrilla Urbanism and the Remaking of Contemporary Cities", Hou defines: Public space has been an important facet of cities and urban culture. In cities around the world, urban spaces such as plazas, markets, streets, temples, and urban parks have long been the centres of civic life for urban dwellers. They provide opportunities for gathering, socialising, recreation, festivals, as well as protests and demonstrations. As parks and plazas, urban open spaces provide relief from dense urban districts and structured everyday life. As civic architecture, they become collective expressions of a city as well as depositories of personal memories. As places where important historical events tend to unfold, public spaces are imbued with important, collective meanings – both official and unofficial (Hou 2010).

Furthermore, the quality of public space has changed over time. Indeed, contemporary trends and diversity in society have a massive impact on the possibilities and existence of such a space.

The dramatic changes of the modern city, its instability, temporality, fragmentation encourage us to think again about the architecture of the city, the way it is established and changed.

Although today there are a number of theories about the metastability of the architectural form as well as the relationship between social change and the spatial framework, it seems that they cannot fully explain the specificity and way the physical structure of our environment changes and the excesses and architectural transformation.

The first critical theories of modern discourse were formulated through which the city is perceived as a complex and contradictory configuration. Aldo Rossi specified the dual nature of the city in history: the city as a material artefact, a handicraft object, built over time, but also a city as a collective representation, which refers not only to the real structure of the city but also to the idea. In that sense, even in the periods of backwardness of the cities, it is possible to single out the "typological character of an indeterminate inherent order" (Rossi 1982: 127). The concept of collective memory, introduced by Aldo Rossi in the discourse of architecture, refers to the complementary character of the image of the city, which consists of a dialogue of material and intangible values, a synthesis of a series of values related to the collective Imagination:

"It can be said that the city itself is the collective memory of its inhabitants and, like memory, it is connected with objects and places" (Rossi 1982: 127–130).

The urban space is the most complex framework of human activities and reflects the needs, values and aspirations that society possesses at a certain time. This multi-layered medium is conceived and materialised through architecture. In the end, citizen-led or citizen engagement activities are becoming increasingly significant to rethink the future of our urban territories. Updated concepts or revised methodologies are no longer sufficient to analyze the new urban condition or to intervene in it. We must face the reified space of contemporary capitalism critically, focusing on the very foundations of the "society of the spectacle," as well as on the environmental and social collapse in the era of "planetary urbanization." (Medrano et al., 2021). Some 'actors' are taking more alternative models of exploration on possibilities that space can offer. Especially the young generation of architects lacking major projects turn to the basics, focusing not only on well-designed on paper architecture, but turning towards architecture made of actions. Those architects have become and have taken the role of activists in the field of architecture and urbanism. As long as there have been cities, there have been makers (Van der Moolen 2017).

Knowing that today's public spaces in cities are being created in the commercial public realm (see: figure 2). That in most scenarios lack of support for public togetherness, there is almost no space for people to come together over productive activities or any kind of form that can support stronger bonds between the urban society.

Figure 2. New York Times Square during lockdown due to Covid Pandemic in 2020. Available at:https://www.sciencenews.org/article/covid19-pandemic-lockdowns-seismic-noise-humans. (Accessed 22 October 2021)

This is a challenge mostly for urban governments, but also developers whose interest is harmed by this conflict, in a way to find more diverse models to apply to the process of designing urban areas, outside of the market-driven logic. On this side, today there are plenty of fruitful examples, supporting that kind of collective participation and temporary usurpation on urban space, often recognized as urban commons.

In most cases, urban commons are set in reference to kinds of community gardens, and collective agriculture. But only by planting rhubarb, new urban policies cannot be achieved. This trend of urban commoning, and commoners in the city is mostly a bottom-up initiative on low cost and usually connected to tiny acts of resistance on a particular group of citizens, that can contribute to the local community. But non the less, commoning can be scaled up to influence everyday processes in a metropolis, opening questions for energy use, food distribution, green areas, clean air, lack of land for residential areas.

On the other side it is acknowledged that the "public" is in retreat. Public services, public housing, public space more and more belongs to the private sphere. In this emerging order, the commons offer an alternative, between public and private. At least in theory the commons are a radical potential, the idea of land that is commonly owned and managed speaks of 21st-century sensibility for participation by citizens.

We will take Berlin as one example that is different from other divided cities because it reflects an ideological separation caused by political differences, rather than ethnic, national, or religious ones (Molnar 2010). Either way, it shows an example of urban planning and a way or approach, as 'giving' back the public space to Berlin's citizens. Urban strategies and planning after the reunification of the city were supposed to connect two entities. Due

to ideological differences between Capitalist and Socialist regimes, planning discourses evolved differently. One example of mending these gaps in recent history is the case of the Tempelhof airfield in Berlin. With a unique status, this valuable piece of land of 300 ha was given to the citizens in 2010. This recreational hub on such an open space in the frames of a previous airport located so close to city Berlin's centre is quite an opportunity for investors and developers. Negotiations that were set on by the government, intended to take 25% of the site to be used for buildings to provide affordable housing, since migratory pressure to Berlin increases. Yet after debates and a campaign backed by the media, 64.3% of voters chose to keep Tempelhof as it is (see: figure3, figure4, figure5). The government and developers were left empty-handed. The airport symbolised freedom, after being on the frontline of the cold war. The site is called Tempelhofer Freiheit, or Tempelhof Freedom. People of Berlin have their space of free spirit, it is no surprise that they are not willing to give it back.

In this way, a new trend is acknowledged by many practitioners who are ready for a more progressive and exciting approach. That can make the underused space open for different setups and programs that in another way would not be able to bring spontaneity, new meaning to the existing urban environment.

In such a theory, Berlin is one of the pioneers in reusing abandoned sites, decaying lands, and revitalizing urban areas.

Figure 3. Frauendorf M. (2020) Tempelhof Feld and the city Berlin in the background. Available at: https://www.berlin.de/tourismus/parks-und-gaerten/3561883-1740419-tempelhofer-feld.html. (Accessed 22 October 2021)

Figure 4. Figure 5. Frauendorf M. (2020) Berlin: People are out and about on Tempelhof Feld during sunset (community gardens can be seen at the top left). Available at: https://www.berlin.de/tourismus/parks-und-gaerten/3561883-1740419-tempelhofer-feld.html. (Accessed 22 October 2021)

The second example in this article is located in the city of Skopje, N.Macedonia. Our location is situated below the fortress hill Kale, less than a kilometre distant from the main city square "Plostad Makedonija". It stretches out along the northern bank of the river Vardar.

It is a space that with time spontaneously got new meaning or new temporary programs defined by the local users. For decades it has been a buffer zone in the divided city, no one´s and everyone´s non-place. In this terrain, vague many completely independent and unrelated functions have developed next to each other – without actually interfering with each other. This site has spontaneously become an informal trading place especially amongst unemployed and retired from all ethnic groups. Due to its central position in the city, the location is easy to reach by foot or bicycle from Albanian and Macedonian as well as Roma neighbourhoods. With this one example, a process that appeared at once as an informal site presents the possibility and will of people to occupy a space according to their needs.

Since the competition project after 1963 from the Kenzo Tange team for the master plan of the city centre, the core element was the distinct zone along the riverbanks enhanced with numerous public functions intended to turn the boundary of the river into a space of collectivity and openness for every citizen of Skopje. These plans were to include a recreational green space in the area adjacent to the fortress Kale. However, the plan was frequently modified and only partially realised. In the decades since reconstruction, Tange's concept for the river recreational zone never became the intended unifying core but rather an urban void. This is just one of few examples, since the practice and urban strategies in Skopje do not allow many opportunities, and free space where and urban commoning is promoted instead of comersialisation on such space. These spaces are so-called urban voids, land that no one uses, even though it is in the very centre of the city. In the end, this kind of abandonment on the site is usually a base for the urban commoning to appear, which is not acknowledged by representatives and city planners. Which shows the lack of ability from governance to deal with the urban voids in the capital city. Once a training area of the state automobile association, then a temporary flea market, today a non-formal parking space, and an empty abandoned space (see: figure6, figure7, figure8).
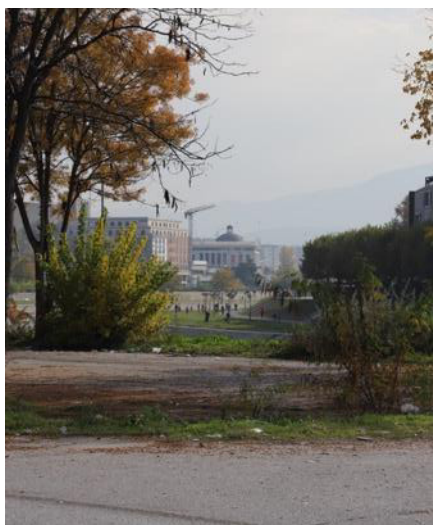

Figure 6. Author's photography 2021. Urban void, previous training area of the state automobile association.

Figure 7. Hristov D. 2015 Crv Pazar, Skopje. Informal Market Worlds Atlas. NAi Publishers, Rotterdam pp. 236-241

Figure 8 Author's photography 2020. Green area on site.

The long-lasting debate over the use of public or open spaces in cities led to many experimental approaches in urban development. Temporary proposals or activities can show the potential of temporary use that are not planned or institutionalized. These actions can be seen as part of the urban commoning since that is a usually localized bottom-up process in one society.

Temporary use is the opposite, the antagonist of professions like architecture and urban planning, but the one that in short term can adjust more rapidly to the new proposals or changes brought by the users. With this approach, a different set of tools can be offered. To be able to design space for specific use in a specific time and still leave space for future changes and adaptations to be made easily. The new relationship between planners and users is growing more than ever in the urban context. On the contrary to the permanent design, which is a final development ending with one result, the temporary one remains as an open system that encourages modification and revision.

Temporary use can be implemented or seen in many kinds of forms and situations especially in the urban environment (see: figure9). Space that will offer temporary activities, or temporary programs that are needed at the very moment. Later that use can be easily changed or put back to the original use that space once had. This kind of new opportunities can generate a mix of uses but also innovation, reuse of materials, eco programs and sustainability for local settlements. Strategies that involve the citizens in the process of creating new urban developments, designs, offering a more open approach where people can see the meaning and be able to contribute to a better quality of urban life.

ARCHITECT AS A MEDIATOR

Architecture is essentially a profession that strives to spatially absorb the needs of people in everyday life, but also to meet their value, cultural and aesthetic expectations. This process creates a discourse based on the need for constant research and observation, which opens up an endless field of creative wandering in which architects enjoy. With this way of self-articulation in the created reality, they influence the behaviour, but also the creation of relations between people. In this act of overlapping communions and the creation of new meanings and relations in space, the architects themselves are one of the main actors.

Figure 9. Parc des Buttes-Chaumont, Paris, France. The future of cities, opportunities challenges and the way forward by the Joint Research Centre (JRC), the European Commission's science and knowledge service. (2019) Available at: https://publications.jrc. ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC116711 (Accessed 20 October 2021)

The architecture was first used as a de-establishment tool, and social utopians like Charles Fourier and Robert Owen made their communal phalanxes in which, in addition to freedom, they also housed the ideas of togetherness and equality. Freedom in architecture is associated with two terms. The first refers to generosity, and the second to communication between people or social interaction. The idea of giving or even more sharing is the basis of the concept of generosity. According to the architects Lacaton & Vassal (2015) and their statements in "Freedom of use", presented from an architectural point of view, refers to quantify more space than expected because in that way a "creative" redundancy is created which expands the use of space with additional possibilities. With that, space gets the freedom of use and is appropriated in ways that activate new and enrich the existing relations between people. Generosity in architecture does not mean a wealth of materials - an effect that often creates

aesthetic hegemony, but a spatial wealth, because (unexpectedly obtained, however random) additional space gives users the freedom to conquer and organize their habitus, their being in space (personally and collectively), thus creating new social conventions inside the home, but also in the space between buildings, in the public shared space.

By presenting "In Life between buildings: using public space" Gehl (2011) showed kind of a rebellion, a protest against the principles of planning cities and residential areas that prevailed in the period of 70s. Explaining the main concern about the space between the built structure and the interaction of people in those spaces. Life between buildings become a dimension in architecture that needs to be carefully treated as, hard to argue against it, the livability and liveliness of cities is an important issue. The request for better defining public spaces and quality of life in contemporary cities emphasizes this statement (see: figure10).

The character of life between built structures changes with variations in a different social context, but the essential principle and criteria are constant.Architecture is not a machine for social and cultural engineering, but a place where the spatial and social complexity and multiplicity of relations in everyday life are encouraged and overlapped. From this multitude, the architecture of the city is created as a body structure, but also as an interaction. Where the city is a field of events created by contradictions arising from the diversity of each individual. It is in this way that architecture liberates because it becomes a communication layer, the basis for creating the freedom of everyday life where through the process of resistance it cohabits with the institutions of the system while aiming to improve their performance.

Figure 10. Barcelona aerial view. The future of cities, opportunities challenges and the way forward by the Joint Research Centre (JRC), the European Commission's science and knowledge service (2019) Available at: https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC116711 (Accessed 20 October 2021)

The public domain, the public interest, finally the public space as their structural denominator is exactly the segment where the relationship of architecture-everyday life-society is most visible and where generosity, social interaction, architecture and freedom overlap.

In a broader interpretation, public space is a place where the character of the city is built. Here we look for personal experiences, where the individual develops a relationship to the immediate social environment and makes an attempt to connect with self-similar entities and create a broader identity and sense of belonging, to find his place in the complex relations within the collective and the city. For that reason, cultivating ethical values depends on the public domain, and thus the quality of life in many ways.

CONCLUSION – URBAN COMMONS CAN CONTRIBUTE TO FUTURE URBAN PLANNING

What is happening in the world today and the dominance of the neoliberal economy is prompting new measures to control the rampage in cities. Given the global commitment to inclusivity, common places as places for all and even sustainable urban development, new recommendations, methodologies, guidelines and sets are being created. The participatory design strategies and tools for new urbanism and modern urban planning appear. In the search for new ways of planning cities, new ones are born, but the old proven theories for planning also revive. Nowadays, cities are places for cultural innovation; they allow citizens to live a quality contemporary life. Citizens often create, negotiate and test ideas and solutions, collectively contributing towards shaping the future urban condition (Sassen 2010; Sassen 2018).

The local culture and cultural heritage are vital assets for regional competitiveness and social cohesion and help to shape the identity of cities and regions. Furthermore, cultural participation has a significant impact on residents, contributing to their wellbeing and sense of belonging which raises the quality of life in urban areas. But when we take into account constantly changing demographics and changes of lifestyle, Jan Gehl in "Cities for people" explains how cities should be observed on a very small scale. This small-scale view, the human scale he points that is too frequently neglected in contemporary projects, especially in the fast-growing cities.

The meaningful integration of citizens in urban governance processes is now valued more than ever. This triggers a new way of thinking and allows people to exchange values, concepts and practices, enabling cities to become spaces for engagement, regardless of size, density or complexity. That in the end, what makes a statement in this society is the consumers, the people. Expanding commoning through institutions that prevent any accumulation of power is possible in the only social context that supports creative individuals in their non-hierarchical collaboration.

Worlds of commoning are not simply worlds of shared beliefs and habits but are strongly connected to ways of sharing that open the circle of belonging and develop forms of active participation in the shaping of the rules that sustain them. Worlds of commoning are worlds in movement (Stavrides 2016).

Temporary use of space could be analyzed as part of the urban development process with its temporal and spatial fluctuations and its multivalent outcomes. It could investigate the temporary use of spaces as a space of opportunity and a flexible method of production. Beyond the realm of necessity, it may be transformed into a cultural choice, for a new way

of urban development and a medium of social change, signifying a space of opportunity for some and vulnerability for others.

To achieve anything, architects must serve the powers they strive to critique, finding themselves in a perpetual conflict of interest. Beyond their duration, temporary uses can have a strong impact on the cultural and social capital of cities. Due to the innovative characters, they very often establish new cultural and social practices and lifestyles, which are absorbed into everyday life.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

De Graff R (2017) Four Walls and a Roof: The Complex Nature of a Simple Profession. London: Harvard University Press pp.115-121.

Foucault M (1967) Des espaces autres, basis of a lecture given by Michel Foucault in March 1967 on a conference at the Cercle d'études architecturales, published in Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité, n°5, octobre 1984 pp. 46- 49

Harvey D (2012) Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution. London:Verso.

Henaff M and Strong T (2001) Public Space and Democracy. University of Minnesota Press pp. 2-27.

Hou J (2010) Insurgent Public Space. Guerrilla urbanism and the remaking of contemporary cities. London:Routledge.

Gehl J (2011) Life between buildings: using public space. Island press.

Gehl J (2011) Cities for people. Island press.

Lacaton A and Vassal P (2015) Freedom of use. Sternberg press.

Lefèbvre H (1991) The Production of Space. Oxford: Blackwell.

Lefèbvre H (2004) Rhythm analysis: Space, Time and Everyday Live. London: Continuum.

Medrano L, Recaman L and Avermaete T (2021) The new urban condition: Criticism and theory from architecture and urbanism. Routledge: 1st edition International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, Vol. 22, No. 2, 331-338.

Marcuse P and Van Kempen R (2002) Of states and Cities. The Partitioning of Urban Space. Oxford: University Press, pp 11-34.

Molnar V (2010) The cultural production of locality: reclaiming the "European City" in post-Wall Berlin. International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, vol. 34, no. 2, pp. 281–309.

Rossi A (1982) The Architecture of the City. The MIT Press.

Sassen S (2010) "The city: Its return as a lens for social theory". City Culture and Society. Elsevier Journal pp. 3–11.

Sassen S (2018) In the post-urban world. Emergent transformation of cities and regions in the innovative global economy. London: Routledge pp. 249-259.

Stavrides S (2016) Common Space: The City as Commons. Zed Books Ltd, The Foundry.

Swenarton M, Avermaete T and van den Heuvel D (2014) Architecture and the welfare state. London and New York: Routledge.

United Nations Human Settlements Programme, UN-HABITAT (2017) Trends in Urban Resilience. Available at: https://unhabitat.org/books/trends-in-urban-resilience-2017/#.

Van der Moolen K (2017) From neighbourhoods to MakerHoods. Available at: https://waag. org/en/article/neighbourhoods-maker holds.