

BLOQUE TEMÁTICO 4

Desigualdad, exclusión y resistencias urbanas

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La gentrificación, como expresión de las dinámicas del capitalismo avanzado y de la financiarización del espacio urbano, genera profundos impactos socioespaciales que se manifiestan en desigualdad, exclusión y conflictividad urbana. Este bloque del marco teórico aborda cómo estos procesos reconfiguran las ciudades, expulsando a poblaciones vulnerables, generando estigmatización territorial y desencadenando resistencias colectivas que reivindican el derecho a la ciudad y a la vivienda.

Desigualdad y desplazamiento: efectos estructurales de la gentrificación

El desplazamiento de poblaciones de menores ingresos es una de las dimensiones más críticas de la gentrificación. Este desplazamiento puede ser directo, mediante desalojos, presión sobre los alquileres y compra de propiedades por parte de nuevos residentes o inversores, o indirecto, a través de la transformación del entorno social y cultural de los barrios, generando exclusión simbólica y deterioro de las redes comunitarias (Slater, 2009). En ambos casos, la gentrificación contribuye a intensificar las desigualdades urbanas, consolidando una ciudad fragmentada en la que los sectores empobrecidos son desplazados hacia periferias con menor acceso a servicios y oportunidades.

David Harvey (2012) y Neil Smith (1996) han subrayado que estos procesos no son accidentales, sino inherentes a las lógicas de acumulación de capital en el espacio urbano. La gentrificación se convierte en un mecanismo de acumulación por desposesión, donde el capital se valoriza a través de la expulsión de poblaciones empobrecidas, facilitada por políticas urbanas que privilegian la rentabilidad del suelo sobre las necesidades sociales.

Estigmatización territorial y marginalidad avanzada

El proceso de gentrificación también implica la producción de narrativas que estigmatizan a ciertos barrios y poblaciones, legitimando su transformación y desplazamiento. Loïc Wacquant (2008, 2009) conceptualiza esta dinámica como “marginalidad avanzada”, refiriéndose a la concentración de pobreza y exclusión en determinados territorios como resultado de las políticas neoliberales, la reestructuración económica y la criminalización de la pobreza. La estigmatización territorial actúa como instrumento de justificación de intervenciones urbanas orientadas a la gentrificación, al asociar ciertos barrios con inseguridad, incivismo o degradación, creando consenso en torno a la necesidad de su “renovación”.

Este proceso de estigmatización se refuerza mediante discursos mediáticos, políticas de “tolerancia cero” y dispositivos de control social que facilitan el desplazamiento de poblaciones consideradas “no deseables” en el marco de la regeneración urbana (Wacquant, 2009). Así, la gentrificación no solo opera a través de mecanismos económicos, sino también mediante la producción de representaciones simbólicas que legitiman la exclusión.

El derecho a la ciudad y las resistencias urbanas

Frente a estos procesos de exclusión y desplazamiento, emergen resistencias colectivas que reivindican el derecho a la ciudad, entendido como el derecho a habitar, producir, usar y transformar el espacio urbano según las necesidades de la vida colectiva, y no según las lógicas de acumulación del capital (Lefebvre, 1970/2014; Harvey, 2008).

Henri Lefebvre formuló este concepto como un derecho colectivo a la apropiación del espacio urbano, mientras que David Harvey lo ha reinterpretado como un derecho a cambiar y reinventar la ciudad de forma inclusiva, defendiendo que la ciudad es un bien común y no una mercancía. En esta línea, Peter Marcuse (2009) y Margit Mayer (2009) han resaltado que el derecho a la ciudad se convierte en una bandera de las luchas urbanas contemporáneas, articulando resistencias frente a los procesos de gentrificación y mercantilización del espacio.

Estas resistencias se expresan a través de movimientos por la vivienda, cooperativas habitacionales, plataformas antidesahucios, ocupaciones de edificios vacíos y redes de solidaridad vecinal, que se convierten en actores fundamentales para disputar las lógicas de la financiarización y el mercado inmobiliario. Estas luchas, aunque locales, están conectadas a escalas globales, como muestran las experiencias de resistencias urbanas en ciudades del Norte y del Sur Global (Rolnik, 2015; Janoschka y Sequera, 2016).

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Importancia de incluir el Bloque temático 4 en el marco teórico

Incluir este bloque en el marco teórico permite comprender que la gentrificación no es un proceso neutral de revalorización urbana, sino un mecanismo que produce y reproduce desigualdades y exclusiones en las ciudades globales. Este bloque también resalta el papel activo de las resistencias sociales, mostrando que las ciudades son escenarios de conflictos, pero también de luchas por el derecho a la vivienda y a la ciudad.

En el marco de esta investigación, este enfoque permitirá analizar cómo, en Chicago, París, Seúl, Ciudad de México, Johannesburgo y Mumbai, los procesos de gentrificación generan desplazamiento y exclusión, pero también cómo surgen resistencias que cuestionan la mercantilización del espacio urbano, articulando demandas por la justicia espacial y la defensa de los territorios frente a las lógicas del capital.

Así, este bloque complementa el análisis estructural y multiescalar de la gentrificación con una perspectiva centrada en sus impactos sociales y en las respuestas colectivas que se generan frente a estos procesos, aportando un componente esencial para comprender la complejidad del fenómeno en las ciudades globales contemporáneas.

EL DERECHO A LA CIUDAD

Vivimos en una era en la que los ideales de los derechos humanos se han colocado en el centro de la escena tanto política como éticamente. Se ha gastado una gran cantidad de energía en promover su significado para la construcción de un mundo mejor, aunque la mayoría de los conceptos que circulan no desafían fundamentalmente las lógicas de mercado liberales y neoliberales o los modos dominantes de legalidad y de acción estatal. Vivimos, después de todo, en un mundo en el que los derechos a la propiedad privada y el beneficio aplastan todas las demás nociones de derechos. Quiero explorar aquí otro tipo de derecho humano, el derecho a la ciudad.

¿Ha contribuido el impresionante ritmo y escala de urbanización de los últimos cien años al bienestar humano? La ciudad, en palabras del sociólogo urbano Robert Parker, es

el intento más exitoso del ser humano de rehacer el mundo en el que vive de acuerdo con el deseo más íntimo de su corazón. Pero si la ciudad es el mundo que el ser humano ha creado, es también el mundo en el que a partir de ahora está condenado a vivir. Así pues, indirectamente y sin un sentido nítido de la naturaleza de su tarea, al hacer la ciudad, el ser humano se ha rehecho a sí mismo¹.

La cuestión de qué tipo de ciudad queremos no puede estar divorciada de la que plantea qué tipo de lazos sociales, de relaciones con la naturaleza, de estilos de vida, de tecnologías y de valores estéticos deseamos. El derecho a la ciudad es mucho más que la libertad individual de acceder a los recursos urbanos: se trata del derecho a cambiarnos a nosotros mismos cambiando la ciudad. Es, además, un derecho común antes que individual, ya que esta transformación depende inevitablemente del ejercicio de un poder colectivo para remodelar los procesos de urbanización. La libertad de hacer y rehacer nuestras ciudades y a nosotros mismos es, como quiero demostrar, uno de nuestros derechos humanos más preciosos, pero también uno de los más descuidados.

¹ Robert Park, *On Social Control and Collective Behavior*, Chicago, 1967, p. 3.

Desde sus inicios, las ciudades han surgido mediante concentraciones geográficas y sociales de un producto excedente. La urbanización siempre ha sido, por lo tanto, un fenómeno de clase, ya que los excedentes son extraídos de algún sitio y de alguien, mientras que el control sobre su utilización habitualmente radica en pocas manos. Esta situación general persiste bajo el capitalismo, por supuesto; pero dado que la urbanización depende de la movilización del producto excedente, surge una conexión íntima entre el desarrollo del capitalismo y la urbanización. Los capitalistas tienen que producir un producto excedente a fin de producir plusvalor; éste a su vez debe reinvertirse para generar más plusvalor. El resultado de la reinversión continuada es la expansión de la producción de excedente a un tipo de interés compuesto, y de ahí proceden las curvas logísticas (dinero, producción y población) vinculadas a la historia de la acumulación de capital, que es replicada por la senda de crecimiento de la urbanización en el capitalismo.

La perpetua necesidad de encontrar sectores rentables para la producción y absorción de capital excedente conforma la política del capitalismo y enfrenta al capitalista con diversas barreras a la expansión continua y libre de inconvenientes. Si el trabajo es escaso y los salarios son altos, o bien el trabajo existente tiene que ser disciplinado —normalmente los dos métodos más comunes son provocar un desempleo inducido tecnológicamente o asaltar el poder de la clase obrera organizada—, o bien deben encontrarse nuevas fuerzas de trabajo mediante la inmigración, la exportación de capital o la proletarización de elementos de la población hasta ese momento independientes. Los capitalistas deben también descubrir nuevos medios de producción en general y nuevos recursos naturales en particular, lo cual presiona de modo creciente sobre el entorno natural a la hora de obtener las materias primas necesarias y absorber los residuos inevitables. Los capitalistas necesitan también descubrir nuevas áreas de extracción de recursos naturales, tarea que es con frecuencia el objetivo de los esfuerzos imperialistas y neocoloniales.

Las leyes coercitivas de la competencia también fuerzan la continua implementación de nuevas tecnologías y formas organizativas, dado que éstas permiten que los capitalistas venzan a sus competidores que utilizan métodos inferiores. Las innovaciones definen nuevos deseos y necesidades, reducen el tiempo de rotación del capital y mitigan la fricción de la distancia, lo cual limita el ámbito geográfico en el que el capitalista puede buscar suministros ampliados de fuerza de trabajo, materias primas y demás insumos productivos. Si no existe suficiente poder de compra en el mercado, deben encontrarse nuevos mercados mediante la expansión del comercio exterior, la promoción de nuevos productos y estilos de vida, la creación de nuevos instrumentos crediticios y el gasto público y privado financiado a través del endeudamiento. Si finalmente la tasa de beneficio es demasiado baja, entonces la regulación estatal de la «competencia ruinosa», la monopolización (fusiones y adquisiciones) y las exportaciones de capital ofrecen vías de salida.

Si alguna de las mencionadas barreras no puede ser evitada, los capitalistas no pueden reinvertir rentablemente su producto excedente, bloqueándose la acumulación de capital y enfrentándolos a la crisis en la que su capital puede devaluarse y en algunos casos destruirse físicamente. Las mercancías excedentes pueden perder su valor o ser destruidas, mientras que los activos y la capacidad productivos pueden dejar de utilizarse como tales y quedar ociosos; el dinero mismo puede devaluarse mediante la inflación, y la fuerza de trabajo, conocer el desempleo masivo. ¿Cómo ha impulsado, pues, la necesidad de eludir estas barreras y de expandir las áreas de actividad rentable la urbanización capitalista? Sostengo aquí que la urbanización ha desempeñado un papel particularmente activo, junto con fenómenos como los gastos militares, a la hora de absorber el producto excedente que los capitalistas producen perpetuamente en su búsqueda de beneficios.

Revoluciones urbanas

Consideremos, en primer lugar, el caso del París del Segundo Imperio. El año de 1848 trajo consigo una de las primeras innegables crisis de capital excedente y de fuerza de trabajo ociosa a escala europea, que golpeó a París de modo especialmente duro, dando lugar a una revolución abortada protagonizada por los trabajadores desempleados y por aquellos utópicos burgueses que consideraban la república social como el antídoto a la avaricia y la desigualdad que habían caracterizado a la Monarquía de Julio. La burguesía republicana reprimió violentamente a los revolucionarios, pero no logró resolver la crisis, que se zanjó con el ascenso al poder de Luis Napoleón Bonaparte, quien organizó un golpe de Estado en 1851 proclamándose emperador el año siguiente. Para sobrevivir políticamente, recurrió a una amplia represión de los movimientos políticos alternativos, mientras que se enfrentó a la situación económica mediante un vasto programa de inversión en infraestructuras tanto en el interior de Francia como en el exterior, en donde acometió la construcción de ferrocarriles en toda Europa y en Oriente, apoyando grandes obras como el Canal de Suez. En el interior, Luis Napoleón consolidó la red de ferrocarriles, construyó puertos y dársenas, y desecó zonas pantanosas, pero sobre todo acometió la reconfiguración de la infraestructura urbana de París, encargando a Georges Eugène Haussmann las obras públicas de la ciudad en 1853.

Haussmann comprendió claramente que su misión era contribuir a resolver el problema de la existencia de capital excedente y la situación de desempleo existente mediante la urbanización. Reconstruir París absorbió enormes cantidades de trabajo y capital para la época y, suprimiendo las aspiraciones de la fuerza de trabajo parisina, fue un instrumento esencial de estabilización social. Haussmann se inspiró en los planes utópicos que fourieristas y saint-simonianos habían debatido durante la década de 1840 para remodelar París, introduciendo, no obstante, una importante diferen-

cia, ya que transformó la escala a la que se imaginó el proceso urbano. Cuando el arquitecto Jacques Ignace Hittorff le presentó sus planes de un nuevo bulevar, Haussmann se los devolvió diciéndole: «No es suficientemente ancho [...] le has dado una anchura de 40 metros y yo lo quiero de 120 metros». Anexionó los suburbios y rediseñó barrios enteros como el de Les Halles. Para llevar a cabo estos proyectos, Haussmann precisaba de nuevas instituciones financieras y nuevos instrumentos de deuda como el *Crédit Mobilier* y el *Crédit Immobilier*, que fueron instituidos de acuerdo con líneas saint-simonianas. Haussmann ayudó, de hecho, a resolver el problema de la utilización del excedente de capital estableciendo un sistema protokeynesiano de mejoras urbanas en infraestructuras financiadas mediante el endeudamiento.

El sistema funcionó muy bien aproximadamente durante quince años e implicó no sólo la transformación de las infraestructuras urbanas, sino también la construcción de un nuevo modo de vida y de persona urbana. París se convirtió en «la ciudad de la luz», un gran centro de consumo, turismo y placer; los cafés, los grandes almacenes, la industria de la moda y las grandes exposiciones cambiaron la vida urbana de modo que pudiera absorber enormes excedentes mediante el consumo. Tras un tiempo, sin embargo, el sistema financiero, sobretensado y especulativo, y las estructuras de crédito colapsaron en 1868. Haussmann fue despedido; Napoleón III, desesperado, declaró la guerra a la Alemania de Bismarck para perderla, creándose un vacío en el que se produjo la Comuna de París, uno de los grandes episodios revolucionarios de la historia urbana del capitalismo, desencadenado en parte por la nostalgia del mundo que Haussmann había destrozado y por el deseo de los trabajadores de recuperar la ciudad de la que habían sido desposeídos por sus trabajos².

Saltemos ahora a la década de 1940 en Estados Unidos. La descomunal movilización para atender el esfuerzo de guerra había resuelto temporalmente el problema del uso del excedente de capital, que había parecido tan intratable durante la década de 1930, y el desempleo que había traído aparejado, pero todo el mundo temía lo que podría suceder una vez que la guerra concluyese. Políticamente la situación era peligrosa: el gobierno federal estaba, en efecto, dirigiendo una economía nacionalizada y mantenía una alianza con la Unión Soviética comunista, mientras que fuertes movimientos sociales con inclinaciones izquierdistas habían emergido durante la década de 1930. Como en la era de Luis Bonaparte, las clases dominantes de la época consideraban necesaria una vigorosa dosis de represión política, siendo demasiado familiar la posterior historia de la política del mccarthysmo y de la Guerra Fría, cuyos primeros signos abundaban ya a principios de la década de 1940.

² Para un examen exhaustivo, véase David Harvey, *Paris, Capital of Modernity*, Nueva York, 2003 [ed. cast.: *París, capital de la modernidad*, Madrid, Akal, 2008].

En el frente económico, persistía la cuestión de cómo podría absorberse el capital excedente.

En 1942, apareció en *Architectural Forum* una larga evaluación de las iniciativas y trabajos de Haussmann, que documentaba con detalle lo que éste había hecho, intentaba un análisis de sus errores y buscaba recuperar su reputación como uno de los mayores urbanistas de todos los tiempos. El artículo no era sino de Robert Moses, quien tras la Segunda Guerra Mundial hizo en Nueva York lo que Haussmann había hecho en París³. Moses cambió la escala de pensamiento sobre el proceso urbano. Mediante un sistema de autopistas y transformaciones de infraestructuras, suburbanización y la remodelación total no sólo de la ciudad sino del conjunto de la región metropolitana, contribuyó a resolver el problema de la absorción de capital excedente. Para lograrlo, exploró las nuevas instituciones financieras y los modelos fiscales que liberarían el crédito necesario para la expansión urbana financiada mediante el endeudamiento. Cuando este proceso se extendió al conjunto de las mayores áreas metropolitanas estadounidenses –de nuevo otro cambio de escala–, desempeñó un papel fundamental a la hora de estabilizar el capitalismo global después de 1945, periodo en el que Estados Unidos podía permitirse propulsar la economía global no comunista incurriendo en déficits comerciales.

La suburbanización de Estados Unidos no fue únicamente cuestión de nuevas infraestructuras. Como en el Segundo Imperio, implicó una transformación radical de los estilos de vida, la introducción de nuevos productos: de las viviendas a las neveras y los aires acondicionados, de los dos coches en el garaje a un enorme incremento en el consumo de petróleo. También alteró el paisaje político, ya que la propiedad subsidiada de una vivienda para la clase media cambió el objeto de atención de la acción comunitaria hacia la defensa de los valores de la propiedad y las identidades individualizadas, canalizando el voto suburbano hacia el republicanismo conservador. Se pensaba que era menos probable que los propietarios de una vivienda, aplastados por la deuda, recurriesen a la huelga. Este proyecto absorbió con éxito el excedente y aseguró la estabilidad social, aunque a costa de vaciar los centros de los cascos urbanos y generar descontento entre aquéllos, básicamente afro-americanos, a quienes se les negaba el acceso a la nueva prosperidad.

A finales de la década de 1960, comenzó un tipo diferente de crisis; Moses, como Haussmann, cayó en desgracia y su solución se consideró inapropiada e inaceptable. Los tradicionalistas se agruparon en torno a Jane Jacobs e intentaron contrarrestar la modernidad brutal de los proyectos de Moses con una estética de barrio localizado. Pero las áreas suburbanas ya habían sido construidas y el cambio radical del estilo de vida que traía

³ Robert Moses, «What Happened to Haussmann?», *Architectural Forum* LXXVII (julio de 1942), pp. 57-66.

aparejado había tenido innumerables consecuencias sociales, llevando a las feministas, por ejemplo, a proclamar esas áreas como el lugar de sus descontentos primordiales. Si la haussmannización desempeñó un papel en las dinámicas de la Comuna de París, las características descarnadas del modo de vida suburbano también desempeñaron su parte en los espectaculares acontecimientos que tuvieron lugar en Estados Unidos en 1968. Los estudiantes blancos de clase media mostraron su descontento desencadenando una fase de revuelta mediante la búsqueda de alianzas con grupos marginales que reivindicaban los derechos civiles y agrupándose contra el imperialismo estadounidense para construir otro tipo de mundo, que incluía también otro tipo de experiencia urbana.

En París, la campaña para detener la vía rápida de la margen izquierda y la destrucción de barrios tradicionales por la invasión de «gigantes de altura» como la Place d'Italie y la torre Montparnasse ayudó a animar las mayores dinámicas del levantamiento de 1968. En este contexto, Henri Lefebvre escribió *La révolution urbaine*, que predijo no sólo que la urbanización era central para la supervivencia del capitalismo y, por lo tanto, susceptible necesariamente de convertirse en objeto crucial de la lucha de clases y de la lucha política, sino que estaba desapareciendo paulatinamente la distinción entre el campo y la ciudad mediante la producción de espacios integrados a lo largo del territorio nacional, si no más allá del mismo⁴. El derecho a la ciudad tenía que significar el derecho a dirigir la totalidad del proceso urbano, que estaba dominando cada vez más el campo mediante fenómenos que iban del *agribusiness* a la segunda residencia y el turismo rural.

De la mano de la revuelta de 1968 vino la crisis financiera de las instituciones crediticias que, al financiar la deuda, habían propiciado un *boom* inmobiliario durante las décadas precedentes. La crisis se intensificó a finales de la de 1960 hasta que el sistema capitalista colapsó, primero con la explosión de la burbuja del mercado inmobiliario en 1973, a la que siguió la quiebra de la ciudad de Nueva York en 1975. Como indicó William Tabb, la respuesta a las consecuencias de esta última avanzaron, de hecho, la construcción de la respuesta neoliberal a los problemas de perpetuar el poder de clase reanimando la capacidad de absorber los excedentes que el capitalismo debe producir para sobrevivir⁵.

Rodear el globo

Demos otro salto hasta la coyuntura actual. El capitalismo internacional ha conocido una rápida serie de crisis y debacles –Asia oriental y sudo-

⁴ Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, Minneapolis, 2003, y *Writings on Cities*, Oxford, 1996.

⁵ William Tabb, *The Long Default. New York City and the Urban Fiscal Crisis*, Nueva York, 1982.

riental en 1997-1998; Rusia en 1998; Argentina en 2001—, pero hasta tiempos recientes había evitado una crisis global, aun teniendo en cuenta la inestabilidad crónica para disponer del excedente de capital. ¿Cuál fue el papel de la urbanización para estabilizar esta situación? En Estados Unidos, se acepta la opinión de que el sector de la vivienda fue un importante estabilizador de la economía, particularmente tras el hundimiento del sector de la alta tecnología a finales de la década de 1990, y un componente activo de la expansión en los primeros años de la actual. El mercado de la vivienda absorbió directamente una gran cantidad de capital excedente mediante la construcción de centros urbanos así como de viviendas y espacios de oficina suburbanos, mientras que la rápida inflación de los precios de los activos de la vivienda —respaldado por una generosa ola de refinanciación hipotecaria a tipos de interés históricamente bajos— estimuló el mercado interior estadounidense de bienes de consumo y de servicios. La expansión urbana estadounidense contribuyó parcialmente a estabilizar la economía global, en un momento en que Estados Unidos soportaba enormes déficits comerciales con el resto del mundo, endeudándose aproximadamente por un monto de 2 millardos de dólares diarios para alimentar su insaciable pauta de consumo así como las guerras de Iraq y Afganistán.

Pero el proceso urbano ha experimentado otra transformación de escala. Se ha hecho, dicho en una palabra, global. Los *booms* inmobiliarios en el Reino Unido y en España, así como en otros muchos países, han ayudado a propulsar una dinámica capitalista de modos que se asemejan a grandes rasgos a lo que ha sucedido en Estados Unidos. La urbanización de China durante los últimos veinte años ha sido de un carácter diferente, concentrándose en el desarrollo de su infraestructura, siendo incluso más importante que el proceso estadounidense. Su ritmo se intensificó enormemente tras una breve recesión en 1997, hasta el punto de que China ha consumido casi la mitad de la producción mundial de cemento desde 2000. Más de cien ciudades han rebasado el punto de inflexión del millón de habitantes durante este periodo, y pequeños pueblos como Shenzhen se han convertido en gigantescas metrópolis de entre 6 y 10 millones de habitantes. Colosales proyectos de infraestructuras, que incluyen presas y autopistas financiadas de nuevo mediante el endeudamiento, están transformando el paisaje. Las consecuencias para la economía global y la absorción de capital excedente han sido significativas: Chile crece espectacularmente gracias al alto precio del cobre, Australia avanza a pasos de gigante e incluso Brasil y Argentina se han recuperado en parte gracias a la fortaleza de la demanda china de materias primas.

¿Es la urbanización de China, por lo tanto, el estabilizador primario del capitalismo global en la actualidad? La respuesta tiene que ser un sí matizado, porque China es únicamente el epicentro de un proceso de urbanización que ahora se ha hecho genuinamente global, en parte por mor de la impresionante integración de los mercados financieros que han utilizado su flexibilidad para financiar mediante el endeudamiento el desa-

rollo urbano en todo el mundo. El banco central chino, por ejemplo, se ha mostrado activo en el mercado hipotecario estadounidense, mientras que Goldman Sachs se ha involucrado intensamente en el vigoroso mercado inmobiliario de Bombay y el capital de Hong Kong ha invertido en Baltimore. En medio de una marea de migrantes empobrecidos, la construcción ha crecido de un modo inusitado en Johannesburgo, Taipei y Moscú, así como en las ciudades de los países capitalistas centrales, como Londres y Los Ángeles. Impresionantes si no criminalmente absurdos resultan los proyectos de megaurbanización que han emergido en Oriente Próximo en lugares como Dubai y Abu Dhabi, los cuales han absorbido los excedentes procedentes de la riqueza del petróleo en los modos más obscenos, socialmente injustos y ambientalmente despilfarradores.

Esta escala global dificulta la comprensión de que lo que está sucediendo es teóricamente similar a las transformaciones que Haussmann supervisó en París, dado que el *boom* urbanizador global ha dependido, como sucedió con los que le antecedieron, de la construcción de nuevas instituciones y dispositivos financieros para organizar el crédito necesario para sostenerlo. Las innovaciones financieras lanzadas durante la década de 1980 –titularización y serialización de las hipotecas locales para ser vendidas en todo el mundo y establecimiento de nuevos vehículos para negociar obligaciones de deuda garantizada– han desempeñado un papel fundamental, siendo sus principales beneficios la dispersión del riesgo y la posibilidad de crear fondos de ahorro excedente de más fácil acceso para la demanda de vivienda. Estas innovaciones financieras también han reducido los tipos de interés globales, al tiempo que generaban inmensas fortunas para los intermediarios financieros que trabajaban con esos prodigios. Pero dispersar el riesgo no significa eliminarlo. Además, el hecho de que éste pueda distribuirse tan ampliamente, estimula comportamientos locales todavía más arriesgados, porque el pasivo puede transferirse a otra parte. Sin controles adecuados de evaluación del riesgo, esta ola de financiarización se ha traducido ahora en la doble crisis de las hipotecas *subprime* y del valor de los activos inmobiliarios. El resultado de todo ello se concentró primero en las ciudades estadounidenses, con implicaciones particularmente serias para los afroamericanos de bajos ingresos ubicados en el centro de las ciudades y los hogares a cargo de una mujer soltera. Ha afectado también a aquellos que, incapaces de permitirse los elevadísimos precios de la vivienda en los centros urbanos, especialmente en el sudoeste, fueron obligados a desplazarse a las periferias metropolitanas: aquí decidieron especular, inicialmente pagando tipos de interés baratos, con viviendas adosadas ya construidas, enfrentándose ahora a costes de desplazamiento crecientes a medida que aumenta el precio del petróleo y con cuotas hipotecarias cada vez mayores cuando comienzan a pagar los intereses de acuerdo con los tipos de mercado.

La crisis actual, con sus severas repercusiones locales sobre la vida y las infraestructuras urbanas, amenaza también la totalidad de la arquitectu-

ra del sistema financiero global y puede desencadenar, además, una recesión de envergadura. Los paralelos con la década de 1970 son escalofrantes, incluida la inmediata respuesta con la concesión de dinero fácil por parte de la Reserva Federal en 2007-2008, que generará casi con toda seguridad fuertes corrientes de inflación incontrolable, si no una situación de estanflación, en un futuro no muy lejano. Sin embargo, la situación es mucho más compleja en la actualidad, y sigue siendo una cuestión abierta si China puede compensar una debacle seria de Estados Unidos; incluso parece que en aquel país el ritmo de la urbanización puede estar ralentizándose⁶. Los sistemas de negociación informatizados que operan prácticamente en tiempo real siempre amenazan con crear una gran divergencia en el mercado, que ya está produciendo una increíble volatilidad en la negociación bursátil y que precipitará una crisis masiva que requerirá repensar totalmente cómo funcionan no sólo los mercados monetarios y financieros, sino también su relación con la urbanización.

Propiedad y pacificación

Como en todas las fases precedentes, esta última radical expansión del proceso urbano ha traído aparejadas increíbles transformaciones de los estilos de vida. La calidad de la vida urbana se ha convertido en una mercancía, como la ciudad misma, en un mundo en el que el consumismo, el turismo, las industrias culturales y las basadas en el conocimiento se han convertido en aspectos esenciales de la economía política urbana. La inclinación posmoderna a estimular la formación de nichos de mercado –tanto en los hábitos de consumo como en las formas culturales– acecha la experiencia urbana contemporánea con un aura de libertad de elección, siempre que se disponga de dinero para ello. Grandes centros y superficies comerciales proliferan como lo hacen los restaurantes de *fast food* y los mercados de productos artesanales. Asistimos ahora, como señala el sociólogo urbano Sharon Zukin, a la «pacificación mediante el *capuccino*». Incluso la incoherente, blanda y monótona promoción de vivienda adosada suburbana, que continúa dominando en muchas áreas, recibe ahora su antídoto en la forma de un movimiento en pro de un «nuevo urbanismo» que oferta la venta de comunidad y estilos de vida de calidad para cumplir todo tipo de sueños urbanos. Éste es un mundo en el que la ética neoliberal de un intenso individualismo posesivo y su correspondiente retirada política de las formas de acción colectiva se convierte en el modelo de la socialización humana⁷. La defensa de los valores de la propiedad se convierte en un interés político tan fundamental que, como señala Mike Davis, las asociaciones de propietarios en el esta-

⁶ Richard Bookstaber, *A Demon of Our Own Design. Markets, Hedge Funds and the Perils of Financial Innovation*, Hoboken (NJ), 2007.

⁷ Hilde Nafstad *et al.*, «Ideology and Power. The Influence of Current Neoliberalism in Society», *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology* XVII, 4 (julio de 2007), pp. 313-327.

do de California se han convertido en bastiones de la reacción política, si no de fascismos fragmentados a escala de barrio⁸.

Vivimos cada vez más en áreas urbanas divididas y proclives al conflicto. Durante las últimas tres décadas, el giro neoliberal ha restaurado el poder de clase en manos de las elites ricas. En México han aparecido 14 milmillonarios desde entonces, y en 2006 el país se jactaba de que un connacional, Carlos Slim, era el hombre más rico del planeta, al tiempo que las rentas de los pobres se habían estancado o directamente disminuido. Los resultados se hallan indeleblemente grabados en las formas espaciales de nuestras ciudades, caracterizadas cada vez más por fragmentos fortificados, comunidades valladas y espacios públicos privatizados sometidos a constante vigilancia. En el mundo en vías de desarrollo en particular, la ciudad

se está dividiendo en diferentes partes separadas, con la evidente formación de innumerables «micro Estados». Barrios ricos dotados de todo tipo de servicios, tales como escuelas exclusivas, campos de golf y de tenis, y servicios privados de policía que patrullan el área de modo permanente, se entrelazan con asentamientos ilegales en los que puede disponerse de agua únicamente en fuentes públicas, no existe alcantarillado, la electricidad es pirateada por unos pocos privilegiados, las calles se convierten en barrizales cuando llueve, y donde compartir casa es la norma. Cada fragmento parece vivir y funcionar de modo autónomo, aferrándose tenazmente a lo que ha sido capaz de conseguir en la lucha diaria por la supervivencia⁹.

Bajo estas condiciones, los ideales de identidad urbana, ciudadanía y pertenencia —ya amenazados por la difusión del malestar de la ética neoliberal— resultan mucho más difíciles de sostener. La redistribución privatizada mediante la actividad criminal amenaza la seguridad a cada paso, promoviendo demandas populares para que sea suprimida por la policía. Incluso la idea de que la ciudad podría funcionar como cuerpo político colectivo, un lugar en el que y desde el que los movimientos sociales progresivos podrían emanar, no parece plausible. Existen, sin embargo, movimientos sociales urbanos que intentan superar el aislamiento y remodelar la ciudad de acuerdo con una imagen diferente de la promovida por los promotores inmobiliarios respaldados por el capital financiero, el capital corporativo y un aparato de Estado cada vez más imbuido por una lógica estrictamente empresarial.

Desposiciones

La absorción de excedente mediante la transformación urbana tiene un aspecto todavía más siniestro, que ha implicado repetidas explosiones de

⁸ Mike Davis, *City of Quartz. Excavating the Future in Los Angeles*, Londres y Nueva York, 1990 [ed. cast.: *Ciudad de cuarzo*, Madrid, Lengua de Trapo, 2003].

⁹ Marcello Balbo, «Urban Planning and the Fragmented City of Developing Countries», *Third World Planning Review* XV, 1 (1993), pp. 23-35.

reestructuración urbana mediante la «destrucción creativa», que tiene casi siempre una dimensión de clase, dado que son los pobres, los no privilegiados y los marginados del poder político quienes sufren primeo y en mayor medida las consecuencias de este proceso en el que la violencia es necesaria para construir el nuevo mundo urbano a partir de las ruinas del viejo. Haussmann desgarró los viejos barrios pobres de París, utilizando el poder de la expropiación en nombre de la mejora y la renovación cívicas, e implementó deliberadamente la expulsión de buena parte de la clase obrera y de otros elementos levantiscos presentes en el centro de la ciudad, donde constituían una amenaza al orden público y al poder. Creó una forma urbana en la que pensaba –incorrectamente, como se demostró en 1871– que, con niveles suficientes de vigilancia y control militar, podría garantizarse que los movimientos revolucionarios serían domados con facilidad. Sin embargo, como Engels señaló en 1872:

En realidad, la burguesía dispone únicamente de un método para resolver el problema de la vivienda de modo vacilante, es decir, resolverlo de modo que la solución continuamente reproduzca de nuevo el problema. Este método se llama «Haussmann» [...] No importa qué diferentes puedan ser las razones, el resultado siempre es el mismo; los escandalosos callejones y callejuelas desaparecen acompañados por las generosas autoalabanzas de la burguesía que explican el tremendo éxito cosechado, pero reaparecen de nuevo inmediatamente en algún otro sitio [...] La misma necesidad económica que los produjo en una primera ubicación, los reproduce en otro lugar¹⁰.

Llevó más de cien años completar el aburguesamiento del centro de París, con las consecuencias vistas en los recientes levantamientos y en la ola de violencia que sacudió los suburbios aislados que atrapan a los migrantes marginados y a los trabajadores y jóvenes desempleados. Lo triste en este caso, por supuesto, es que la situación descrita por Engels se reproduce de modo recurrente a lo largo de la historia. Robert Moses «empuñó el hacha en el Bronx», según sus propias palabras, cosechando largos y ruidosos lamentos de los grupos y movimientos vecinales. En el caso de París y Nueva York, una vez que el poder de las expropiaciones del Estado ha sido objeto de resistencia y contención exitosas, se desencadena una progresión más insidiosa y cancerosa a través de la disciplina presupuestaria municipal, la especulación inmobiliaria y la zonificación del uso del suelo de acuerdo con la tasa de beneficio de su «más elevado y mejor uso». Engels comprendió esta secuencia de modo más que certero:

El crecimiento de las grandes ciudades modernas concede al suelo localizado en determinadas áreas, particularmente en aquellas que se hallan centralmente situadas, un incremento artificial y colosal de su valor. Los edificios erigidos sobre las mismas deprimen su valor en vez de incrementarlo, porque dejan de estar adaptados a circunstancias que no dejan de modificarse, siendo entonces

¹⁰ Friedrich Engels, *The Housing Question*, Nueva York, 1935, pp. 74-77.

derribados y sustituidos por otros, lo cual sucede sobre todo con las viviendas de los trabajadores que se hallan ubicadas en los centros de las ciudades y cuyas rentas, incluso forzando al máximo su congestión, nunca pueden, o lo hacen muy lentamente, incrementarse por encima de determinado máximo. Son demolidas y en su lugar se construyen tiendas, almacenes y edificios públicos¹¹.

Aunque esta descripción fue escrita en 1872, es aplicable directamente al desarrollo urbano contemporáneo en gran parte de Asia –Delhi, Seúl, Bombay–, así como a los procesos de gentrificación de Nueva York. En el corazón de la urbanización característica del capitalismo radica un proceso desplazamiento y lo que yo denomino «acumulación por desposesión»¹². Se trata de la contraimagen de la absorción de capital mediante el redesarrollo urbano, que da lugar a numerosos conflictos en torno a la captura de suelo valioso en manos de las poblaciones de renta baja que han podido vivir en esas ubicaciones durante muchos años.

Considérese el caso de Seúl durante la década de 1990: las empresas de construcción y los promotores inmobiliarios contrataron escuadras de matones con complexión de luchadores de sumo para invadir los barrios de las colinas de la ciudad, que no sólo demolieron y destruyeron las viviendas sino también todas las pertenencias de aquellos que habían construido sus propias casas durante la década de 1950 en terrenos que se habían convertido ahora en suelo de gran valor. Edificios de gran altura, que no muestran traza alguna de la brutalidad que permitió su construcción, cubren ahora la mayoría de esas colinas. En Bombay, entretanto, 6 millones de personas oficialmente consideradas como chabolistas se hallan instaladas en terrenos sobre los que no poseen título legal alguno; todos los mapas de la ciudad dejan estos lugares en blanco. Con la pretensión de convertir Bombay en un centro financiero global digno de rivalizar con Shanghai, el *boom* inmobiliario se ha intensificado y el suelo que ocupan estos habitantes ilegales parece cada vez más valioso. Dharavi, una de las áreas urbanas hiperdegradadas más prominentes de Bombay, se estima que puede tener un valor de 2 millardos de dólares. La presión para desalojarla –aduciendo razones ambientales y sociales que ocultan el apoderamiento del suelo– asciende día tras día. Los poderes financieros, respaldados por el Estado, presionan para que se produzca un desalojo por la fuerza, con la intención de apropiarse violentamente de terrenos en algunos casos ocupados durante una generación. Se trata de acumulación de capital mediante *booms* de actividad inmobiliaria, ya que el suelo se adquiere prácticamente sin ningún coste.

¿Será compensada la gente que es desplazada? Los afortunados obtendrán algo, pero aunque la Constitución india especifica que el Estado tiene la

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 23

¹² D. Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, Oxford, 2003, capítulo 4 [ed. cast.: *El nuevo imperialismo*, Madrid, Akal, 2004].

obligación de proteger las vidas y el bienestar del conjunto de la población, con independencia de la clase o la casta, y de garantizar los derechos a la vivienda y el alojamiento, el Tribunal Supremo ha dictado sentencias que reescriben esa exigencia constitucional. Como los habitantes de esas áreas urbanas hiperdegradadas son ocupantes ilegales y muchos no pueden demostrar de modo irrefutable una residencia prolongada, no tienen derecho de compensación. Conceder tal derecho, afirma el Tribunal Supremo, equivaldría a recompensar a los rateros por sus acciones, de modo que los ocupantes ilegales, o bien resisten y luchan, o bien se trasladan con sus pocas pertenencias para acampar en los márgenes de las autopistas o donde puedan encontrar un reducido lugar para instalarse¹³. Ejemplos de desposesión pueden encontrarse también en Estados Unidos, aunque éstos tienden a ser menos brutales y más legalistas: el derecho del Estado al dominio eminente ha sido objeto de abuso a fin de desplazar a residentes establecidos en viviendas razonables en beneficio de usos del suelo de mayor importancia como grandes edificios de viviendas y centros comerciales. Cuando tal comportamiento llegó al Tribunal Supremo estadounidense, los jueces sentenciaron que era constitucional que las autoridades locales se comportasen de ese modo para incrementar la base imponible de sus impuestos sobre la propiedad¹⁴.

En China, millones de personas están siendo desposeídas de los espacios que han ocupado durante largo tiempo, ascendiendo a 3 millones únicamente en Pekín. Como carecen de derechos de propiedad privada, el Estado puede simplemente desplazarlos por decreto, ofreciendo un pequeño pago en metálico para ayudarles en su nueva situación, antes de conceder con gran beneficio el suelo a los promotores. En algunos casos, la gente se ha movido voluntariamente, pero abundan las noticias de casos de gran resistencia, que son respondidos con una represión brutal por el Partido Comunista. En China abundan los casos de desplazamientos de población en los márgenes rurales, que ilustran el significado de la idea de Lefebvre, visionariamente articulada en la década de 1960, de que la distinción entre lo urbano y lo rural se estaba disolviendo en un conjunto de espacios porosos de desarrollo geográfico desigual bajo el poder hegemónico del capital y del Estado. Esto ha sucedido en India, donde los gobiernos central y estatal favorecen ahora el establecimiento de Zonas Económicas Especiales, supuestamente para el desarrollo industrial, aunque la mayoría del suelo se dedica a la urbanización. Esta política ha conducido a enconadas batallas contra los productores agrícolas, cuyo epítome fue la masacre de Nandigram en Bengala occidental en marzo de 2007, orquestada por el gobierno marxista del estado. El intento de encontrar terrenos para el Grupo Salim, un conglomerado indonesio, por parte del gobierno del PCI (marxista) se saldó con el envío de la policía

¹³ Usha Ramanathan, «Illegality and the Urban Poor», *Economic and Political Weekly*, 22 de julio de 2006; Rakesh Shukla, «Rights of the Poor. An Overview of Supreme Court», *Economic and Political Weekly*, 2 de septiembre de 2006.

¹⁴ *Kelo versus New London, CT*, decidió el 23 de junio de 2005 en el caso 545 US 469 (2005).

para dispersar a los habitantes del pueblo, de los cuales 14 murieron y docenas fueron heridos. Los derechos de propiedad en este caso no proporcionaron ninguna protección.

¿Qué opinar, por otro lado, de la propuesta aparentemente progresista de conceder derechos de propiedad privada a las poblaciones que ocupan ilegalmente, proporcionándoles activos que les permitirían salir de la pobreza?¹⁵ Un plan de este tipo se está discutiendo ahora para las favelas de Rio de Janeiro, por ejemplo. El problema es que los pobres, asediados por la inseguridad de su renta y frecuentes dificultades financieras, pueden ser persuadidos fácilmente de vender ese activo por un pago en metálico relativamente bajo. Los ricos habitualmente rechazan renunciar a sus activos de valor sin importar lo elevado que pueda ser el precio ofrecido por ellos, lo cual explica por qué Moses pudo empuñar el hacha en el Bronx de rentas bajas, pero no en la rica Park Avenue. El efecto duradero de la privatización de la vivienda social en Gran Bretaña por Margaret Thatcher ha sido crear una estructura de alquileres y precios en toda el área del Londres metropolitano que impide a los grupos de renta baja o incluso de clase media el acceso a una vivienda en punto alguno próximo al centro urbano. Apuesto que en quince años, si continúan las tendencias actuales, la totalidad de las colinas de Rio de Janeiro ocupadas por favelas estarán cubiertas por altos edificios de viviendas con vistas fabulosas sobre la idílica bahía de la ciudad, mientras que los anteriores habitantes de aquéllas habrán sido filtrados a alguna remota periferia.

Formular demandas

La urbanización, podemos concluir, ha desempeñado un papel crucial en la absorción de los excedentes de capital, siempre a una escala geográfica cada vez mayor, pero al precio de un proceso impresionante de destrucción creativa que ha desposeído a las masas de todo derecho a la ciudad, cualesquiera que sean éstos. El planeta como terreno de construcción choca con el «planeta de ciudades miseria»¹⁶. Periódicamente esto acaba en revuelta, como en París en 1871 o en Estados Unidos tras el asesinato de Martin Luther King en 1968. Si, como parece probable, las dificultades presupuestarias crecen y la hasta ahora exitosa fase neoliberal, posmoderna y consumista de urbanización capitalista mediante la absorción de excedente llega a su fin y se desencadena una crisis de mayores dimensiones, entonces se plantea la siguiente pregunta: ¿dónde está nuestro 1968 o, dicho más llamativamente, nuestra versión de la Comuna? Como sucede con el sistema financiero, la respuesta va a ser mucho más compleja precisamente porque el proceso urbano presenta ahora un alcance global. Los signos de rebelión se prodigan por doquier: el malestar en China e India es crónico, las guerras civiles desgarran África, América Latina está en fermento. Cualquiera de estas revueltas podría ser contagiosa. A diferencia del sistema financiero, sin embargo, los movimientos urbanos y periurbanos de oposición, que abundan en todo el mundo, no se ha-

llan estrechamente interrelacionados; de hecho, la mayoría no tienen conexión entre sí. Si algo los hiciera conectarse entre sí, ¿qué exigirían?

La respuesta a esta última pregunta es realmente simple en teoría: mayor control democrático sobre la producción y utilización del excedente. Dado que el proceso urbano es un canal esencial de uso del excedente, instituir una gestión democrática sobre su despliegue urbano constituye el derecho a la ciudad. A lo largo de la historia capitalista, parte del plusvalor ha sido gravado fiscalmente, y durante las fases socialdemócratas la proporción a disposición del Estado ha crecido de modo significativo. El proyecto neoliberal de los últimos 30 años ha estado orientado hacia la privatización de ese control. Los datos del conjunto de países de la OCDE muestran, sin embargo, que la parte gestionada por el Estado del producto bruto se ha mantenido prácticamente constante desde la década de 1970¹⁷. El mayor logro del asalto neoliberal ha sido, por consiguiente, impedir que la cuota pública se expandiese como lo hizo durante la década de 1960. El neoliberalismo también ha creado nuevos sistemas de *governance* que integran los intereses del Estado y de las empresas, y que, mediante el uso del poder del dinero, han asegurado que la utilización del excedente a través de la Administración pública favorezca al capital corporativo y a las clases dominantes a la hora de conformar el proceso urbano. Incrementar la proporción del excedente detentado por el Estado únicamente tendrá un impacto positivo si éste es sometido de nuevo a control democrático.

Es obvio que el derecho a la ciudad está cayendo cada vez más en manos de intereses privados o cuasi privados. En Nueva York, por ejemplo, el multimillonario alcalde Michael Bloomberg está remodelando la ciudad en sintonía con los promotores, Wall Street y los elementos de la clase capitalista transnacional, promoviendo como una ubicación óptima para las empresas de alta gama y un destino fantástico para los turistas. Está convirtiendo Manhattan en una inmensa comunidad vallada para los ricos. En Ciudad de México, Carlos Slim había remodelado las calles del centro para agradar la mirada de los turistas. Pero no sólo se trata de que individuos ricos ejerzan un poder directo. En la ciudad de New Haven, carente de recursos para la reinversión urbana, está Yale, una de las universidades más ricas del mundo, que está rediseñando gran parte del tejido urbano para adaptarlo a sus necesidades. Johns Hopkins University está haciendo lo propio con la zona oriental de Baltimore, y Colombia University planea hacer lo mismo respecto a determinadas áreas de Nueva York: ambas iniciativas han desencadenado movimientos vecinales de resistencia. El derecho a la ciudad, tal como se halla hoy constituido, se encuentra demasiado restringido, en la mayoría de los casos, a una reducida elite política y económica que se halla en condiciones cada vez más de conformar las ciudades de acuerdo con sus propios deseos.

¹⁷ OECD Factbook 2008. *Economic, Environmental and Social Statistics*, París, 2008, p. 225.

Cada mes de enero, la Oficina del Interventor del Estado de Nueva York publica una estimación del total de bonos pagados por Wall Street durante los anteriores 12 meses. En 2007, un año desastroso para los mercados financieros desde todo punto de vista, esos bonos ascendieron a 33,2 millardos de dólares, tan sólo un 2 por 100 menos que el año anterior. A mediados del verano de 2007, la Reserva Federal y el Banco Central Europeo inyectaron miles de millones de dólares en créditos a corto plazo en el sistema financiero para asegurar su estabilidad, y posteriormente la Fed redujo espectacularmente los tipos de interés e inyectó enormes cantidades de liquidez cada vez que el índice Dow amenazaba con caer estrepitosamente. Entretanto, aproximadamente dos millones de personas han perdido o están a punto de perder sus viviendas por la ejecución de sus hipotecas. Muchos barrios urbanos e incluso comunidades periurbanas en Estados Unidos han sido clausuradas y vandalizadas, destrozadas por las prácticas prestamistas de las instituciones financieras. Esta población no percibe bonos. En realidad, dado que la ejecución hipotecaria significa la condonación de la deuda, lo cual es considerado como una renta en Estados Unidos, muchos de los expulsados se enfrentan a una importante carga tributaria en concepto de impuesto sobre la renta por un dinero que nunca estuvo en sus manos. Esta asimetría no puede entenderse sino como una contundente y masiva forma de confrontación de clase. Está desencadenándose un «Katrina financiero», que amenaza, convenientemente para los promotores inmobiliarios, con barrer barrios enteros de renta baja ubicados en terrenos potencialmente de alto valor situados en el centro de las ciudades, de forma mucho más eficaz y rápida de lo que sería posible con los expedientes de expropiación forzosa.

Durante el siglo XXI veremos surgir una oposición coherente a estas pautas de comportamiento. Existen ya, por supuesto, una gran cantidad de diversos movimientos sociales que se concentran en la cuestión urbana, desde India y Brasil hasta China, España, Argentina y Estados Unidos. En 2001, se insertó un anexo sobre la ciudad en la Constitución brasileña, fruto de la presión ejercida por los movimientos sociales, que reconocía el derecho colectivo a la ciudad¹⁸. En Estados Unidos, se ha sugerido que los 700 millardos de dólares destinados a rescatar a las instituciones financieras se entreguen a un Banco para la Reconstrucción que serviría para evitar las ejecuciones hipotecarias y financiar proyectos para revitalizar los barrios y renovar las infraestructuras municipales. La crisis urbana que está afectando a millones de personas se pondría por delante de las necesidades de los grandes inversores y financieros. Desafortunadamente, los movimientos sociales no son lo suficientemente fuertes como para imponer esta solución, ni han convergido todavía en torno al objetivo singular de obtener un mayor control sobre los usos del excedente y mucho menos sobre las condiciones de su producción.

¹⁸ Edésio Fernandes, «Constructing the “Right to the City” in Brazil», *Social and Legal Studies* XVI, 2 (junio de 2007), pp. 201-219.

En este momento de la historia, ésta tiene que ser una lucha global, predominantemente con el capital financiero, ya que ésta es la escala a la que trabajan en la actualidad los procesos de urbanización. Obviamente, la tarea política de organizar tal confrontación es difícil, cuando no apabullante. Sin embargo, las oportunidades se multiplican, porque, como demuestra este breve texto, las crisis estallan recurrentemente en torno a la urbanización tanto local como globalmente, y las metrópolis se han convertido en el punto de colisión masiva –¿nos atrevemos a llamarlo lucha de clases?– de la acumulación por desposesión impuesta sobre los menos pudientes y del impulso promotor que pretende colonizar espacio para los ricos.

Dar un paso adelante para unificar estas luchas supone adoptar el derecho a la ciudad como eslogan práctico e ideal político, porque el mismo plantea la cuestión de quién domina la conexión necesaria entre urbanización y producción y utilización del excedente. La democratización de ese derecho y la construcción de un amplio movimiento social para hacerlo realidad son imprescindibles si los desposeídos han de recuperar el control sobre la ciudad del que durante tanto tiempo han estado privados, y desean instituir nuevos modos de urbanización. Lefebvre tenía razón en insistir en que la revolución tiene que ser urbana, en el más amplio sentido de este término, o no será.

From critical urban theory to the right to the city

Peter Marcuse

The right to the city is becoming, in theory and in practice, a widespread, effective formulation of a set of demands to be actively thought through and pursued. But whose right, what right and to what city? Each question is examined in turn, first in the historical context of 1968 in which Henri Lefebvre first popularized the phrase, then in its meaning for the guidance of action. The conclusion suggests that exposing, proposing and politicizing the key issues can move us closer to implementing this right.

I. Introduction: overview and definitions

The main concern of this paper is what I take to be the ultimate purpose of critical urban theory: implementing the demand for a Right to the City. But that is a demand, a goal, that needs definition. Whose right is it about, what right is it and to what city? The paper begins with a look at the actual problems that people face today, and then looks at them in their historical context, focusing on the difference between the crisis of 1968, which produced the demand for the Right to the City, and the crisis we confront today. The question then is: how do we understand the Right to the City today, and how can a critical urban theory contribute to implementing it? The paper suggests an approach to action that relies on three steps a critical theory could follow: exposing, proposing and politicizing. The conclusion presents a perhaps far-fetched idea of what the possibilities for large-scale and enduring social change might actually be today. Is another world not only possible, but realistically attainable?

A word on the use of terms. ‘Critical’, ‘urban’, ‘theory’ and ‘practice’ are four

important words and concepts. (One might argue that ‘theory and practice’ are really only one word in this context, but that’s truer in theory than in practice.)

‘Critical’ I take to be, among other things, shorthand for an evaluative attitude towards reality, a questioning rather than an acceptance of the world as it is, a taking apart and examining and attempting to understand the world. It leads to a position not only necessarily critical in the sense of negative criticism, but also critically exposing the positive and the possibilities of change, implying positions on what is wrong and needing change, but also on what is desirable and needs to be built on and fostered.

‘Urban’ I take to be shorthand for the societal as congealed in cities today, and to denote the point at which the rubber of the personal hits the ground of the societal, the intersection of everyday life with the socially created systemic world about us.

‘Theory’ I take to be the attempt to understand, to explain and to illuminate the meaning and possibilities of the world in which practice takes place. It is, in a sense, the conscious and articulated aspect of practice, of action. It is developed through action, and

in turn informs understanding and undergirds practice.

'Practice' is often spoken of as if it were the Siamese twin of theory, because it is needed for theory and because theory should lead to practice if it is taken seriously. The image is of a theory and a practice that are linked organically, that a critical theory depends on a critical practice and a critical practice depends on a critical theory. But it is not so simple. The Paris Commune, a classical example of critical practice, began with no 'theory', and leading exponents of critical theory saw their work as *Flaschenpost*, in Adorno's words, analysis written down and put in a bottle thrown in the ocean hoping it would some day be retrieved and be useful. But it may have been one of the failings of the mainstream of critical theory that it saw itself evolving independently of practice, and it may similarly have been a weakness of some forms of critical action that they proceeded uninformed and even rejecting critical theory, as in the *We Are the Poors* approach (Desai, 2002) and in some forms of anarchist and communitarian action.¹

In any event, as used here, critical urban theory is taken as analysis that flows from the experience of practice in developing the potentials of existing urban society, and critical theory is intended to illuminate and inform the future course of such practice.

The sections that follow discuss the reality today and its history, the right to the city in terms of whose right, what right and what city, solutions in terms of the formulation Expose, Propose, Politicize and finally, getting to the goal.

II. The reality today and its history

Today

As this is written, two developments shape the context for our analysis: the election of Barack Obama as president of the USA and the deepening economic crisis globally.

The election of Obama was seen as a dramatic event, not only in the USA but in the world. What does it in fact mean? What has changed, and what has not? Answering the question requires exactly critical theory. For the answer is, in conventional terms, everything has changed, but as well, in critical terms, nothing has changed—and it is the ability of critical theory to say what has and what hasn't changed that entitles it to an important place in our thinking and action. What has changed is that the use of racism as a support for economic and social policies that exploit and oppress has become counter-productive, as racism is rejected by more and more people (although not by all) as contrary to their own experiences and values. And we still have institutional racism, so that for every dollar of wealth held by the typical white family the African American family has only ten cents (Lui, 2009, p. A15). What has not changed is the underlying structure of the society in which the election took place, neither politically—this was the most expensive campaign in the history of the USA, and the media's role in it was enormous—nor economically—the Goldman Sachs crew who are running the national treasury, and their economist academic minions, are running the Federal government's economic role after Obama's election as they did before, and the \$700 billion bail-out for the financial sector already authorized will be implemented in full, if not expanded. Even the staid *New York Times* writes:

'Goldman's presence in the [US Treasury] department is so ubiquitous that other bankers and competitors have given the star-studded firm a new nickname; Government Sachs.' (Creswell and White, 2008, p. 1)

Another aspect of the US presidential election campaign that led up to the election result is noteworthy, and ties in with a major argument I want to make here. Both parties ran under the slogan of 'Change'; Obama's was 'Change you can believe in', McCain highlighted his maverick, non-conformist

record every chance he got. Close to 50% saw the change needed as being in one direction, close to 50% saw it in another, but hardly anyone was satisfied with things as they are. If critical urban theory is able to expose the roots of that dissatisfaction, and show both almost equal halves that their dissatisfaction is with the same features of the economy, the politics, the society, it will have done its job.

The other development, already unfolding as the election took place, is the economic crisis. I focus on the USA, but the picture is similar globally. In the USA today, over 6 million households (Credit Suisse, 2008) face mortgage foreclosure, unemployment is rising to a several decades-long high, homeless use of emergency shelters is at an all-time high in New York City, real wages are falling way behind increases in productivity, the gap between rich and poor is growing. The financial crisis seems to be spreading, to engulf more and more people, to cause more and more unemployment, insecurity, hunger and want, a greater and greater dissatisfaction with conditions as they are, with inequality, luxury in the midst of poverty, illiteracy, substantive as well as linguistic, selfishness in place of solidarity, isolation in place of love. But I think it is not a financial crisis spreading to other parts of the economy that we confront, but an economy whose contradictions are erupting in a very visible manner in the financial sector, but only as manifestations of much more deep-seated contradictions which we should not allow to be concealed in the focus on issues of regulation or deregulation in one small excrescence of a fundamentally flawed system as a whole. The problem is not in unregulated credit default swaps or out of control hedge funds; the problem is in exploitation, domination, repression system-wide.

Fundamentally, the crisis comes from a system that both necessarily produces gross material inequality and at the same time produces gross insecurity and emotional discontent and distortions. Greed is not an aberration of the system; it is what makes the

system go. Calling greed 'the profit motive' is a euphemism that tries to justify a system that relies on greed to produce growth at the expense of all other values, and that stifles creativity that does not serve profit. Anti-abortion activists, religious fundamentalists, defenders of 'family values', are as much a reflection of emotional impoverishment as hunger and homelessness are of material deprivation. A society one-dimensional in its driving force produces one-dimensional people, and struggles to be supported by them. The victims of the system include both the materially deprived and the intellectually and socially alienated, as is explored below.

The history of the Right to the City as a slogan dealing with such problems came into widespread usage largely out of the events—the theory and the practice—of May 1968 in Paris, and their parallels worldwide. Further discussion requires a look at that history, what preceded it, how it compares to the events of today.

History: before and after 1968

'Crisis?' Capitalism has always been a system with deep internal contradictions. Marxism has had the investigation of crises at the center of its concerns, and its conclusions are hardly likely to be disproven by current events. In the 20th century, five major crises, five periods of deep-going social turmoil, can be identified. They differ in their severity and consequences in the respective strengths and weaknesses of both the system's critics and of its defenders—a critical point. The five crises are:

- 1917: The crisis after the end of the First World War, and the victory of the Russian revolution, the Weimar Republic
- 1929: The great depression, the triumph of fascism, the New Deal
- 1968: The civil rights movement, the new left, the student protests, the Vietnam War

- 1990: The crisis of really existing socialism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union
 2008: Today's more-than-financial crisis.

I mention three of these, 1917, 1929 and 1990, only to make an often forgotten point: the range of resolutions of crisis is a broad one, not confined to the kinds of questions that seem to pre-empt public discourse today: do we regulate speculation or not, do we increase welfare benefits or not, do we end this war or not, do we bail out this bank or this business or not, do we put up trade barriers or take them down. Historically, the choices are much broader. As these earlier crises have shown, at the extremes there lie, and have always lain, socialism on the one side, barbarism, in the modern form of fascism, on the other. Neither extreme seems imminent today, if for different reasons—not socialism, for lack of a base that presses for it or might bring it about, and not fascism, because the forces of domination have found subtler and more insidious means of holding on to power than naked violence.² In each crisis, the outcome has depended, not simply on the strength or weakness of the critical forces (and not the quality of their critical theory) but also on the strengths and weaknesses of the established system. Indeed, one key function of critical theory may well be to expose and evaluate both the strengths and weaknesses of the existing system and the ultimate nature of its crises, thus informing practice as to what its strategic potential actually is, as well as analyzing the strategies that that practice might adopt.

After 1917, none of these crises involved more than sporadic violence, and all but 1929 in Europe seemed in reality (if not always in the minds of the participants) remote from the extremes of communism and fascism. But the crises of 1968 and 1990 were different from the earlier ones in one key regard: they did not rest on the material breakdown of the existing system, on the depth of poverty or oppression or material want, but on the combined dissatisfaction of

broad elements of the population with the frustrated potentials that they saw in society—in a sense, resting on injustice rather than, or in addition to, want. The contradiction between the reality and the potential for greater progress undermined really existing socialism in the Stalinist period, but the potential was even clearer in May 1968, in Paris most prominently, but in April of that year in universities in the USA and elsewhere also. In each case critical action represented a new element in the oppositional protest. For the first time on a significant scale, the agitation resulting from the aspirations of the alienated were linked, if tenuously and in constant tension, with the demands of the materially exploited: the claims of the students to the claims of the workers (see Marcuse, 2008). Workers as a whole were not uniformly supportive, and the institutionalized organs of the working class opposed the protests; yet worker support on the ground was strong.

On the other hand, the state against which the protests were directed, the rulers, the capitalists and the underwriters of the establishment, were strong. The context was not of economic crisis; the system was still, in my father's phrase, producing the goods. And the goods it produced satisfied the majority; those aspiring to something more than those goods remained a minority. The protest was defeated.

Today, in 2009, we have in a sense the reverse situation. The system is shaky in its production of the goods, whose delivery relies today more and more on financial arrangements rather than direct home production within the national economy. Foreclosures are up dramatically, with close to 4,000,000 threatened, unemployment is rising, local tax revenues and thus local governmental services are shrinking, public education is endangered, the security of retirements is threatened as pension funds lose large percentages of their value. And things are expected to get worse.

The establishment's response has been widely and deeply unpopular. The largest

financial institutions have taken over the national treasury quite directly in private hands, have in effect privatized the government (quite a reversal of the nationalization of the banks of which Marx wrote in the Communist Manifesto). Goldman Sachs, one of the largest of the private financial banking and speculation firms, now has its members staffing the national treasury, distributing multiple billions of dollars to the biggest banks and financial institutions, those precisely that are universally recognized as having caused the immediate crisis to which they are supposed to be responding. Insecurity is widespread and deep, and the rulers and their lackeys are almost apologetic in their response; Alan Greenspan, as I write this, has admitted he 'overestimated the market'.

Yet the protest has been subdued. Life on the campuses barely notices the crisis. Labor unions confine themselves to asking for limits on CEO pay. Bernie Sanders, the one socialist member of Congress (elected as an independent—socialist is not a label that can get you elected) speaks of nationalizing the banks; no one listens. The media denounce the 'greed' of the bankers; no one blames the banking system and its driving force, the accumulation of profit and expansion of capital. The left intelligentsia speaks to itself, trying to figure out how deep the crisis is; the media erects a wall against fundamental questioning of the system. Socialism remains a bad word in US electoral politics, in which the contenders shy away from it in unquestioning condemnation and speak only of regulation and renewed economic growth.

Critical urban theory can provide some illumination on why this situation exists. It has to do with the question of whose right to the city is involved, who the potential actors, the 'agents of change', are and what moves them either to propose or to oppose basic change.

III. Right to the City

The Right to the City is both an immediately understandable and intuitively compelling

slogan, and a theoretically complex and provocative formulation. What does the Right to the City mean? More specifically: Whose Right are we talking about? What Right is it we mean? What City is it to which we want the right?

Henri Lefebvre popularized the slogan in 1968, but he was more provocative than careful in its usage. The best definition he gave is:

'... the right to the city is like a cry and a demand. This right slowly meanders through the surprising detours of nostalgia and tourism, the return to the heart of the traditional city, and the call of existent or recently developed centralities.' (Lefebvre, 1967, p. 158)

In other places he has it meandering through:

'the right to information, the rights to use of multiple services, the right of users to make known their ideas on the space and time of their activities in urban areas; it would also cover the right to the use of the center'. (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 34)

So: *whose right, what right and to what city?*

Whose right?

'Whose right' is a complex question, and one as to which I think an expansion of the existing discussion would be worthwhile—useful both theoretically and in practice.

The question is a long-standing one. Herbert Marcuse struggled with it (Marcuse, 1969). David Harvey (2009) recently called attention to it in today's context:

'I don't think we are in a position to define who the agents of change will be in the present conjuncture and it plainly will vary from one part of the world to another. In the United States right now there are signs that elements of the managerial class, which has lived off the earnings of finance capital all these years, is getting annoyed and may turn a bit radical. A lot of people have been laid off in the financial services, in some instances

they have even had their mortgages foreclosed. Cultural producers are waking up to the nature of the problems we face and in the same way that the 1960s art schools were centers of political radicalism, you might find something like that re-emerging. We may see the rise of cross-border organizations as the reductions in remittances spread the crisis to places like rural Mexico or Kerala.'

The analysis following is new, but I think it is consistent with Lefebvre's, and certainly with my father's. Lefebvre's right is both a cry and a demand, a cry out of necessity and a demand for something more. Those are two separate things. I would reformulate them to be an exigent demand by those deprived of basic material and existing legal rights, and an aspiration for the future by those discontented with life as they see it around them, perceived as limiting their own potentials for growth and creativity.

The demand comes from those directly in want, directly oppressed, those for whom even their most immediate needs are not fulfilled: the homeless, the hungry, the imprisoned, the persecuted on gender, religious, racial grounds. It is an involuntary demand, those whose work injures their health, those whose income is below subsistence. The cry comes from the aspiration of those superficially integrated into the system and sharing in its material benefits, but constrained in their opportunities for creative activity, oppressed in their social relationships, guilty perhaps for an undeserved prosperity, unfulfilled in their lives' hopes. The discussion of the role of art, and of an aesthetic revulsion against the results of the existing order of things, is relevant (Miles, forthcoming). For both, their one-dimensionality eats away at their humanity, and from the same source, but it does it in different ways.

So that there is no misunderstanding, those deprived even of the material necessities of life are as entitled to, and in need of, the fuller life to which the alienated aspire as are the alienated, and the sources of dissatisfaction for both arise out of equally organic and

essential human needs. 'Erst kommt das Fressen, dann kommt die Morale', as Brecht said;³ but both are necessary for a human and humane life. Where choices must be made, the demands of the deprived are entitled to priority over the fulfillment of the aspirations of the alienated.

To return then to whose rights are our concern, the demand is of those who are excluded, the cry is of those who are alienated; the demand is for the material necessities of life, the aspiration is for a broader right to what is necessary beyond the material to lead a satisfying life. But to make the discussion clearer, let me digress briefly to a schematic definition of terms.⁴

An analysis in terms of material interests, in somewhat traditional class terms (see, for instance, in urban terms: Marcuse, 1989) along lines of position in the relations of production (somewhat modernized), might be:

- The *excluded* (not in fact an accurate term, for they are in fact a part of the system, without the protections won by the working class for labor, but they operate at its margins).
- The *working class*, the materially exploited (including what is euphemistically called the middle class, i.e. white as well as blue collar workers, skilled as well as unskilled, service as well as manufacturing workers, but underpaid and producing profit for others)—together with the excluded, we may speak of these two groups as the *deprived*.
- The *small business people* (the individual proprietors, the small entrepreneurs, the craftsmen).
- The *gentry* (including the more successful small business persons, professionals, the highly paid servants of the multi-nationals).
- The *capitalists* (owners and decision-making managers of large business enterprises).
- The *establishment intelligentsia* (including much of the media, academics, artists and others active in the ideological aspect of the production processes).

- The *politically powerful* (including most of those in or aspiring to high public office).

Looked at economically, the cry for the Right to the City here comes from the most marginalized and the most underpaid and insecure members of the working class, not from most of the gentry, the intelligentsia, the capitalists.

An analysis in 'cultural' terms, along lines of relation to the dominant cultural, ethnic, and gendered society and ideology, might be:

- The *directly oppressed* (oppressed along lines of race, ethnicity, gender, lifestyle, often called the excluded, but excluded only in this 'cultural' sense, often included in an economic sense).
- The *alienated* (of any economic class, many youth, artists, a significant part of the intelligentsia, in resistance to the dominant system as preventing adequate satisfaction of their human needs).
- The *insecure* (a shifting group, varying with conjunctural changes, e.g. level of crisis, prosperity, including much of the working class and periodically some of the gentry).
- The *hapless lackeys* of power (including some of the gentry and some of the intelligentsia).
- The *underwriters and beneficiaries* of the established cultural and ideological hegemonic attitudes and beliefs.

Looked at from this point of view, the demand for the Right to the City comes from the directly oppressed, the aspiration comes from the alienated.

Demand and aspiration, deprivation and discontent. The demand led to the Russian Revolution, the aspiration led to the fall of the Berlin wall. The demand and the aspiration both surfaced, rather independently, in 1968 (see above), but failed to come fully together; the distance between the deprived and the alienated remained. The description of the World Social Forum's meeting in Belem in 2009 as 'The Gathering of the

Distressed' (Ramirez and Cruz, 2009) can be interpreted as covering both material and cultural or intellectual distress. Overcoming that distance, with due priority for the deprived and attention to the alienated, is high on what needs to be done today.

It's crucially important to be clear that it is not everyone's right to the city with which we are concerned, but that there is in fact a conflict among rights that need to be faced and resolved, rather than wished away. Some already have the right to the city, are running it now, have it well in hand (although 'well' might not be just the right word, today!). They are the financial powers, the real estate owners and speculators, the key political hierarchy of state power, the owners of the media.

It is the right to the city of those who do not now have it with which we are concerned. But that is not a useful answer. It is necessary to know who is most deeply affected, who is likely to lead the fight, who will be most likely to support it, what will their reasons be? Contributing to understanding exactly who that is is a contribution critical urban theory should attempt to make. I suggest here it is a combination of the deprived and the discontented who will lead the push for the Right to the City, but the issue can use a lot more attention.

Specifically, I would argue that discontent, and for that matter deprivation, does not automatically lead to support for the claim to the right to the city for all deprived and alienated. The threat of discontent, especially when coupled with fear of unrest from the deprived and the working class, has always worried those on top ('A specter is haunting Europe ...'). The effort to channel that discontent has been a chief task for the lackeys of power, the manipulators of ideology, with the media, the schools, religious institutions, and a variety of business and civic organizations as their allies/targets. The results are seen in a variety of widespread emotional group-based phenomena, circling around issues such as:

- Anti-abortion and right to life
- The right to hold guns
- Anti-tax measures
- Homophobia
- Racism
- Anti-immigrant sentiment
- Religious fundamentalism
- Family values
- Chauvinist war-mongering
- False patriotism
- Elements of sports fanaticism.

And, I would argue:

- Home ownership as the American Dream.

It is tempting to use Freudian terms for the process, repression of discontent and its sublimation in these emotional phenomena, a cathexis in which emotion is attached to these issues and removed from more dangerous discontents, or even realization of discontent (H. Marcuse, 1955; Žizek, 2008). A direct confrontation with this repression/sublimation may have to be a very concrete part of any practical political action to achieve real change.

So I would argue people affected by these phenomena are also among the deprived and the discontented, but the direction of their reaction is quite opposite. It is the basis for the old formulation that the future lies between socialism and barbarism—it is they that provide the base for the barbarism, the ‘national socialism’, but it is a base that can be addressed in a progressive manner also.

The battle thus becomes ever more a battle of ideology, understanding, grounded in material oppression but not limited to it, combining the demands of the oppressed with the aspirations of the alienated.

The organizational form of that opposition needs exploration. Clearly the view that it will be the proletariat that, as a single class, leads the struggle with the aid of some intellectuals is outdated. If in the process of struggle, *social blocs*, à la Gramsci, can develop, something solid will have been achieved. The present debates in the World Social Forum,

strikingly at its meeting in Belem about the nature of that gathering, suggest that a broad theoretical understanding along the above lines might help clarify that it is a single conflict in which all participating groups are engaged, with a single objective, even though the immediate form may be only that of a *forum* (where sympathetic groups around varying issues come together to exchange experiences and debate), or of a *coalition* (a temporary coming together around specific temporally and spatially limited issues), or of an *alliance* (a more permanent coalition), or of a *movement* (less organized, less clear in its ultimate goals but very clear in its solidarity and concerned with multiple issues), an *assembly* (a single, or many single, coming together of multiple groups for varying levels of common thinking, sharing, action). There are other formulations: *networks*, *cross-network convergence*, *network of networks* (Costello and Smith, 2009), but these are formulations that beg the question of what kind of coming together a ‘network’ is—convergence on what, around what? The argument here is that there is a convergence of all groups, coalitions, alliances, movements, assemblies around a common set of objectives, which see capitalism as the common enemy and the right to the city as their common cause.

What right?

The right to the city is a claim and a banner under which to mobilize one side in the conflict over who should have the benefit of the city and what kind of city it should be. It is a moral claim, founded on fundamental principles of justice, of ethics, of morality, of virtue, of the good. ‘Right’ is not meant as a legal claim enforceable through a judicial process today (although that may be part of the claim as a step in the direction of realizing the Right to the City). Rather, it is multiple rights that are incorporated here: not just one, not just a right to public space, or a right to information and transparency

in government, or a right to access to the center, or a right to this service or that, but the right to a totality, a complexity, in which each of the parts is part of a single whole to which the right is demanded. The homeless person in Los Angeles has not won the right to the city when he is allowed to sleep on a park bench in the center. Much more is involved, and the concept is as to a collectivity of rights, not individualistic rights.

The demand is made as a right not only in a legal sense but also in a moral sense, a claim not only to a right as to justice within the existing legal system but a right on a higher moral plane that claims a better system in which the demands can be fully and entirely met.

What city?

Lefebvre is quite clear on this: it is not the right to the existing city that is demanded, but the right to a future city, indeed not necessarily a city in the conventional sense at all, but a place in an urban society in which the hierarchical distinction between the city and the country has disappeared. The demand of the landless farmer in the Amazon in Brazil is not met by giving him entrée to a favela in the middle of Rio de Janeiro. As Lefebvre (1967, p. 158) has it:

‘The right to the city cannot be conceived of as a simple visiting right or as a return to traditional cities.’

And in fact not a city at all, but a whole society. The ‘urban’ is only a synecdoche and a metaphor, in Lefebvre (1967, pp. 158, 45):

‘[The right to the city] can only be formulated as a transformed and renewed right to urban life.’

‘... this from this point on I will no longer refer to the city but to the urban’.

Harvey (2003) formulates well what such a city/society might be in principle; he uses

Robert Park’s phrase: ‘the city of heart’s desire’.

But first, as a precondition for pursuing what is desired, a city where material needs and aspirational needs are met, the needs of the deprived and of the alienated, clarity—up to a point—should be sought as to what such a city would look like.

The principles that such a city would incorporate can be set forth in general. They would include concepts such as justice, equity, democracy, the full development of human potentials or capabilities, to all according to their needs, from all according to their abilities, the recognition of human differences. They would include terms such as sustainability and diversity, but these are rather desiderata in the pursuit of goals rather than goals in themselves.

But there is a limit to how much benefit can be gained from trying to spell those principles out in clear terms today.⁵ Such a city is not to be predicted in detail, as Lefebvre often said (indeed, following Marx and Engels, in opposition to the early utopians—see Engels, 1880).

‘To the extent that the contours of the future city can be outlined, it could be defined by imagining the reversal of the current situation, by pushing to its limits the converted image of the world upside down.’ (Lefebvre, 1967, p. 172)

IV. Solutions: expose, propose, politicize

Given the problems we face today, what are the solutions? More specifically for purposes of this discussion, what is the contribution that critical urban theory can make to those solutions? How can theory inform and help practice—for, while in theory, theory and practice are one, in practice there are real differences, if only that the development of theory and the leadership in practice largely reside in different people, different occupations, different life histories. Our common task, those privileged (to be honest about it) to work in the realm of theory, and those

differently privileged to be able to lead in the realm of practice, our task is to make that link between theory and practice and to make it productive. In other words, how do we go from critical urban theory to radical urban practice?

In my own field, urban planning, an examination of what planning in New Orleans was doing in the aftermath of hurricane Katrina led to a suggestion for an approach I called Critical Planning, and outlined an approach in three steps:⁶ they could be summarized in three words: *Expose*, *Propose* and *Politicize*. *Expose* in the sense of analyzing the roots of the problem and making clear and communicating that analysis to those that need it and can use it. *Propose*, in the sense of working with those affected to come up with actual proposals, programs, targets, strategies, to achieve the desired results. Critical urban theory should help deepen the exposé, help formulate responses that address the root causes thus exposed, and demonstrate the need for a politicized response. *Politicize*, in the sense of clarifying the political action implications of what was exposed and proposed, and supporting organizing around the proposals by informing action. Politicizing includes attention to issues of organization strategy and day-to-day politics. And where appropriate, it includes supporting organization directly with interventions in the media and sometimes raising issues within the critic's peer groups themselves, often academics.

V. The goal of the Right to the City, and how we get there?

If this is the strategy for action using critical urban theory and practice, what exactly is its ultimate goal? So a comment or two on just what exactly is the vision of the society towards which pursuing the Right to the City implicitly reads.

Most immediately, the goal can be read from the main immediate contribution of the Right to the City: the claim is a claim to

a totality, to something whole and something wholly different from the existing city, the existing society. Lefebvre and most of those on the streets of Paris and in the occupied buildings of Columbia in 1968 might call it socialism or communism, but it has various names: a democratic society (Purcell, 2008), or a society supporting strivings for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, as in the US Declaration of Independence, or for liberty, equality, fraternity, as in the French Revolution, or a just society (Fainstein, 2009) or a humane one or one allowing for the full development of the human capabilities (Nussbaum, 1999; also developed by Fainstein, 2009), the potential of humans as a species being (Marx, 1844). What all of these formulations must imply, if the analysis of critical urban theory is correct, is a fundamental rejection of the prevailing capitalist system. What all but the most old-fashioned utopian proposals also have in common is a rejection of the idea that the most desirable future can be spelled out, designed, defined, now, in advance, except in the most broad principles. Only in the experience of getting there, in the democratic decisions that accompany the process, can a better future be formed. It is not for lack of imagination or inadequate attention or failing thought that no more concrete picture is presented, but because, precisely, the direction for actions in the future should not be preempted, but left to the democratic experience of those in fact implementing the vision.

Can an alternative to capitalism really be accomplished, given the proven power of the established system?⁷ Not only is the end product hard to imagine, but the steps leading there are hard to see; anything now on the agenda seems trivial in such a long-term perspective. Many believe that spaces of hope, in David Harvey's formulation (2000), can be found, and many such spaces indeed move in the direction of broader change. There is perhaps general agreement, by Marx, Lefebvre, my father, Harvey and most thinking people, that the seeds of the future must

be found in the present. But what does that, apart from the spatial conceptualization, exactly mean?

A spatial image for the seeds of the future can be helpful (Pinder, 2005; Miles, 2007) and whatever is done will surely have a spatial aspect also.⁸ But a spatial focus has its dangers too: most problems have a spatial aspect, but their origins lie in economic, social, political arenas, the spatial being a partial cause and an aggravation, but only partial. It might be better to see the seeds of the future as sectors. It is clearly possible to have sectors of everyday life that are free of capitalist forms, operating within the capitalist system but not of it, not dominated by it. For shorthand, those are the sectors of the economy and of daily life that are not operated on the profit system, that are within it but not of it, that are not motivated by profit but rely on solidarity, humanity, the flexing of muscles and the development of creative impulses, for their own sake. They will need to draw resources from the for-profit sector, preferably democratically and openly through government, but their own driving force will be found in general principles that are radically different from those motivating the for-profit economy, and principles that can have increasingly wider visibility and appeal.

Such sectors, such areas of activity, already exist, are well known, are sought after. The aspirations of those who are alienated from capitalism lead in this direction. Artists create, teachers teach, inventors invent, philosophers think, young people volunteer, not for profit, but because they believe that is what life is for, that is what they want to do. They come up against the same constraints that make people homeless, hungry, sick, impoverished, people whose demands thus naturally link with the aspirations of the alienated. The ultimate goal of most social movements, and certainly of the Right to the City movement, necessarily leads in this direction: they are not after profit, but seek a decent and supportive living environment. Profit, if a concern at all, is a means to an end, which is not high consumption, social status

or further accumulation, but rather decent living conditions for all. Thus the culturally alienated and the immediately deprived have a common enemy. And that is increasingly recognized, even if its name is not always the same: capitalism, neoliberalism, greed, multinationals, power elite, the bourgeoisie, the capitalist class. Above all, eliminating profit as means and motivation in the political sector, eliminating the role of wealth and the power linked to it from public decisions, is a key requirement for both the immediately oppressed and the alienated.

The logic of attempting to expel that enemy from everyday life, one sector at a time, is appealing. We are moving in that direction, although the present leadership is only being dragged there reluctantly, in health care and in education, two sectors in which the conflict over private vs. public has turned, if only slightly, in favor of public. The opportunity is there in housing. The economic crisis has certainly expanded the government's role in finance, banking, real estate, if always within conservative ideological limits.

A critical urban theory, dedicated to supporting a right to the city, needs to expose the common roots of the deprivation and discontent, and to show the common nature of the demands and the aspirations of the majority of the people. A critical urban theory can develop the principles around which the deprived and the alienated can make common cause in pursuit of the Right to the City. How to politicize most effectively that common ground? We already have sectors of society where the commonality is visible, where action for people, not for profit, is the rule. Think of (unfortunately only some) education. Think of (unfortunately only some) health care. Think of (unfortunately only some) of the arts. Think of space exploration. Think of the environmental movement. Think of the non-profit and cooperative sector in housing. Think of the effort to deepen democracy and expand participation in public decisions, and limit or abolish the role of money in elections and governmental decisions. In each of these, the slogan of *CITIES FOR PEOPLE*,

NOT FOR PROFIT, resonates. Let that be the political cry that embodies the nature of the city to which the right is being claimed. Let it be the cry that forms a noose about one part of the capitalist system after another. Rudi Dutschke, at the peak of the 1968 movement in Germany, spoke of the 'long march through the institutions'. Let us pick them off, separately or together. Let us tighten the noose around the housing system, and move to squeeze the profit out of it, one sector at a time. The subprime mortgage crisis, for example, could be an opportunity to move again in that direction (Marcuse, forthcoming), as social housing was before it. Let us not be afraid to name the common goal, and the common enemy.

A critical urban theory, internally linked to practice, might help get there.

Notes

- 1 I am aware that the school known as critical theory comes at the critical from a different direction, but it is one which, I believe, inevitably leads to this position. I suspect that the root of the differences between my father and Adorno in the Vietnam era was in Adorno's unwillingness to deal with the issue of the seeds and movements for change, which had become my father's major concern.
- 2 Underneath, violence still plays a role, as the level of incarceration in the USA shows, as does right-wing violence against opposition, both left-wing and/cultural non-conformists, shows.
- 3 'First comes eating, then comes morality.'
- 4 Iris Marion Young's 'five faces of oppression' may provide an alternate basis for the analysis I am proposing.
- 5 The point is discussed, and the difficulties shown, in many of the contributions to Marcuse (forthcoming).
- 6 Marcuse (2007). In a further elaboration, I am suggesting disaggregating the three steps into six: *Reflect* (to clarify whose values and the planners' own role), *Theorize* (to understand the roots of the problem, whose immediate form and concrete actors should then lead to the next step), *Expose* (to communicate clearly the realities underlying the problem, the parties and interests involved), *Propose* (to put concrete proposals forward for action), *Disclose* (to make clear the assumptions involved, and the limits of what can be expected), and *Politicize* (to deal with issues of strategy and tactics involved in implementation).

- 7 For a recent honest, thoughtful, approach to an answer, see Ehrenreich and Fletcher (2009).
- 8 See the forthcoming publication of the proceedings of the Nanterre conference on Spatial Justice, and the journal that developed from it.

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Urban Social Movements and the Right to the City: An Introduction to the Special Issue on Urban Mobilization

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Abstract This paper introduces the special issue and explains the diversity as well as common features of mobilization practices present in cities around the world. The paper starts with presenting the specificity and history of urban movements worldwide, as well as the development of ‘right to the city’ frame. Drawing on the existing literature, it focuses on presenting different forms of urban activism and interpretations of ‘right to the city’ slogan. This paper strives to fuse the framework of social movements as networks (Diani, in: Diani, McAdam (eds) *Social movements and networks*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp 299–318, 2003) of challengers (Gamson in *The strategy of social protest*, Wadsworth Publishing, Belmont, 1990) with the concepts of diffusion and translation of ideas, borrowed from Finnemore and Sikkink (*Int Org* 52(4):887–917, 1998). It also illustrates the application of the theoretical concepts of incumbents and challengers (Gamson 1990), organizational platform and norm life cycle (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998) as well as the development on movement networks within and between localities (Diani in *The cement of civil society: studying networks in localities*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2015). The theoretical model helps to explain the rapid global spread of the notion of the ‘right to the city.’ The paper concludes with a discussion of the urban context, both ‘glocal’ and global, as an arena of social mobilization around different aspects of the ‘right to the city.’

Keywords Urban movements · Grassroots · Mobilization · Right to the city

Introduction

The interest in urban activism within a broader context of civil society and social movements has been growing steadily in recent years, as a consequence of a new wave of activism emerging in urban settings across the globe. Urban mobilization takes many forms, including traditional civil society organizations (grassroots neighborhood organizations, housing associations, local interest groups, politically or culturally oriented pressure groups), as well as protests initiatives (against profit-oriented urban policies or commercialization of public resources) or political movements for environmental and social justice. As Bitušíková (2015) points out, urban activism has been increasingly considered an important part of urban governance processes as local activists participate in urban politics and influence decision-making through legal tools and participatory practices. While citizen’s involvement in governance has gradually come to be seen as one of the crucial factors of democratic and sustainable urban development (see, e.g., Holston 1999; Purcell 2003; Staeheli 2003), it remains unclear which of many urban initiatives should be included in democratic processes and how to compromise between their often conflicting goals.

This paper’s objective is to offer an introduction to the special issue on urban mobilization in the times of urban crisis. To this aim, it summarizes and systematizes the differences between urban initiatives as observed in cities worldwide, focusing on the so-called urban movements and the ‘right to the city’ initiatives. It also attempts to ‘unpack’ the mobilizing frame of right to the city by illustrating its

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different interpretations or ‘facets,’ thus allowing for better understanding what ‘urban’ in ‘urban movements’ means.

This special issue focuses on the city as both the arena and the subject of social mobilization, illustrating the diversity of approaches and strategies employed by different groups of urban civil society actors. I argue that those different types of grassroots activism can be all understood as a manifestation of the right to the city struggle, as presented by Lefebvre (1968) and developed by Harvey (2008) and Marcuse (2009) to include the context of globalization and consequences of the neoliberal paradigm. This introduction is inspired by the global spread and (at least discursive) success of the ‘right to the city’ frame, popularized most notably by the Right to the City Alliance in the USA, the *Derecho a la Ciudad* movements in Latin America, the *Recht auf Stadt* initiatives in Germany and Urban Movements Congress in Poland.

The cases presented in this special issue are meant to illustrate how cities become a theater of global transformation, including the ways of how people come together, define a common agenda and collectively act to achieve their goals (Diani et al. 2018). Papers presenting data from Czechia, Hungary, Poland and Romania illustrate how, due to a postponed period of post-industrial development, the urban movements in the region emerged later than in the West, but quickly gained momentum. Due to the period of communism that stifled autonomy and strictly regulated all forms of social activism, CEE countries have only recently started to observe the urban mobilization processes that were visible in Western countries since the 1960. Papers focusing on France, Italy or Spain (Catalonia) describe different forms of urban activism, ranging from housing struggles, through artistic appropriation of space, to different forms of social entrepreneurship. Finally, a Cape Town case serves as an example of possible analytical approach to studying the importance of right to the city agenda as a mobilization frame.

In the following, a brief history of urban movements will be presented to explain the existing diversity of forms of urban mobilization. Consecutively, a short overview of right to the city concept helps to systematize its different interpretations or ‘facets’ present in the field of urban activism. Finally, the introduction offers a review of theoretical concepts that help explain the relative success of right to the city frame and its possible consequences.

The Urban Crisis and Urban Movements

As a result of the largest wave of urban growth in history, more than half of the world’s population now lives in cities and urban problems became central to both policy makers and civil society actors worldwide (Frantzeskaki et al.

2016; New Urban Agenda 2016). While urban development brings huge social, economic and environmental transformations, nowhere is the rise of negative social processes clearer than in urban areas, where enclaves for the rich often coexist alongside ghettos of the disempowered poor.

Therefore, it comes as no surprise that some key social conflicts nowadays concern urban issues and often center on socio-spatial rights and needs. Main areas of struggle include the growing privatization of both services and places (Lorrain and Stoker 1997; Becker et al. 2017); the gentrification processes pushing low-income groups out of upscaling neighborhoods (Beauregard 1986; Smith 1987; Freeman 2009); and the lack of affordable housing and accessible public spaces (Appadurai 2001; Smith 2008; Soja 2010). While a profit-oriented logic is increasingly shaping the cities, they tend to become less livable and less adapted to the residents’ needs (Massam 2002; Baohua 2006; Harvey 2008; Marcuse 2013). In the context of this so-called urban crisis, the civil sphere—defined by Alexander as a sphere that is ‘analytically independent, empirically differentiated, and morally more universalistic vis-à-vis the state, and the market and from other social spheres as well.’ (Alexander 2006: 984)—is where those problems are defined, articulated and, in some cases, resolved. These processes, some argue, led to the emergence of specific civil society actors, namely urban social movements (Castells 1972; Hamel 2014; Fainstein and Fainstein 1974; see also Fincher 1987). Castells perceives these movements as agents of change of the urban system and suggests that mobilization can be explained by the intensity of urban problems and the contradictions behind them (Castells 1972, 1983).

Later, Pickvance (2003) coined the shorter term ‘urban movements,’ skipping the ‘social,’ similarly to environmental or women movements. As Pruijt defines them, ‘urban movements are social movements through which citizens attempt to achieve some control over their urban environment. The urban environment comprises the built environment, the social fabric of the city, and the local political process.’ (Prujt 2007: 1). As Hamel points out, contemporary urban movements seek social recognition by demanding a ‘right to the city’ and building democratic and solidarity-based spaces rooted in local cultures (Hamel 2014:466), in opposition to urban development models designed for the elites (Brenner et al. 2012). When integrated, these two definitions offer the most accurate description of urban movements, whose activities range from advocacy and service provision to political representation, as well as down-to-earth problem solving at the neighborhood level.

Traditionally, urban movements were studied as movements happening in the cities—including workers’

movement, students' movement, etc. However, a more precise definition applies to movements which engage with the city or with urban policies, which are specifically urban at their core, reflecting the problems, needs and lifestyles typical for the urban environment. In recent years, we could specifically observe a rise of collective actions mobilizing around urban planning issues. However, those struggles are usually only the beginning of a longer-term engagement in the field of urban policies, in some cases leading to structural transformation of the urban system.

Castells, in his initial analysis (along the lines of historical materialism), proposed a normative definition of urban movements, seeing in them an actor who is to bring about a thorough social and political change, acting in a coalition with trade unions and political parties (Castells 1972). In the mid-1980s, when there was an intensification and increase in the diversity of urban conflicts, forms of protest and political mobilization, a narrow definition of social movements was replaced by a less normative vision of urban activism. Castells redefines urban movements as 'city-oriented mobilization, affecting structural social change and transforming urban meanings' (Castells 1983: 305) through the pursuit of three goals: (1) realizing collective consumption demands (e.g., related to public services or social housing) through de-commodification and focusing on the city's use value; (2) strengthening the cultural identity and two-way communication instead of top-down information flow; and (3) promoting territorially based self-management and autonomy of local communities. Following in Castells footsteps, the definition used by researchers usually ignores the political engagement of urban movements, focusing on the values to which they refer, like democracy, justice, equality, etc. The contributions of the SI will show that while 'urban issue' becomes increasingly political, so are some of the movements striving to gain real control over cities power structures, running in elections and expressing explicit political programs.

The Urban Context as the Arena of Right to the City Mobilization

With the increased mobility that has accompanied globalization, cities have become main venues of social and political transformation. Main urban centers are situated within transnational networks of economic and cultural exchange, which turned them into strategic spaces for the global economy, but also arenas where the diversity (or what Tasan-Kok et al. 2014 call 'hyper-diversity') challenges traditional ideas of citizenship and fosters new citizenship practices and identities (Sassen 2002). While different authors have pointed out that anonymity and

alienation are typical traits of urban lifestyles (Simmel 1903; Beck 1992; Castells 1983), mushrooming grassroots initiatives seem to prove that the urban environment can be a fertile ground for new as well as traditional forms of civic engagement. Rooted in-between the private and public spheres, urban activism grows from concrete challenges like density, diversity and an imbalance of power among urban stakeholders. These stimulate the development of a specifically urban civil sphere as described by Alexander (2003), including place-oriented, democracy-oriented as well as 'quality of life'-oriented forms of social engagement and collective action. What seems to be at their core is the question: 'what type of city we want to live in?' It embodies opposition to the general trends of privatization of public spaces and housing, socio-spatial segregation and residents' lack of access to decision-making influencing their everyday life.

To explain recent cycles of urban contention we should look into both objective and subjective mobilizing factors. On the objective level, we can observe how many modern cities became 'capital production hubs' and 'growth engines' (see Nawrotek 2017; Colenbrander 2016; Vliet 2002), with the economic interests and the logic of profit dictating the direction of urban development. This means fewer investments in social infrastructure and more in 'hard' infrastructure that would attract new investors, also, more incentives and flexibility in terms of allowing construction in areas that had recreational, environmental or communal value. The willingness to please big investors was particularly important in post-industrial cities, struggling to bring in new employers, as well as cities in the global semi-periphery, striving to catch up with the First World's rate of development and willing to offer cheap land, workforce and special deals to big market players. In CEE countries where the period of transformation was characterized by relative poverty after years of communistic regime, foreign companies enjoying the privileges of 'first movers' quickly filled the investment vacuum. As a result of unregulated spatial development, fueled by a post-communist housing hunger, the region started to experience the classic suburbanization processes, in, e.g., Poland also followed by excessive trend of gating housing estates. As in Western countries, rapid urban growth created new environmental challenges (air pollution, noise pollution, etc.) and put too much strain on the social services system that was designed to serve smaller and less diverse populations. To summarize, we can say that, in some of the cities and many of the neighborhoods, a visible decrease in terms of quality of life could have been observed, raising valid concerns among the residents (Harvey 2012; Jacobsson 2015; Mergler 2008).

However, the negative change in terms of life standards was hardly enough to create wider mobilization. Following

the analyses of Castells, Hamel and Mayer, I will argue that to understand the consecutive waves of urban contention it is necessary to study the cultural shifts as well as identity processes that allowed for successful framing of collective goals and new norms. What made the ideas of ‘right to the city’ or ‘city for all’ so carrying is connected to several factors, including: (1) new media enabling the spread of information and exchange of know-how between geographically distant actors; (2) glocalization processes (Robertson 1992; Massey 1994) that focus on local environments as a response to globalization-related weakening of identity and sense of belonging; (3) social and environmental deterioration threatening the quality of life of all, pushing into action diverse groups of residents, including middle class and intelligentsia, whose voice resonates in the public debate. Different forms of urban mobilization, united under the right to the city umbrella, are an example how solidarity can be generated through skillful framing and introducing new norms via dominant cultural codes. As Alexander suggests (2006), the role of media in producing wider social solidarity and enabling new waves of urban contention is crucial.

Following the work of Tasan-Kok (Tasan-Kok et al. 2014), Beck (2000) and Bauman (2006) we can single out the role of urban activism as a source of identity and sense of belonging for urban dwellers, replacing the weakening traditional support structures (based on extended family and tight community ties), in neighborhood networks and supra-local alliances of like-minded activists. In the era of increased mobility and shrinking families, we could interpret the growing interest in the semi-public and public space as well as neighborhood relations as a sign of socioeconomic transition, focused on creating new place-based or lifestyle-based communities. As several authors show (Di Masso 2012; Domaradzka 2015; Flesher Fominaya 2015) the need for ‘new community’ and ‘reference group’ is one of the reasons fueling many forms of urban mobilization, including neighborhood groups’ initiatives or activity of local associations. Interviews with local activists illustrate how the idea of ‘my home is my castle’ is being replaced by ‘my neighborhood is my business,’ with place attachment processes (Lewicka 2011) very much at play. This also reflects Lefebvre’s ‘right to the city’ idea, underlining the importance of transforming urban space into a meeting point for building collective life, with the citizen at the center as main element and protagonist of the city.

A Brief History of Urban Movements

Although the notion of ‘urban social movement’ appeared already in the literature in 1972 (Castells 1972), social movements and collective action around central urban issues such as housing or rights of the city dwellers date back to as far as the late nineteenth century (Lawson 1988). However, the sociological analysis (Mayer 2007; Marcuse 2009; Hamel 2014) focuses mainly on recent waves of mobilization of urban movements in the Western countries of the global core (Wallerstein 2004). As Jacobsson puts it, ‘urban movements in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) have to a large extent remained a blind spot in international urban movement studies’ (Jacobsson 2015: 273). Recently, two edited volumes by Jacobsson (2015) and Sava (2015) presented the variety of urban grassroots in several CEE countries, illustrating both differences (such as the more diverse and ad hoc character of urban initiatives in CEE as compared to elsewhere, see Jacobsson 2015: 273) and similarities (use of same narratives and slogans) of the regions’ mobilization in comparison with the mainstream analysis.

Despite its Western focus, the descriptions of consecutive waves of urban mobilizations presented by Mayer and Hamel remain relevant worldwide, as they explain the present heterogeneity of the movement. The authors date the first wave of urban mobilization in the 1960s and associate it with the crisis of Fordism. Characteristic of this period were the conflicts around housing, strikes against rent increases and campaigns for urban renewal in the face of segregation, suburbanization and the growth of ‘inhospitable cities’ (Mitscherlich 1965). The radical slogans like ‘Let’s take the city’ were voiced primarily by young people, students and migrants in Western Europe. In the USA, in turn, the pragmatic ideas of regaining control over the local community (the so-called community control, see Fainstein and Fainstein 1974) were predominantly proclaimed, especially among the African-Americans. It was also a period when protests moved from factories to housing estates, focusing on matters related to access and quality of public services and infrastructure, generating local initiatives and alternative solutions to existing problems.

The next phase in the history of urban social movements was, according to Mayer (2007), the effect of the 1980s policies of budgetary cuts in public spending, and the increasing importance of the neoliberal paradigm, at the expense of the welfare state institutions and the socio-collectivist model (mainly visible in European countries).

The search for alternatives, especially innovative ways of providing services and coproduction of public goods (Brandson et al. 2018), has opened up opportunities for

cooperation between the authorities in many Western countries and local organizations. The change of the relationship from confrontational to cooperative was conducive to the development of specific types of service-oriented urban movements that contributed to the improvement of the quality of life of residents, but also increased the legitimacy of local authorities. As a result, many urban organizations have shifted ‘from protest to program,’ filling the gaps in the public services system, that in turn ensured them with a relative financial stability.

A similar ‘wave’ appeared in CEE Europe several years later, following the fall of communism and the opening of their markets to the capitalist logic. In the face of growing unemployment, poverty, housing needs and the associated social dissatisfaction, local authorities have begun to seek new ways of solving social problems. Urban activists’ transition from the logic of protest to the logic of a subcontractor—which some researchers also call the ‘NGO-ization of civil society’ (Korolczuk 2011; Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2013)—was very much visible in the CEE countries, which in the 1990s went through the accelerated scenario of civil sector professionalization (Polanska 2011; Schreier 2016).

Worldwide, the growing professionalization and institutionalization of some urban movements (thus distancing themselves from the radical postulates) generated cleavages in the urban movement environment, as many emerging initiatives were critical of co-optation and routinization of local organizations activities. This bifurcation of the urban activism strengthened the mobilization of the city’s middle class, whose representatives were involved in both progressive (ecological, feminist, anti-war) and conservative (reactionary or NIMBY) activities (Mayer 2009: 365). As a result of the second phase of changes, increasingly diverse and fragmented forms of urban protests began to coexist in cities, and the urban movement environment lost the ability to interact or even express common postulates.

The third stage or ‘wave’ of urban mobilization can be dated back to 1990s, when as a result of the increasingly intense implementation of market mechanisms in the public sphere, fueled by the New Public Management approach, cities began to function as engines of economic growth, competing with each other for investors and consumption leaders. During this period, local authorities began using the achievements and slogans of urban initiatives to promote the image of a ‘creative city’ and strengthen its competitive advantages. Active local communities, places of protest and resistance, have been labeled as attractive landmarks of the city—a mosaic of alternative subcultures, spaces and initiatives (Novy and Colomb 2013; Gurr 2017; Thörn 2012; Inal and Gezgin 2017). The use of slogans and energy of urban movements

to strengthen the economic potential of the cities have led to further fragmentation of bottom-up initiatives. At the same time, they provoked the discussion around ‘whose city is it?’ (Sassen 1996) and the growing politicization of the ‘urban issue,’ accompanied by waves of alter-globalist demonstrations and protests concerning gentrification, under the slogans of ‘Reclaim the Streets’ and ‘Another city is possible!’ (Mayer 2009: 365).

According to several authors (Hamel 2014; Mayer et al. 2016; Andretta et al. 2015), the early 2000s mark the next stage of urban change and movements mobilization. Apart from the increasing professionalization of local organizations, three new trends of urban mobilization and opposition to the policy of growth began to emerge simultaneously. First were the protests against the commercialization of public spaces, the intensity of supervision (police activities and presence of security cameras) and cities’ marketing strategies in the context of the deteriorating situation of some districts and neighborhoods. The second trend represented primarily the interests of the urban precariat (Johnson 2011), and the unemployed, often combined with the demands for social and spatial justice in terms of protection of workers’ and immigrants’ rights (Ranci et al. 2014; Della Porta 2015). The third trend was the transnational activity of anti-globalist movements, demanding the democratization of international institutions, but also access to urban public goods and services. This contributed to the popularization of the slogans of urban movements around the world in a form of norm cascade (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998) and further institutionalization of ‘right to the city’ norm (see, e.g., New Urban Agenda 2016).

As a result, in the last years, we can observe the development of a global network of organizations and initiatives representing the rights of residents (such as the Social Forum, Attac or Future of Places), guided by slogans of spatial justice and residents well-being. At the same time, global demands for democratization are translated into the local context and actions of urban movements (see, e.g., Andretta et al. 2015; Domaradzka 2017; Hou and Knierbein 2017). As Mayer points out, although the ‘city neoliberalization’ has created an environment hostile to progressive urban movements, it also enabled them to articulate urban protest, and gave birth to coalitions joining various strands under the joint umbrella of the right to the city (Mayer 2009: 367).

While the processes of global networking continue until today, one may posit that the urban movements are entering a fifth phase of localization, associated with politicization in the form of local election committees, with leaders of urban initiatives becoming part of local power structures (e.g., in Barcelona, Warsaw or Poznan). It is a phase that creates new challenges, as it promotes the

fragmentation and co-optation of urban movements by the ruling parties, often leading to delegitimization of activists' claims. However, history suggests that, as long as urban policy fosters social inequalities and excludes large numbers of citizens, the slogans of the right to the city retain the ability to mobilize bottom-up initiatives. However, one can expect negative consequences (like the delegitimization or breakup of urban movements already visible in Montreal, see Hamel 1986; recently also Poland, see Author 2017; for Turkey, see Özdemir and Eraydin 2017) of activists entering local politics and the discrediting of urban slogans as a result of the political compromises.

As in the case of other social movements (e.g., women's or ecological movements), urban movements from the very beginning have had the character of a multi-level network combining various forms of urban involvement, such as grassroots neighborhood initiatives, protest groups or local associations. As shown by the historical analyses, over time the level of diversity and complexity of this network increased, and its composition was dynamically changing with the transition of some organizations from the area of civil society to the field of public services or party politics and the emergence of new allies (like squatter movements and tenant associations). As a result of its liquid and multi-level character, operating as a loose network of organizations, initiatives and individual actors function now both on the global level, and in individual cities and even local communities. In some cases, also national or regional urban movement platforms operating at the meso-level are emerging, as is the case with the Congress of Urban Movements in Poland (Domaradzka 2018), Right to the City Alliance in the USA (Sinha and Kasdan 2013) or Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca movement in Spain (Santos 2018).

Typically, the first impulse to formulate an urban movement initiative was to organize a protest against the existing policies (e.g., causing mass evictions) or development plans (e.g., replacing communal or recreational spaces with private investments). The grassroots groups of protesters soon realized that their opposition had limited effectiveness and that real impact would require the introduction of social consultation mechanisms and participatory planning tools (see, e.g., Mergler et al. 2013). Searching for support for such solutions has contributed to the formation of wider coalitions between activists from different districts or cities to change the rules of decision-making processes. At the same time, however, more radical groups appeared in the cities, contesting marketing efforts of local governments, through actions aimed at reducing the attractiveness of cities—emphasizing existing problems, conflicts or hidden enclaves of poverty and

exclusion. So from the one hand, radical movements focused on active resistance and disruptive behavior to challenge the status quo, while milder activities of the middle class or the intelligentsia groups focused on abstract issues related to the privatization of public space and right to self-expression. As Mayer points out, the latter protests are often short-lived and focus on creative expression of views rather than effective resistance, which means that they remain in the area 'between protest and carnival' (Mayer 2007: 97). Those activities are often hijacked by the economical and political elites who like to incorporate the urban struggles into 'creative city' branding. By building an official narrative about the city diversity, 'rebellious spirit' and openness to alternative lifestyles (Uitermark 2004; Novy and Colomb 2013) those elites hope to attract tourists and big companies looking for attractive locations. What is more, as the campaigns against the privatization of public and political space are becoming a topic for intellectuals and cultural activists with limited outreach, the remains of wider movements become increasingly isolated and compete with each other for the small residual resources and spaces.

'Right to the City' as a Common Frame

The slogan of the right to the city, though intuitively understandable and extremely fashionable in recent years (De Souza 2010), is a complex concept requiring a theoretical analysis. Following Harvey (2008), I will define it here as both the individual liberty to access urban resources (including space, services and infrastructure) and the ability to exercise a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization.

The work of Henri Lefebvre was crucial in crystallizing the contemporary understanding of the right to the city—in *Le Droit à la Ville* (1968) he described it as both 'cry and demand,' later adding that it is in fact a conglomeration of various rights, including the right to information, access to services, to operating in urban space, to using the city center (Lefebvre 1991: 34). The distinction between 'cry' and 'demand' suggests, according to Marcuse (2009), that the right to the city expresses both the protest of excluded groups (homeless, poor, hungry or persecuted), and the aspirations of groups that, although integrated in the existing system, are not able to realize their full potential. The first group consists of excluded social groups and low-paid working class. The second group includes the alienated representatives of middle and high classes, especially young people, small entrepreneurs, representatives of the intelligentsia, artists and officials. Ultimately, the source of

the frustration of both groups is that the city services and initiatives do not meet their important needs.

According to critical urban theorists (Marcuse 2009; Mayer 2009; Brenner et al. 2012), currently the right to the city (here understood mainly as control over its resources) is attributed primarily to a group of economically and politically privileged, represented by the elite of the real estate market, influential politicians and media owners. Those incumbents often trigger mechanisms that can dissipate this dissatisfaction of actors deprived of the right to the city by arousing emotions around moral issues, fueling nationalism, homophobia, fundamentalism or chauvinism, and even sports fanaticism that weakens the mobilization potential of right to the city. Despite these commonly occurring ‘distractions,’ we are now dealing with various forms of civic activity (groups, coalitions, federations, networks, movements and assemblies) mobilizing around the common pursuit of the right to the city in opposition to capitalist logic influencing urban policies. In Benford and Snow’s (2000) terms, the slogan of the right to the city became a common conceptual framework for these diverse groups, enabling mobilization around an alternative vision of the cities’ future. Both Harvey (2008) and Mayer (2009) refer to the concept of the right to the city as both a political ideal and a mobilization frame. As Soja points out, the right to a city is not only legislative, but also moral, referring to human rights as well as the concept of social and spatial justice (Soja 2010). The values that such a city should embody are justice, the rule of law, democracy, capacity development, as well as balance and diversity (Marcuse 2009: 193).

Analyzing the changing slogans and forms of collective action in North and South America and Western, Central and Eastern Europe, we can see the relationship between the meanings given to the right to the city and the dominant forms of exclusion and oppression prevailing in a given period. Presenting the right to the city in opposition to the capitalist order is one of the leitmotifs of the literature on the subject. Most authors remain critical of the dominance of the capitalist system (or neoliberalism), pointing out that its mechanisms exclude large numbers of citizens and thus prevent the democratization of cities (Swyngedouw 1997; Smith 1995; Purcell 2003; Brenner and Theodore 2002). As Marcuse points out, ‘most problems have a spatial aspect, but their origins lie in economic, social, political arenas, the spatial being a partial cause and an aggravation, but only partial’ (Marcuse 2009: 195).

Therefore, authors claim, it is necessary to strive for the ideal of a ‘city for people, not for profit’ by regaining individual sectors of life from the dominance of the market by, for example, increasing the role of the state and civil society in areas related to health protection, education or culture. As Harvey and other authors point out (Harvey

2008; Nawrotek 2012; Smith 2008; Soja 2010; Appadurai 2001), rejecting the logic of profit¹ is the only way to seek solutions that serve a decent life and create a supportive environment for inhabitants.

While Marcuse and Harvey treat the slogan of the right to the city as a moral postulate referring to ethical principles and values such as justice or goodness, it must be noted that urban movements interpret the slogan in different ways. Some are based on the original concept of Lefebvre, according to which urbanization involves a negative (controlled by the logic of profit) transformation of human life, which must be opposed by lobbying for new methods of city management. In their view, the right to a city is the right to redistribute resources, primarily to those who are deprived of privileges and whose basic needs are not met. This revolutionary version of the right to the city, whose roots Lefebvre sought in the protests of 1960s, is now represented by the actions of Right to the City Alliance in the USA and similar networks in countries around the world (Derecho a la Ciudad movements in Latin America or Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca in Catalonia). This approach opposes the existing allocation of resources and the dominance of the rules of the market in areas such as housing, employment, social services or planning. Networks on regional or national level are developed to create lobbying platforms that not only express alternative vision of city development, but also embody the preached values in their practice, through, e.g., horizontal management, members’ empowerment and gender equality.

Other movements interpret the right to the city less radically, using it as a general claim for developing urban democracy, involving residents in decision-making processes and focusing on quality of life in urban areas (see, e.g., Congress of Urban Movements in Poland). Mayer underlines the growing popularity of this second interpretation, promoted by international human rights organizations, such as the UN (UN Habitat program) and UNESCO (2006). In 2003, a team of international organizations presented ‘World Charter for the Human Right to the City,’ and in 2005 the World Charter on the Right to the City was formally adopted during the Second World Urban Forum in Porto Alegre.

According to the World Charter provisions, the right to the city is a conglomerate of specific laws such as the right to housing, social assistance, work, a decent standard of living, leisure, information, association, access to food and water, participation and auto-expression, health, education,

¹ However, the growing popularity of social entrepreneurship or social economy brings in the question of how profit oriented can some of the urban initiatives become, while still remaining part of urban mobilization.

culture, privacy, security, etc. The goal of such defined right to the city is to lobby for policies and legislation that would connect the development of cities with social justice. The documents define a list of specific rights that these policies should protect, combining human rights with the obligations of local and national authorities.

Critics (see, e.g., Eide 2016; Earle 2016; Caprotti et al. 2017) of the above-mentioned international documents draw attention to the fact that their recipients are primarily local authorities, interested in implementing the principle of good governance, using tools such as participatory budgets, transparent management methods and participative decision-making. Although certainly useful, the tools themselves do not affect the essence of the problem of uneven distribution of power. Also, as Mayer (2009) points out, the problem with their general category of urban residents is that it assumes the existence of a relatively cohesive civil sphere that requires protection against the effects of liberal policies. It denies the class divisions and differences in access to power between actors of urban civil society, some of which are beneficiaries or even cocreators of the ‘machine of the economic growth.’ In other words, the definition of right to the city popularized by transnational organizations calls for more inclusion within the existing system, without offering a vision of changing the current development model.

The result of those new documents is paradoxical—the slogans and postulates of grassroots urban movements are on the one hand strongly supported by the involvement of international institutions such as the United Nations; on the other hand, the same commitment deprives these slogans of inspiration for a deeper social change. Bottom-up pursuits are institutionalized as part of a professional NGO network, appearing as a body representing the needs of all city dwellers and supporting the cooperation of these residents with local authorities for sustainable development.

Moreover, as a result of the growing professionalization and politicization of urban initiatives in some of the cities (e.g., Barcelona, Montreal, Prague, Warsaw, Poznan) incumbents groups started to employ right to the city frame, modeling their political programs on the urban movements manifestos. Recent interviews with developers (Domaradzka 2018; unpublished) illustrate how even the private actors claim their right (to profit) from the city. This hijacking of the urban movements slogans creates new challenges in terms of common narrative, but also signifies ‘a norm cascade’ described by Finnemore and Sikkink (1998).

The right to the city also remains alive and radical among the diverse groups of activists for global justice, both on the local level and transnationally. As Mayer notes, as part of these local symptoms a new form of urban mobilization emerged:

a new local actor has emerged for whom broad coalition building and a new kind of advocacy professionalization are characteristic. Media-savvy, organizationally conscious activists are connecting the political agendas of citizens initiatives, social service organizations, and a variety of social movements and NGOs, as well as church organizations, in an explicit effort to overcome the segmented local patterns of protest and to build organizational continuity. As with the transnationally active movements before them, they combine traditional repertoires built up during previous cycles of protest with new tactics of civil disobedience and flexible organizational formats, but apply them to local manifestations of the global neoliberal trends (Mayer 2007: 108).

To summarize, in different national contexts described in this issue, we could observe the convergence of numerous local groups into coalitions and alliances around a shared set of objectives, which see current urban practices as the common problem and the right to the city as a common cause. Many of urban initiatives emerge in order to protect a certain space or place, like in case of heritage protection groups, but also schools, cultural or social centers, squats or important workplaces. Those coalitions include formal actors like nationwide networks of local associations engaged in changing the power balance in their cities to give more voice to residents and their concerns, and organizations fighting for affordable housing and the protection of tenants’ rights (Jezierska and Polanska 2017; Grazioli and Caciagli 2018; Florea et al. 2018). However, numerous less formal initiatives celebrating the urban commons as well as more embedded estate councils and traditional contestants, including squatters’ movements and alternative cultural spaces, also become allies. Another interesting hybrid form of social engagement that often supports right to the city claims is urban social entrepreneurs (engaged in solving specifically urban problems like lack of access to fresh and healthy food, offering spaces for start-ups, bringing skills and services into dilapidated neighborhoods) focusing on generating profit through pursuing social goals and community-embedded impact (Bilewicz and Potkanska 2013; Bilewicz 2015; Domaradzka et al. 2018, unpublished; Zabłocka-Bursa and Praszkiel 2012). Finally, the diverse Not-In-My-Backyard protest groups (who perceive certain investments in their neighborhood as a threat to residents’ quality of life) as well as land owners worried about their property value also use the right to the city frame to support their claims.

To better illustrate the multifaceted character of right to the city frame, Table 1 presents a simple typology of urban initiatives organized by different facets of right to the city around which they mobilize.

Table 1 Different aspects of right to the city and groups mobilizing around them

Economic and social rights	Housing rights	Civil and political rights	Environmental rights	Cultural rights	Ownership rights
<i>Different facets of the right to the city mobilization</i>					
Social entrepreneurs	Housing activists	Right to the city federations	Environmental groups	Neighborhood associations	NIMBY groups
Precarious workers	Tenants' associations	Local election committees	Ecological organizations	Ethnic and religious groups	House owners
Trade unions	Squatters	Advocacy groups	Food cooperatives	Alternative cultural spaces	Home-owner associations
Unemployed	Grassroots housing initiatives	Estate councils	Commoning and sharing initiatives	Intercultural centers	Private investors
Marginalized poor		Watchdog initiatives		Heritage conservation groups	
Community-based organizations					
Self-managed social centers					

Source: own compilation

As the papers included in this special issue illustrate, the slogan of the right to the city became a common conceptual framework (Benford and Snow 2000) for activist groups around the globe, enabling mobilization around an alternative vision of the future of cities (Mayer et al. 2016). Despite all differences, most of the right to the city activists agree in their criticism of the liberalization of markets. Unlike previous generations, however, modern urban activists do not seem to be planning a revolutionary take-over of power, but are working to weaken profit-oriented logic in a pragmatic, concrete and gradual way.

Theoretical Approach

A wide range of research methods and theories were applied to the study of urban civil society actors (Mayer and Boudreau 2012). While in the 1970s researchers were mainly interested in mobilization concerning renewal projects (Oliver 1972) and urban politics in 1980s (Harris 1987), during the 1990s and 2000s they turned toward gentrification and its detrimental effects (Hackworth 2002; Franzén 2005). In recent years, the issue of citizenship and residents' rights (Di Masso 2012) as well as the transnational aspect of the urban movements are getting most academic attention (see Hamel et al. 2000; Jacobsson 2015; Mayer et al. 2016).

Authors working on urban movements drew on the classical theories of social movements (Diani 1992; McAdam et al. 2004), new social movements (Offe 1985), protest analysis (della Porta 2015), critical urban studies (Harvey 1973; Marcuse 2009; Soja 2010), social network theories (Diani 2003) and field theory (Martin 2003; Fligstein and McAdam 2012; Domaradzka and Wijkström 2016).

While analyzing the history of urban movements, this paper combines several theoretical concepts to allow for a

better understanding of urban mobilization phenomena and their actors. First, it fuses the framework of social movements as networks (Diani 2003) grounded in localities (Diani 2015) with the concepts of diffusion and translation of ideas, borrowed from authors like Finnemore and Sikkink (1998), Strang and Soule (1998) and Sahlin and Wedlin (2008). Diani's approach to social movements as a distinct form of network organizing (Diani 1992, 2003, 2015) allows viewing urban movements as systems of relations between local groups as well as their environment. This approach is useful for studying urban civic networks in cities (Diani 2015; Diani et al. 2018) and for comparing localities, illustrating their specificity through the lens of network structure and actors' positions within it. The mechanisms of network emergence can be illustrated by Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) concept of organizational platforms, playing the role of network hubs and stabilizing structure. In turn, Strang and Soule (1998) observations concerning the ideas' diffusion in social movements, as well as Sahlin and Wedlin concept of ideas translation and editing mechanisms, find confirmation in the analysis of right to the city trajectories in urban movements narratives (Pluciński 2018; Domaradzka and Wijkström 2016).

The network approach to urban movements profits from merging it with the idea of 'challengers' and 'incumbents' offered by Gamson (1990). Gamson's approach helps to position urban activists in the field of urban policy as it highlights the importance of being either inside or outside of the existing power structures of the field (Gamson 1990). It also positions them vis-à-vis power-holding elites, who play the role of incumbents in the so-defined field. In cases presented in this special issue, urban activists play the role of challengers in their local policy fields, as they focus on contention of an existing order and resistance to mainstream rules, in search of an opportunity to reshape urban

power structures or more generally the direction of urban development. To understand different forms and results of urban movements engagement Tilly's (1978) concept of opportunity structure can be also employed. As cases presented in this issue illustrate, both opportunities and threats, defined by local sociopolitical context, are distinct catalysts of urban challengers' mobilization.

Apart from the locally defined opportunity structure, however, we can also point out to the emergence of transnational debate about the right to the city as an important impulse facilitating the mobilization of urban activists in different localities. This ideological frame, borrowed from Lefebvre by Right to the City Alliance, quickly gained momentum and became a global reference point to geographically scattered local urban initiatives. At this point, the Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) ideas of institutional platforms and norms' 'life cycle' help to explain the activists' institutional strategies as well as the growing resonance of the right to the city slogan. Their theory also describes a specific type of challenger called 'norm entrepreneur,' an agent who has a decisive role in the first stage of new norm development, often carrying and reshaping a new paradigm or set of ideas between different movement or cultural settings (Strang and Soule 1998). The first stage of norm life cycle is *norm emergence*, when norm entrepreneurs are motivated to adopt a norm, either by altruism, empathy, or ideational commitment. Norm entrepreneurs often use organizational platforms (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998)—either already existing ones or created specifically for a cause—as tools to promote the new norms and to persuade others (often governments or other public sector actors) to adopt them. Those organizational platforms often have a form of a CSOs federation, as in case of US Right to the City Alliance or Polish Congress of Urban Movements (multi-city coalition) or more loose activists coalitions, such the Derecho a la Ciudad or Recht auf Stadt local networks.

As Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) point out, when enough actors are convinced, the stage of *norm cascade* begins, during which multiple actors are motivated to adopt a norm in order to enhance legitimacy or reputation. This includes politicians, other activists, international organizations, etc. On the global level, it was reflected by UN Habitat adopting the right to the city claim in the official New Urban Agenda as well as the European Union including it in the Urban Agenda for the EU (2016). The final stage of the norm life cycle is *internalization*, where the bureaucratic procedures, the legal system and professional training incorporate the norm so it becomes part of common knowledge.

The norm life cycle model describes the surprisingly rapid spread of the right to the city idea in different cities around the globe, including Miami and Los Angeles, Berlin

and Hamburg, Río de Janeiro and Porto Alegre, Warsaw and Poznan, and later included in globally discussed of the World Charter for the Right to the City 2005 and the UN New Urban Agenda (2016). For example, in cases such as Brazil and Poland the norm cascade resulted in the institutionalization of the urban movement claims in the local policy setting (Estatuto de la Ciudad de Brasil 2001; Polish Urban Policy 2014). More importantly, the model is useful to detect and explain the ongoing shift in local city administration practices, including the adoption of participatory budgeting, consultation mechanisms and new communication strategies by the cities officials, as a response to the 'glocal' urban activists' pressure (Robertson 1992), which is an issue often overlooked in the analysis of urban movements practices (Domaradzka 2015, 2016). Although, in the case of the right to the city agenda, ongoing institutionalization may reflect the norm's relative 'success,' it also weakens its mobilization capacity and enables it to be hijacked by the elites.

Conclusions

The complexity of the urban reality is reflected in the complexity of urban movements and forms of protests, adapting to specific places, scales and context. According to Meyrowitz (2005), we live in 'glocalities'—each of them unique, yet reciprocally influenced by global trends. This explains how many localized efforts of neighborhood activists become 'glocalized,' producing a heterogeneous environment of urban mobilization (Gobo 2016). Interestingly, as post-industrial cities are becoming urban regions (Vogel and Savitch 2012), the collective action generated by urban movements begins to spread geographically, covering wider areas and addressing both environmental and other spillover effects of urban centers. However, at their core, urban movements remain locally based and focused on the particular needs and conflicts, which gives them fuel for continuous contention. This approach has been criticized (Fainstein and Hirst 1995) as limiting the movements' claims, but recent developments in several countries seem to prove that this is no longer the case, as local challengers raise to create supra-local coalitions (Flesher Fominaya 2015) and even national networks (Domaradzka and Wijkström 2016) aiming at a more profound change in urban policies.

The rapid changes related to the weakening of the state and the economic crisis create a new opening for the radical interpretation of the right to the city, as the demand for the democratization of cities and changes in decision-making practices resonates stronger than before. Although challenging, the changes connected with the refugee crisis and the intensification of various social conflicts may be

conducive to the implementation of alternative models of urban development. However, in the pursuit of politicizing the crisis, urban movements need to act cautiously and systematically, building social legitimacy, while simultaneously lobbying for the democratization of cities.

This special issue starts with four papers addressing the idea of right to the city directly and then moves on to discussing diverse housing struggles, ending with a piece on social entrepreneurship. The first article by Eynaud, Juan and Mourey analyzes a case study from France to describe participatory art activities as urban commons practice that allows participants to exercise the collective right to the city. The second paper by Diani, Ernstson and Jasny applies a network analytic approach to the role of right to the city as a symbol and a broader frame, to understand the patterns of relations between CSOs in Cape Town. The subsequent paper by Pluciński applies the alter-modernist perspective to analyzing the voices of Polish urban activists, constituting both local and national ‘urban public sphere.’ The paper by Pixova explores the potentials and limits of activists’ efforts to improve urban politics and local development in five Czech cities. The paper by Jezierska and Polanska casts more light on the processes of collective claims and identity formation in Polish tenants’ movement by applying the theory of radical politics to movement analysis. The paper by Grazioli and Caciagli presents the case of Roman housing rights movements, their role in developing practice of grassroots urban regeneration and their evolution toward polycentric political actors. Another take on housing struggles is presented by Florea, Gagyí and Jacobsson in their paper on Bucharest and Budapest, advancing the relational approach to urban mobilization and laying emphasis on different forms of urban collective actions and their relationship-building capacity. The final paper by Molina, Valenzuela-Garcia, Lubbers, Escribano and Lobato discusses the dynamic of the social entrepreneurship field in Catalonia during the crisis, to illustrate how different actors shape values and practices of those environmentally or socially focused organizations.

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Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of interest The author declares that she has no conflict of interest.

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Löic WACQUANT

BOURDIEU IN THE CITY: CHALLENGING URBAN THEORY

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Durante el año 2023, el sociólogo francés Löic Wacquant publicó dos nuevos libros: *Bourdieu in the City: Challenging the Urban Theory* (Wacquant, 2023) y *El diablo en la ciudad: La invención de un concepto para estigmatizar la marginalidad* (Wacquant, 2023). Estas obras profundizan en aspectos claves de su extensa producción académica —que abarca más de 20 libros y 90 artículos— que se inició con su llegada a la Universidad de Chicago y su experiencia en el *ghetto* de South Side.

Aquí nos ocupamos de *Bourdieu in the city*, una obra provocadora que propone una interpretación de Pierre Bourdieu como teórico urbano, abordando la aparente ausencia de una teoría explícita sobre la ciudad en sus trabajos, a excepción de: *El baile de los solteros* (Bourdieu, 2006), *Argelia 60* (Bourdieu, 2013) y *El desarraigo* (Bourdieu & Sayad, 2017).

El libro es el resultado de la ampliación de tres conferencias celebradas en: York (Wacquant, 2017), Porto (Wacquant, 2011) y Bruselas (Wacquant, 2014b, 2014c, traducido al español). Está estructurado en una introducción, tres capítulos principales y un epílogo.

El primer capítulo “Bourdieu in the Urban Crucible” brinda las claves para el uso de la teoría bourdieusiana en los estudios urbanos y advierte de los errores comunes en su aplicación. El capítulo 2 “The Bitter Taste of Territorial Taint” desarrolla el concepto de estigmatización residencial y explicita cómo afecta a diferentes agentes y actores sociales. Finalmente, el capítulo 3, “Marginality, Ethnicity, and Penalty in the Neoliberal Metropolis” propone estos conceptos como vectores explicativos de las transformaciones urbanas contemporáneas.

Löic Wacquant busca abiertamente desafiar las perspectivas consagradas en los estudios urbanos, para esto clasifica a la sociología urbana contemporánea en seis campos. El primero (grupo 1), conformado por teóricos abstractos inspirados en filósofos franceses como Lefevre, Foucault y Deleuze, que toman por objeto a la ciudad global. Su principal debilidad son las reconstrucciones históricas y muestran una marcada influencia de la economía política crítica del neoliberalismo. En este grupo ubica a Neil Brenner, Saskia Sassen, Manuel Castells, David Harvey, Helga Leitner, Jamie Peck, Eric S. Sheppard, Nik Heynen y Daniel Aldana Cohen.

El segundo (grupo 2), más heterogéneo en cuanto a teoría y método, está conformado por macrosociólogos de grandes aglomerados urbanos con predilección por los “estudios estadísticos de los procesos a nivel de barrio” (Wacquant, 2023, p. 2), y, académicos que recurren a la microsociología. Se caracterizan por su impronta etnográfica y favorecen las teorías de rango medio. Su principal debilidad es teórica debido a su limitada capacidad de abstracción. Algunos de sus representantes son: Patrick Sharkey, Forrest Stuart, Anne Lambell, Talja Blockland, Mario Luis, Mary Pattillo, Ruth Fincher y Jane Jacobs, Faith Deckard y Javier Auyero.

El tercero (grupo 3), reúne perspectivas positivistas centradas en políticas urbanas, economía y problemas sociales. Su principal limitación es la definición de sus unidades de análisis y la construcción de conceptos, que toman prestado de otras áreas como la arquitectura y el urbanismo. Son mayormente economistas, débiles en abstracción y teoría, pero fuertes en metodología. En este grupo ubica a Richard Florida y Edward Glaeser.

El cuarto (grupo 4), aborda el impacto de las tecnologías digitales y la degradación ecológica, bajo títulos como “ciudad inteligente” (Wacquant, 2023, p.3). Tienden a hacer uso de las tecnologías de la información (*machine learning*, análisis de clusters, *natural language processing*, etc.) para el análisis de grandes bases de datos. Son fuertes en sentido práctico y débiles en autonomía intelectual. Algunos de sus exponentes son: Luis Bettencourt, Jay Wright Forrester, Alessandro Willis y Katharine Aurigi, Theresa Anderson, Genie Stowers y Michael Burayidi.

Luego encontramos a los investigadores del Sur Global (grupo 5) -vinculados a los estudios decoloniales, poscoloniales, subalternos y feministas- que proponen ‘provincializar’ los estudios europeos y norteamericanos y estudian principalmente asentamientos y barrios pobres. Son fuertes en teoría y comparación, pero débiles en especificación. Sus referentes son: Faranak Miraftab y Neema Kudva, Susan Parnell y Sophie Oldfield, Desden Rukmana, AbdouMaliq Simone, Marco Garrido, Xuefei Ren, y Liza Weinstein. Añadimos los trabajos de Annanya Roy y Jennifer Robinson.

Finalmente, presenta a la nueva generación de historiadores (grupo 6), que adoptan una perspectiva de larga duración e incorporan métodos cuantitativos en sus análisis. Algunos referentes son: Shane Ewen, Timothy Gilfoyle y Peter Clark.

Wacquant (2023) posiciona su trabajo —y en particular este libro— dentro de los estudios teóricos abstractos (grupo 1), dado que combina predicción estadística con micro sociología a nivel local/barrial (grupo 2) para el análisis de múltiples escalas que incluyen desde las configuraciones de grandes aglomerados urbanos hasta las experiencias y prácticas de los individuos. Con una fuerte perspectiva socio histórica (grupo 6) que coloca a sus objetos de estudio en un contexto de larga duración.

En la revisión del estado del arte que presenta, llama la atención la ausencia de Mike Davis, Edward Soja, o los análisis cartográficos-históricos de Laura Vaughan (2018). Tampoco aparecen mencionados otros académicos que han buscado extender la perspectiva de Bourdieu a los estudios urbanos como Patrick Champagne, Sylvain Maresca, Marie-France Garcia-Parpet, Afranio Garcia, Youjung Shin, Adam Rajčan y Edgar A. Burns o los grupos de investigación neo-bourdieuianos nucleados en el INRAE (Institut de Recherches pour l'Agriculture, l'alimentation et l'Environnement) influidos por Chamboredon y Topalov.

Para el caso de América Latina, se lamenta la ausencia de Jirón y Mansilla (2014), Gustavo Guerrero, Jhon Williams Montoya, Michael Janoschka (2002), Gonzalo Saraví, María Cristina Bayón, Marie-France Prévôt Schapira (2000), María Cristina Cravino (2009) o Eleonora Elguezabal (2018), así como los trabajos de Adrian Gorelik (2022). Otros autores neo-bourdieuianos ausentes en esta recapitulación son Mercedes Di Virgilio (2011) y Alicia Gutiérrez (2015). Sería interesante analizar cómo estos trabajos dialogan con la categorización que propone Wacquant en este texto.

El aporte fundamental de *Bourdieu in the city* es la introducción de la dialéctica bourdieuiana conformada por: espacio simbólico, espacio social y espacio físico, para el estudio de la ciudad. Aunque algunos indicios de esta metodología ya habían sido esbozados en trabajos anteriores (Wacquant, 2017, 2022), es en esta obra donde la propuesta se clarifica y adquiere mayor capacidad explicativa.

Por espacio simbólico, entiende a las categorías cognitivas que configuran grillas mentales que “moldean nuestra forma de pensar, sentir y actuar [...] constitutivas del habitus” (Wacquant, 2023, p. 6). Son el resultado de la socialización compartida y en su estructuración participan las principales agencias simbólicas de la sociedad. Un ejemplo de sus efectos son las representaciones que tenemos de los distintos barrios de la ciudad en que vivimos, las que

organizan mapas cognitivos que nos permiten transitar por ellos.

El espacio social, es la distribución multidimensional de los agentes de acuerdo al volumen y estructura de su capital (económico, cultural, social y simbólico). El que se expresa en su capacidad para imponer los principios sociales de visión y división, de acuerdo a la jerarquía de posiciones en competencia. Entre los agentes que ocupan posiciones dominantes encontramos a los productores culturales -provenientes del campo académico, periodístico y políticos- con incidencia en el campo burocrático (que es la forma en que define al Estado). El espacio social tiende a traducirse de manera más o menos deformada en el espacio físico, al análisis de la superposición de ambas cartografías permite elaborar esta relación.

Finalmente, el espacio físico, es la expresión material (edificios, avenidas, vecindarios, etc.) y tridimensional dentro de la que los agentes e instituciones sitúan sus prácticas. Actúa como contenedor y pivote “de las especies de capital desigualmente distribuidas (espacio social) entre las distintas categorías sociales de personas (espacio simbólico)” (Wacquant, 2023, p. 7). En él se concretizan las categorías mentales y las divisiones sociales. Esta tríada conceptual permite comprender cómo el espacio físico se convierte en lugar “al dotarlo de valor material y significado simbólico [...] en una dinámica infinitamente reiterada de conversión recursiva” (Wacquant, 2023, p. 56).

Estos conceptos tomados de la “caja de herramientas” bourdieusiana buscan enriquecer los estudios urbanos. Sin embargo, Wacquant advierte la necesidad de utilizarlos de manera teórica (en contraposición con retórica) y articulada, evitando su fetichización. Así reconstruye una serie de advertencias para su uso. Recomendamos evitar caer en la “falacia geográfica” (Wacquant, 2023, p. 32, nuestra traducción) que consiste en imputar al espacio abstracto lo que es un efecto de la distribución espacial concreta de personas y bienes, en un momento y contexto dado (crítica al grupo 4).

Sostiene la necesidad de despojarse del sentido común (académico, político, del lenguaje de las políticas públicas y ordinario) para producir objetos empíricos propios (discusión con grupo 3 y 4) y evitar tomar prestada terminología, preguntas y preocupaciones de los administradores de las ciudades, periodistas o la moda académica. La historización (grupo 6) de los fenómenos debe ser triple: del agente (con el concepto de *habitus*), del mundo (con la noción de espacio social de la que el campo es un subtipo) y de las categorías y métodos del analista (reflexividad epistémica). Discute con los estudios que tienden a aislar en el análisis a los barrios segregados, desvinculándolos de la trama urbana de la ciudad y los círculos de poder (crítica al grupo 2 y 5).

Así mismo, aboga por la incorporación del género, la familia y el trabajo social al panorama del precariado (grupo 5), debido a que el campo burocrático ejerce su control a partir de la asistencia social (mano izquierda) y la penalidad (mano derecha). Prioriza la perspectiva macroestructural (grupo 1) por sobre el nivel micro fenomenológico, a los que considera complementarios, pero con una jerarquía definida (crítica al grupo 2).

El libro brinda precisiones sobre el concepto de estigmatización territorial y sus efectos en los agentes estatales, expuestos a la mancha territorial (en el caso de las burocracias de calle) pero también productores de estigma (en el caso de funcionarios de alto nivel). Define a la estigmatización como una forma de trabajo simbólico llevada adelante por especialistas simbólicos (periodistas, políticos, académicos, funcionarios estatales y electos) con efectos de retroalimentación entre productores, a los que resulta central identificar en el análisis.

Finalmente, el autor aborda los conceptos de marginalidad, etnicidad y penalidad y su correlación a partir de la dialéctica bourdieusiana. Destaca el aislamiento temático entre autores (crítica al grupo 5) y realiza un llamado al trabajo conjunto. Muestra la potencialidad

de esta articulación en sus libros *Urban Outcasts* (Wacquant, 2008), *Castigar a los pobres* (Wacquant, 2009) y *Deadly Symbiosis* (Wacquant, 2014a). Discute con la idea de extensión del *ghetto* norteamericano y teoriza sobre el surgimiento de un nuevo régimen de pobreza en la ciudad, alimentado por la fragmentación del trabajo asalariado, la reducción de la protección social, el hiper encarcelamiento y la estigmatización territorial, destacando la centralidad estatal en este proceso. Denuncia la sinergia entre racialización y penalidad, al mostrar que las personas afrodescendientes —pero también migrantes— son quienes padecen en mayor medida las detenciones policiales.

Para concluir, nos preguntamos ¿Qué aportes nos deja este libro a los especialistas en estudios urbanos? Luego de una pormenorizada lectura, consideramos que la introducción y los capítulos 1 y 2, son lo más interesante del libro. En estos fragmentos se presenta una revisión bastante completa de los estudios urbanos contemporáneos en clave bachelardiana, realizada siguiendo el ejemplo de Bourdieu (1999). Aunque el estigma residencial ya había sido tratado por Wacquant (2006, 2007; 2014), la incorporación de la dialéctica enriquece enormemente el análisis. También es destacable la tematización de la ciudad como medio distintivo para la acumulación de capital —vía la concentración de recursos materiales, humanos y simbólicos— y la preeminencia de la visión agonística entre los agentes, impulsada por la capacidad de la perspectiva bourdieusiana para conciliar enfoques estructurales y micro sociológicos.

El punto débil del argumento es a nuestro entender el capítulo 3. Con la extensión del concepto de etnicidad, vinculado a poblaciones afrodescendientes y migrantes al resto del mundo. Se lamenta la ausencia de enfoques latinoamericanos asociados a otros procesos productores de estigma como a la pertenencia a pueblos originarios (apenas mencionados), la inseguridad o centrados en la posición social. Esta perspectiva es limitada convenientemente, al caso de Brasil, el que presenta concordancia con el argumento de Wacquant. Para un autor que problematiza de sobremanera el uso político de ciertos conceptos, su intención de extender el análisis de la racialización a escala planetaria termina deformando la noción. Sería interesante una mayor atención los trabajos de Javier Auyero (2001, 2007, 2018; Auyero & Berti, 2013; Auyero & Servián, 2023; Auyero & Sobering, 2021) que brindan valiosas claves para el análisis de la vida cotidiana de los sectores pobres de Latinoamérica.

Más allá de estas críticas menores que podemos formular, *Bourdieu in the city*, es un libro de lectura obligada para todos los que nos hemos preguntado alguna vez, cómo extender la perspectiva de Pierre Bourdieu al estudio de la ciudad. Este trabajo nos lega una profunda reflexión epistemológica, así como un sólido programa de investigación para continuar enriqueciendo los estudios urbanos comparados.

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Social Movements against Housing Financialization: An Introduction to the Special Issue

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Introduction

Housing financialization, or the increased dominance of financial markets, narratives and logics in the housing sector, has become a key concept for understanding recent housing market dynamics (Aalbers 2016). In the literature, three strands of housing financialization research can be identified. First, approaches on mortgaged (and often securitized) homeownership focus on the myriad ways in which finance-led housing accumulation triggers periodic booms-and-bust cycles and contributes to volatile house prices (during a recession) and declining housing affordability (during a boom) (Fernandez and Aalbers 2016; Schwartz and Seabrooke 2009; Rolnik 2013; Jordà et al. 2016). Second, recent examples from the public and private rental sector demonstrate that private, corporate and institutional landlords are acquiring an increasing part of the global urban housing stock (Fields and Uffer 2016; Ronald and Kadi 2018; Waldron 2018; Lima 2020). As for that, they treat housing as financial asset class and seek to increase revenue or capital gains by selling units, increasing rents or lowering maintenance costs (August and Walks 2018; García-Lamarca 2021). Finally, studies on urban planning and governance have shown that the state is also complicit in the financialization of housing (Guironnet et al. 2016; Lennon and Waldron 2019; Gil García, Martínez López 2023). Favourable investment and urban policy tools enable financialized housing practices, and create complex public-private partnerships and trade-offs between public needs and private profits (Weber 2010; Waldron 2019; Kay and Tapp 2022).

Although calls to de-financialize or de-commodify housing are emerging (Wijburg 2021a; Norris and Lawson 2023), questions on what can be done against housing financialization remain typically under-researched. This is all the truer for the critical role that social movements and other civil society groups can play in contesting or transforming the financialized housing landscape (but see O’Callaghan et al. 2018; Martínez and Gil 2022 as noteworthy examples). This is not only a shortcoming because in the current era of declining housing affordability, the ‘*housing question*’ has once again been on the national or local agenda of policy-maker and civil society groups (Wijburg et al. 2024). In the long history of residential capitalism, bottom-up initiatives to improve housing conditions have often evolved into national, trade union-like institutions, entertaining a considerable influence on national or local housing laws and policy (Harloe 2008). Indeed, in many ways, the post-war revival of public, cooperative and council housing can be seen as a formal institutionalization of late-nineteenth century philanthropy and civil society efforts (Tummers 2016).

In this special issue, we identify how scholarship on the resistance to financialization is emerging in three distinct ways. Firstly, a number of contributions explore the ‘*everyday activism*’ of tenants in resisting corporate landlords and their tactics in exposing code violations, fraud, harassment and evictions. Tenants often conduct their own research to develop critical narratives of landlord practices, build grassroots alliances and agitate through municipal complaints, and these practices are examined in particular from two cases from Canada (Crosby 2024) and South Africa (Bond 2024). Secondly, two papers examine the ability of ‘*urban social movements*’ to impact policymaking processes and address the socio-economic structures that reproduce uneven development and housing insecurity from the cases of Germany (Berfelde and Heeg 2024) and Brazil (Lima 2024). These papers document how protest movements seek to influence urban policy through informal and formal means, including the building of local coalitions, promoting



referendums and engaging with government officials. Finally, our third strand of papers consider housing movements in terms of multi-scalar relationality and the challenges and opportunities they face in scaling up their activities into mass movements against housing financialization with examples drawn from Portugal (Mendes and Tulumello 2024) and the United States (Tardanico 2024). Taken together, these papers highlight the ways that urban, grassroots coalitions resist the financialization of housing and advocate for more democratically accountable and socially-driven modes of affordable housing supply.

Why social movements?

The contestation of financialized housing practice is typically associated with radical grassroots movements, but it is important to realize that social movements and civil society groups often transform the financialized housing landscape from within. A valuable analysis on the contestation of housing financialization therefore first starts with perspectives on the governance of financialized housing. Indeed, following the global financial crisis, several national or local governments have sought to de-financialize housing, either by introducing macro-prudential policy or changing regulatory frameworks and rental laws (Deschermeier et al. 2016; Stellinga 2022; Hochstenbach 2023), by imposing urban planning obligations and developmental guidelines (Whitehead 2007; Wijburg and Waldron 2020; Hyde 2022), or by introducing new modes of public governance, where a greater emphasis on tenure neutrality and affordability impose restrictions on housing commodification (Aalbers et al. 2017; Kadi et al. 2021; Wijburg 2021a; Tasan-Kok et al. 2023). These activities seldom start from scratch and are often preceded by numerous initiatives from civil society or political activism. For example, attempts to reform the private rental sector of Berlin cannot be seen as independent from civil society groups calling out for stricter rental laws and tenant rights against the malpractices of corporate landlords (Kusiak 2021). In Amsterdam and Miami, local housing policy aimed at improving affordable living conditions is strongly backed by local business and civil society groups (Wijburg 2021b). This is all the truer for the cities of Barcelona and Madrid where left-wing politics and activism have had a profound impact on local housing markets (Janoschka and Mota 2021).

Nevertheless, the crux is that many of the aforementioned housing initiatives often run into the limits of affordable housing governance. Three reasons for this political inertia are worth mentioning. First, in financialized housing markets driven by mortgage debt or private investments, a large part of the housing stock is already owned by private actors which gives city governments and civil society little wiggle room to alter general housing conditions. Second, the introduction of rental ceilings usually slows down new rental housing production because private developers no longer have a viable business case to work with (Wijburg 2021a), a factor which is also driven by the lack of affordable supply in land markets. Finally, despite their best intentions, city governments often lack the public funds to strongly back affordable housing operations. This forces them to tinker with different kinds of public-private incentives which ultimately lead to varying forms of financialized housing arrangements (Waldron 2019; Kay and Tapp 2022). In the absence of greater public commitments, reliance on the private sector remains strong which ultimately forces city governments to compromise to the financial expectations of private developers, institutional investors and real estate companies (Guironnet et al. 2016).



While much of the literature has rightly focused on the processes, instruments and impacts of financialization (Rolnik 2013; Aalbers 2016), it has often overlooked the agency of those who contest the influence of investors and developers in setting urban policy agendas (Lima 2020; Garcia-Lamarca 2017). This is despite that fact that such groups are often well placed to challenge the institutional structures, legislation and policies that enable financialization in practice (Reynolds 2021; Gil and Palomera 2024). We lack nuanced accounts of the agency of actors seeking to resist financialised modes of housing and urban policymaking (McManus and Haughton 2021), as well as their strategies and tactics for challenging the legislative provisions, technical valuation exercises and calculative practices that enable the financialization of housing and land (Bradley 2021; Whiteside 2019), or indeed how they challenge existing path dependencies, organizational barriers and entrenched interests in the housing system. Research is needed to better understand the mechanisms by which housing campaigners can unpick the organisational, regulatory and legal structures that enable the financialization of real estate (Fields 2017). Identifying examples of best practice or common tactics of resistance might help to develop empowering forms of knowledge exchange (Listerborn et al. 2020; Lima 2020). Methodologically, research must also find new ways by which scholars can engage with housing activists and meaningfully contribute to the struggle of the ‘right to the city’ (Lancione 2019). Critically, much of the existing research on de-financialization has not engaged sufficiently with contexts from the Global South (Aalbers et al. 2020; Çelik 2021) and we lack comparative analyses of grassroots organizing across geographically dispersed locations. These are all issues and omissions that this set of papers seek to address in order to develop a common framework for understanding housing struggles in global terms.

This, then, is when the potentially transformative policy impact of civil society groups and social movements becomes important. It is beyond the aim of this introduction to discuss the variety of social movements and housing activist groups across time and space. Yet two broad groups are typically distinguished in the literature. The first consists of more radical, grassroots movements aiming to alter the commodified nature of housing in fundamental terms. Borrowing from Lefebvre (1967) and Harvey (2012), this group is inspired by the slogan of the “*Right to the City*” and considers civil action and (*sometimes subversive*) political activism as a key driver of the democratic process. It centres on the idea that decades-long neoliberal housing policy, along with financial deregulation, has promoted inner city renewal and gentrification over the preservation and protection of low-income neighbourhoods (Hackworth and Smith 2001). The goal of these social movements is to protect tenant groups, foreclosed homeowners as well as other ‘unwilling subjects of financialization’ (Fields 2017; Crosby 2020).

The second group consists of housing associations within civil society that seek to institutionalize not fully-commodified housing practices without necessarily challenging existing power structures. Historically, this group emerged from the nineteenth century moral economy where social reformists as well as philanthropic elites and self-organizing working classes sought to improve general living standards by engaging in different kinds of housing practice (Harloe 2008). Examples from this group are non-profit housing providers, cooperatives and land community trusts. Unlike their more radical counterparts, these social movements do not necessarily contest



financialized housing practice. However, by offering alternatives modes of housing production and management, they unmistakably seek to transform the housing system from within.

We contend that social movements do not necessarily belong to the former or latter group but rather create hybrids across both. In some instances, like the well-studied tenant unions in Spain, social movements often start as more radical platforms contesting foreclosures or evictions before they eventually grow in size and significance, become institutionalized and change their activist repertoires from social actions to proposing, legalizing and enforcing housing policy and other regulations (Gil and Palomera 2024; González Guzmán 2024). In other cases, otherwise conventional non-profit housing associations or mission-oriented land community trusts stand out as radical social experiments. This is particularly the case with self-managed, cooperative housing which in recent years has been discovered as ‘alternative housing model’ to financialized, profit-driven housing (Tummers 2016). Therefore, the boundaries between social activism and one-step-up sectoral involvement are sometimes thin. In some instances, co-optation is even luring, and financial market actors embrace the social narratives of mission-oriented organizations to justify some of their ongoing financialized housing practices (Wijburg et al. 2024).

Contributions

The contributions in this special issue bring together a number of different themes regarding the importance of urban social movements and their practices of resistance. Each contribution offers valuable insights into the political-economic conditions that contribute to the treatment of housing as a financial asset class and how alternative forms of social organization have emerged to confront financialized housing practices and advocate for redistributive forms of housing production. In doing so, the contributors examine a diversity of national and city contexts and provide a depth of empirical evidence that is drawn from their reading of housing market conditions, policy and their engagement with housing activists, sometimes over considerable periods of time. In the section below, we succinctly outline the content addressed in the following contributions, which are organised around our three central themes.

Everyday Activism of Social Movements

The first papers in the special issue examine the ‘*everyday activism*’ of housing tenants in resisting extractive practices of corporate landlords and real estate developers that contribute to unaffordable, insecure and poor quality housing. In this vein, Andrew Crosby explores the grassroots mobilizations of the Herongate Tenant Coalition in Ottawa and their efforts to resist displacement via the regeneration efforts of a financialized-developer, Timbercreek Asset Management. The paper valuably demonstrates how new planning tools, such as ‘*community wellbeing frameworks*,’ and narratives of urban improvement are being deployed by developers to justify demolition-led processes of eviction, or demoviction. The paper interrogates the specific practices of the Herongate coalition and how they mobilized through street protests, social media campaigns and a formal legal challenge to force the developer into significant concessions to the community, including the greater provision of affordable housing units and commitments to end



the displacement of existing tenants. Crosby helps to elucidate on the significance of such tactics of resistance, but also questions how lasting such concessions might be. Indeed, he notes that the developer's promise of affordable units is timebound, while rents will be pegged to Ottawa's market average, which in reality means they will be far from affordable for Herongate's existing residents.

Patrick Bond provides an historical account of the impacts of financial exclusion and extraction in the context of the apartheid South Africa, as well as the expansion of predatory financial practices in the 2010s that allowed for the collateralization of welfare payments to low income households. He documents the relative success of the 'Bond Boycott' movement in South Africa's townships and the organization of collective defaults on mortgage payments in response to penal interest rate increases in the 1980s. A recurrent theme through this set of papers is the importance of coalition building, staging protests and demonstrations, as well as media engagement, to politicize such socio-economic injustices as well as to reinforce communal solidarity. However, Bond also draws attention to individual practices of disengagement with finance, and how poor South Africans refused the predatory credit lines offered to them via state-backed financial inclusion programmes. It also highlights the importance of the research work done by social movements, such as Black Sash, in documenting the dealmaking and lobbying activities of financial and real estate interests, which is often key to challenging predatory financial practices through litigation.

Impacting Urban Housing Policy and Legal Procedures

The subsequent papers examine the ability of urban social movements to impact housing and urban policymaking, and the methods and practices by which housing activists critique and counter dominant (neoliberal) modes of policymaking. Valesca Lima's examination of the '*Minha Casa, Minha Vida – Entidades*' programme in Brazil outlines how urban social movements can strategically work within existing entrepreneurial policymaking regimes to extract significant policy concessions that support de-commodified forms of housing delivery. She outlines how national social movements, like the Forum Nacional da Reforma Urbana (FNRU), strategically levered their political connections to advocate for a stronger approach to participatory governance within a national social housing programme that was developed in partnership with the private sector. The paper valuably outlines how groups like the FNRU mobilised their campaigns, and in particular the tactics and strategies they deployed to drive public and political support for the demands of the housing movements. These included both performative public rallies and occupations, but also through more subtle engagement and dialogue with government actors, which ultimately led to legislative gains that reinforced social control over the allocation of public funds. As such, the paper provides a valuable contribution on the advocacy efforts of housing movements and their efforts to secure more affordable forms of housing delivery in an era of deepening financialization.

The second paper on this sub-theme comes from the case of Berlin, where Rabea Berfelde and Susanne Heeg address the legal aftermath of the successful 2021 referendum of "Expropriate Deutsche Wohnen & Co." During the 1990s and 2000s various formerly subsidized housing portfolios were sold to private equity firms and – subsequently – listed real estate companies. This



formed a threat against Berlin's housing stability since many of these actors, including Deutsche Wohnen as the most notorious example, began increasing rents or selling individual units. Based on Article 15 of the German Basic Law, the referendum proposed a 'socialization' of housing portfolios owned by listed real estate companies. In that capacity, it perfectly illustrates how social movements can use legal instruments to serve the public interest and contest ongoing rounds of housing financialization. However, even though the outcome of the referendum was in favour of socialization, political resistance against it grew and the city government introduced an expert commission to both neutralize its impact and problematize some of its recommendations. As such, the paper reconstructs the aftermath of the referendum and how legal and political interpretations, i.e. 'knowledge production', not only complicate initiatives like 'Expropriate Deutsche Wohnen & Co.', but also inspire new legal activism against housing financialization.

Multi-Scalar Relationality

Our final empirical examples relate to the challenges for urban social movements in organizing and scaling their efforts into mass movements against housing financialization and how they negotiate their specific multi-scalar state/society and local politico-spatial configurations. Indeed, within the extant literature few have considered how housing movements navigate existing policy path dependencies, institutional barriers and the operation of entrenched real estate interests, particularly when such networks are often under-resourced and excluded from decision making processes. Two papers in this symposium directly address such issues. Luís Mendes and Simone Tulumello examine the emergence of new housing movements in the case of Lisbon, Portugal and how they have 'scaled up' their activities in response to a State-led regime of financialized urban growth. They document how the Covid-19 pandemic was an inflexion point which saw new movements emerge out of online campaigns that forced the government into implementing a national rent freeze. Following this initial success, these organisations have expanded their activism by forging new links with existing left wing political parties to shape their policy platforms, while also internationalizing their struggle and learning from successful mobilizations in other geographic contexts (notably the Berlin Deutsche Wohnen referendum). These groups have also sought to build new intersectional coalitions by politicizing racialized practices of displacement and policy violence within minority neighbourhoods. The paper opens a new avenue for further research into the the potential for new inter-class and intersectional urban coalitions against housing financialization, as well as the politics of housing struggles.

In contrast, Richard Tardanico's paper examines the potentially messy and fragmented politics of housing activist movements. In Little Haiti, a black immigrant neighbourhood in Miami, Florida, local resistance against the gentrifying Magic City Innovation District failed to materialize into a powerful social movement due to internal divisions and fractured leadership roles. Accordingly, in Miami's neoliberal urban context of racialized capitalism and mega-real estate speculation, the consortium of Magic City and its government partners were able to carry forward without having to make strong concessions to affordability and community concerns. More radical grassroots movements were neutralized because they failed to forge powerful supra-community allies or find meaningful support within the community itself. A community group consisting of social service, small business, social activist and church leaders could neither form a threat to the Magic City



Innovation District. In attempt to secure local interests and employment opportunities this group chose to accommodate the project rather than to contest it. However, this example does not merely reveal that social movements sometimes become complicit to the forces they are politically challenging. At the heart of the case Tardanico identifies a difficult dilemma. Should social movements resist mega-projects at the risk of zero-sum defeat, or should they make accommodative negotiations to rescue modest benefits while mitigating dislocations?

Conclusions

If the aim of future research is to develop theoretical and methodological alternatives in order to counter established modes of neoliberal policymaking and the influence of the '*Real Estate-Financial Complex*' in setting urban policy agendas, then in our view a number of key issues must be addressed. Firstly, there is a need for more agent-centred accounts of practices to contest the financialization of urban real estate, particularly the means and mechanisms by which housing campaigners pursue and enact their beliefs and enrol others into their campaigns to pursue institutional and policy change. Such agents tend to act collectively rather than individually, and examining their modes of organising, how they share ideas with other social actors and create network effects, as well as their performative and discursive tactics of campaigning would be revealing. Such campaigners often enrol professional expertise, such as urban planners or housing rights lawyers, to buttress their views and policy proposals by way of their epistemic knowledge and credentials.

Secondly, there is need for more in-depth activist-research encounters to better understand the tactics of urban social movements against financialization in a comparative sense across both the Global North and South. Such campaigns can be organised forms of resistance, run by dedicated and funded platforms (often involving trade unions or more radical political parties). However, they might also be more informal, everyday acts of resistance, such as the squatting campaigns of migrants in Italy (Chiodelli et al. 2021) or campaigns of debt resistance (Montogmerie and Tepe-Belfrage 2019). Furthermore, the de-financialization literature would benefit from further engagement with critical feminist and decolonial perspectives to deepen understanding of such acts of resistances. Finally, a more committed approach to knowledge exchange is necessary from the de-financialization literature. While documenting the campaigns of urban social movements is an important initial step, critical scholars must aim to better support such groups by way of facilitating knowledge exchange and by the co-production of research. Indeed, incorporating activist and practitioner perspectives into such research agendas would help to ensure a more diverse, grounded and practice-led approach to urban theory building.



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“Clear action requires clear thinking”: A systematic review of gentrification and health research in the United States

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Abstract

Gentrification is a process in which formerly declining, under-resourced, neighborhoods experience reinvestment and in-migration of increasingly affluent new residents, with understudied implications for individual health and health-protective community resources for low-income and minority residents. Increased attention on urban health inequities have propelled research on the relationship between gentrification and health. Yet, there are significant challenges inherent in the study of gentrification given its non-linear process occurring at multiple levels and via various mechanisms in a complex web of urban systems. How then have empirical studies addressed questions regarding the relationship between gentrification and health and wellness from a conceptual and methodological standpoint? Applying key search terms to PubMed and Web of Science, we identified 546 papers published in the United States. This review is guided by three foundational premises informing the inclusion and exclusion of articles. These include: 1. a clear definition of gentrification and explicit health outcome; 2. identification of a specific geographic context (United States) in which gentrification occurs, and 3. use of a social determinants of health framework to identify potential health outcomes of interest. 17 papers met our inclusion criteria. Through systematic content analysis using MaxQDA software, we evaluated the included studies using three critical frames: 1. conceptualization of gentrification; 2. mechanisms linking gentrification and health; and 3. spatio-temporal considerations. Based on this analysis, we identify the strengths and limitations of existing research, and offer three methodological approaches to strengthen the current literature on gentrification and health. We recommend that

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future studies: 1. explicitly identify the mechanisms and levels at which processes can occur and systems are organized; 2. incorporate space and time into the analytical strategy and 3. articulate an epistemological standpoint driven by their conceptualization of the exposure and identification of the relevant mechanism and outcome of interest.

1. Introduction

Similar to the human body, the urban environment is an intricate web of social, political, physical and economic systems and diverse resources (Galea et al., 2005). The complexity of the urban environment is magnified during periods of urban change, such as during the process of gentrification. Gentrification is an interactive process in formerly declining, under-resourced, predominantly minority neighborhoods involving economic investment and increasing sources of capital infusion and in-migration of new residents, generally with a higher socio-economic status. The process is dynamic, uneven, and occurs in stages. (Clay, 1989; Helms, 2003; Hochstenbach and van Gent, 2015; Hwang and Sampson, 2014; Kerstein, 1990; Maloutas, 2012). The process of gentrification is a multi-level phenomenon linking social, political, and economic structures and conflict between blocks, neighborhoods, districts, cities and regions (Smith, 1996, p. 16). Simultaneously, it shapes a neighborhood's social context, physical attributes, and other key resources and opportunities, which are critical to resident health outcomes (Hwang and Sampson, 2014b; Timberlake and Johns-Wolfe, 2017).

Efforts to reduce health inequities have propelled research on the relationship between gentrification and health. Yet, there are significant challenges inherent in the study of gentrification. Conceptually clear and methodologically rigorous research regarding the relationship between gentrification and health is challenging given the complex, multi-level, nuanced process of gentrification itself, as well as its potentially contradictory outcomes for different population groups. In addition, the specification of research questions concerning how and why urban change may affect health is of prime importance and requires consideration of systems spurring gentrification, from macrosocial forces such as limited federal government financial support to create new, affordable housing to local community factors such as the reliance of private developers to invest in housing and support business improvement districts (Galea and Schulz, 2006, p.278). Finally, given the spatially uneven process of gentrification and the ebbs and flows of gentrification through time, selection of relevant geographic scope of time periods of study are also essential considerations.

Confronting these challenges through explicit conceptualization and measurement of the phenomena itself and identification of potential mechanisms and relevant spatio-temporal scales can help illuminate how, for whom, and under what circumstances gentrification exacerbates or mitigates health inequities.

The aim of this review is to systematically evaluate how empirical studies have addressed questions regarding the relationship between gentrification and health and wellness conceptually and methodologically. Illuminating conceptual and methodological challenges can generate novel research approaches and methods for understanding and measuring the drivers of social exposures resulting in health inequities more generally. Specific to

gentrification, it can facilitate unearthing plausible mechanisms linking gentrification and health and wellness, assisting in the production of a translational epidemiology linking research to policy and action.

Given the breadth of the literature on gentrification, this interdisciplinary review draws on research across the fields of public health, anthropology, sociology, environmental science, and criminology. We evaluate the included studies using three critical frames: 1. conceptualization of gentrification; 2. mechanisms linking gentrification and health; and 3. spatio-temporal considerations. Based on this analysis, we identify the strengths and limitations of existing research through these critical frames, and three methodological approaches to strengthen the current literature on gentrification and health. We recommend that future studies: 1. explicitly identify the mechanism(s) and levels (a construct that organizes systems and processes that can occur simultaneously but some of which may be more causally relevant than others) by which exposures are related to which outcomes, 2. incorporate space and time into the analytical strategy and 3. articulate an epistemological standpoint to improve methodological rigor driven by their conceptualization of the exposure and identification of the relevant mechanism and outcome of interest.

2. Methods

2.1 Inclusion/exclusion criteria

Selected articles were empirical studies using either quantitative or qualitative data examining the relationship between gentrification and health. This review is guided by three foundational premises informing the inclusion and exclusion of articles. These include: 1. a clear definition of gentrification; 2. identification of a specific context (United States) in which gentrification occurs, and 3. use of a social determinants of health framework to identify potential health outcomes of interest. Each of these premises is described below.

First, we defined gentrification as a socio-economic process within neighborhoods where formerly declining disinvested neighborhoods experience reinvestment and in-migration of increasingly affluent new residents. In line with Maloutas' call for conceptual clarity and theoretical rigor by exposing contextual assumptions within gentrification research, we specify the process of gentrification as operating in the United States geographic context (2012). This includes neighborhoods with a history of disinvestment and marginalization, neo-liberal regulation, commodification of housing, and restructuring of urban space which moves capital back to the city (Maloutas, 2012; Smith, 1979).

Second, given the varied trajectories and increasing globalization of gentrification, some argue that gentrification is now so generalized that the "concept captures no less than the fundamental state and market-driven 'class-remake' of cities throughout the world" (Shaw, 2008). Often gentrification, urban renewal and urban change are used interchangeably. For example, these terms are used to describe the process of gentrification or a completely distinct process, such as urban regeneration in the United Kingdom, which is led by government policies and not market forces, or in Paris where the urban core has never experienced disinvestment (Maloutas, 2012). For this systematic review, we incorporated a broad array of terms that may be associated with gentrification, and thoroughly reviewed the

article to assess if words such as urban renewal were used in the context of gentrification in the United States.

Third, guided by a social determinants of health framework and by fundamental cause theory, we defined health and wellness broadly. The social determinants of health place importance on structural drivers and social, political, economic, and cultural conditions shaping a range of exposures and thus an array of health outcomes (Woolf and Braveman, 2011). Furthermore, the ability to control disease and death is mediated and moderated by access to fundamental flexible resources, including knowledge, money, power, prestige, and beneficial social connections, which may be shaped by gentrification (Link and Phelan, 1995). We therefore do not limit our search to direct health outcomes alone, but include a range of mediators and moderators to health status such as financial status and neighborhood crime, which research has shown to be a critical factor shaping mental and physical wellness (Giurgescu et al., 2015; Morrison Gutman et al., 2005; Nuru-Jeter et al., 2009, 2008; Theall et al., 2017). Financial hardship making housing unaffordable has been associated with anxiety, depression, and lower self-rated health (Burgard et al., 2012).

2.2. Search strategy

We conducted a literature search in April 2018 according to the 2009 PRISMA guidelines (Moher et al., 2009). We used Web of Science and PubMed databases to identify empirical studies in the United States with no restrictions on publication date. Keywords related to the exposure included gentrification, gentrified, urban renewal, urban change, and socio-economic ascent. Keywords related to the outcome used in Web of Science given its interdisciplinary scope included health, disease, medical, medicine, and wellness. These key words were not used when searching the PubMed database, given PubMed's exclusive focus on biomedical, science and health literature.

2.3 Identification and study selection

The search located 383 entries through PubMed and 199 through Web of Science, with 36 duplicate entries (Figure 1). A review of 546 titles and abstracts using the aforementioned eligibility criteria resulted in the exclusion of 461 articles. We examined the remaining 85 full-text articles based on our exclusion/inclusion criteria, and excluded an additional 71 articles. These 71 articles were excluded for the following reasons: 1. gentrification was not the primary exposure of interest or there was exclusive focus on assessing if displacement is induced by gentrification (35); 2. urban renewal/urban regeneration/relocation was the exclusive focus of the article and did not connect gentrification with health and wellness (17); 3. the article was theoretical in nature (11), and 4. outcomes were not related to health and wellness (6). A list of the 85 articles reviewed and the rationale for exclusion is provided in Appendix 1. Three additional articles were identified through other sources and reference lists. This resulted in the inclusion of 17 articles.

2.4 Data extraction and analytic approach

Using MaxQDA Pro 2018 software, for each study, we extracted the following information: author(s), title, year, conceptualization of gentrification, hypothesized mechanisms and levels of these mechanisms, spatial scale, frequency of measurement, measurement

approach, frequency of gentrification measurement to capture change over time, spatial scale of data measuring gentrification, and health outcomes. To examine our main research question - how have empirical studies examined the relationship between gentrification and health and wellness from a conceptual and methodological standpoint – we conducted the following process. First, we identified categories of the ways gentrification was conceptualized through content analysis. These categories were defined in the codebook with examples to ensure consistent coding. Then, mechanisms were coded and grouped and included in the established codebook with examples. The level at which these mechanisms operated were also coded and analyzed concurrently with the mechanism itself using the Reports function in MaxQDA. Furthermore, we assessed the spatial and temporal characteristics of gentrification and outcome measures.

3. Results

Reflecting recent salience of gentrification processes in urban health research, all studies were published since 2011. Ten of the 17 articles were published after 2015. Of the 17 articles meeting our inclusion criteria, three used qualitative data in their analysis. Two qualitative studies used a case study approach to explore the experience of gentrification and exclusion of Latinos from health protective neighborhood resources and social fabric (Anguelovski, 2015; Betancur, 2011). The third qualitative study used semi-structured interviews to examine experiences of gentrification and structural drivers of food insecurity (Whittle et al., 2015).

The remaining 14 studies employed quantitative data. All of the quantitative studies used longitudinal data to measure exposure to the process of gentrification. Discordantly, 11 of these studies measured a health outcome at only one point in time (Abel and White, 2011; Anguelovski, 2015; Breyer and Voss-Andreae, 2013; Desmond and Gershenson, 2017; Ding et al., 2016; Ding and Hwang, 2016a; Gibbons and Barton, 2016; Huynh and Maroko, 2014; Kreager et al., 2011; Linton et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2018). Three remaining articles from all 14 studies employing quantitative data (two articles which focused on the outcomes of crime and violence) used longitudinal data for both the exposure and outcomes of interest (Lim et al., 2017; Papachristos et al., 2011; Smith, 2014).

The reviewed studies encompassed a broad range of outcomes related to health and wellness. These included: socio-spatial patterns of exclusion, mobility and industrial air toxic risk exposure (Abel and White, 2011; Anguelovski, 2015; Ding et al., 2016) access to healthy food and food insecurity (Breyer and Voss-Andreae, 2013; Whittle et al., 2015), housing instability (Desmond and Gershenson, 2017), financial health (Ding et al., 2016; Ding and Hwang, 2016a), self-rated health (Gibbons and Barton, 2016; Smith et al., 2018), crime (Kreager et al., 2011), health care access (Lim et al., 2017), homelessness (Linton et al., 2014), preterm birth (Huynh and Maroko, 2014); robberies and homicide rates (Papachristos et al., 2011); gang homicides (Smith, 2014), and violent crime (Gibbons and Barton, 2016).

Fourteen studies acknowledged the potential impact of gentrification on marginalized and underserved populations (Abel and White, 2011; Anguelovski, 2015; Breyer and Voss-

Andreae, 2013; Desmond and Gershenson, 2017; Ding et al., 2016; Ding and Hwang, 2016b; Gibbons and Barton, 2016; Huynh and Maroko, 2014; Kreager et al., 2011; Lim et al., 2017; Linton et al., 2017; Smith, 2014) for example, with one study focusing on people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) (Whittle et al., 2015) and one focused on the elderly (Smith et al., 2018)

In the following section, we evaluate the included studies using three critical lenses: 1. conceptualization of gentrification; 2. mechanisms linking gentrification and health; and 3. spatio-temporal considerations. We provide examples of both strengths and limitations of current research through these lenses. Identifying how current studies are conceptualizing gentrification, the extent in which there is explicit articulation of mechanisms linking gentrification and health and wellness, and consideration of spatio-temporal scales will provide the foundation for a subsequent discussion illuminating opportunities to increase rigor in current research on gentrification and health and wellness.

3.1 Conceptualization of gentrification

A conceptual framework transforms experiential knowledge, prior theory, and research into a system of constructs and presumed interrelationships among them that supports or informs one's research (Maxwell, 2012, p. 39; Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 18). Additionally, conceptual frameworks help identify the most critical variables to include in research design and the ways in which they influence one another (Ravitch and Riggan, 2012, p. 6).

We identified three key ways in which authors themselves articulated their conceptualization of gentrification in guiding their research. These categories do not reflect the expansive literature on the multitude of ways gentrification is conceptualized and are not mutually exclusive; categories of how gentrification is conceptualized in these research articles are the following: 1. socio-economic upgrading; 2. political conflict and urban restructuring, and 3: stages of gentrification. Identifying how research conceptualizes gentrification shapes the research questions posed, the facets of the complex construct of gentrification that are interrogated, the variables employed or groups given voice, and relevant methods utilized, as illustrated in the following examples. The majority of studies (14/17) described gentrification as a process of socio-economic upgrading. For example, Huhyn et al., state: "little work has examined the influence of social and economic change over time (i.e., gentrification) on health" (2014). Three of these studies considered the racial dimensions of gentrification by explicitly examining, either quantitatively or qualitatively, differences in the relationship between gentrification and health among individuals or communities identifying as distinct racial and ethnic identities (Anguelovski, 2015; Barton, 2016; Papachristos et al., 2011). Three articles also included residential displacement as potentially part of the process of gentrification (Desmond and Gershenson, 2017; Ding and Hwang, 2016b; Gibbons and Barton, 2016) (Table 1).

The second conceptualization of gentrification is based on theories of power, race and political conflict. One study (Smith, 2014) conceptualized gentrification and incorporated socio-economic upgrading and political conflict within a staged process. Two articles explicitly conceptualized gentrification as a process interwoven with urban restructuring and political conflict (Anguelovski, 2015; Betancur, 2011). For example, Anguelovski indicates

gentrification includes changes in the socio-economic and demographic composition of a neighborhood, while also employing language concerning gentrification's inherent power and racial dynamics.

Anguelovski writes:

when supermarket greenlining occurs, it produces new socio-spatial patterns and experiences of environmental inequality and exclusion, transforming these amenities into new locally unwanted land uses (LULUs) for vulnerable residents. LULUs comprise not only toxic sites and industries, as highlighted by much of the traditional EJ literature, but can also include green amenities. Protests against current urban redevelopment dynamics highlight the multiple forms of exclusion and displacement produced by food gentrification, and by the manipulation of health and sustainability discourses about food.” (2011).

Here, gentrification is an unjust process where the right to land, ownership and power over key decisions is appropriated by new, predominately white residents with higher incomes.

Two studies conceptualized gentrification as a staged process along with it triggering socio-economic upgrading and displacement (Ding et al., 2016; Ding and Hwang, 2016b). Incorporating a staged model implies outcomes may differ for individuals depending on the extent in which gentrification has advanced in the neighborhood (Ding et al., 2016; Ding and Hwang, 2016b). Hypothesized stages of gentrification differ across studies. For example, two studies classified gentrified tracts that started gentrifying in 2000 as either experiencing weak, moderate or intense gentrification (Ding et al., 2016; Ding and Hwang, 2016b). Kreager also identified gentrification as a staged process, with crime rates being moderated during the most advanced stages of gentrification (2011). In the next section we identify the mechanisms explicitly articulated in the reviewed studies. These conceptualizations have implications for spatio-temporal scales employed for measuring exposures and outcomes, along with the types of data collected. These implications are presented in the discussion section below.

3.2 Mechanisms linking gentrification and health

The context of gentrification influences the operation of mechanisms; these mechanisms indicate how and why macrosocial factors, such as gentrification, impact population health (Ng and Muntaner, 2014). Mechanisms operate at various levels (i.e. individual, interpersonal, community, institutional) simultaneously; the extent in which each level is causally relevant to the outcome of interest is determined by the conceptualization of the phenomenon of interest (Krieger, 2008).

We identified four categories of mechanisms, operating at distinct levels across studies, linking gentrification to health. First, the majority of studies identified neighborhood attributes and specified the following neighborhood-level sub-categories: either in terms of altered infrastructure, economic opportunities/development, or social cohesion as the main attribute linking gentrification and health and wellness (Abel and White, 2011; Barton, 2016; Desmond and Gershenson, 2017; Ding et al., 2016; Ding and Hwang, 2016b; Gibbons and Barton, 2016; Huynh and Maroko, 2014; Kreager et al., 2011; Lim et al., 2017; Linton

et al., 2015; Papachristos et al., 2011; Smith, 2014; Smith et al., 2018). Second, four studies identified individual mechanisms of change via individual health protective resources within a neighborhood experiencing gentrification (Breyer and Voss-Andreae, 2013; Ding and Hwang, 2016b; Huynh and Maroko, 2014; Lim et al., 2017). Third, three of these studies identified both neighborhood and individual level mechanisms such as economic opportunities and growth and individual health protective resources such as financial status (Ding and Hwang, 2016b; Huynh and Maroko, 2014; Lim et al., 2017). Fourth, one study focused on the role of political and economic institutions in shaping the relationship between gentrification and health (Whittle et al., 2015).

Linking findings concerning the conceptualization of research with mechanisms employed, the mechanisms of neighborhood attributes or individual level resources were associated with conceptualizing gentrification as a process of socio-economic upgrading (Abel and White, 2011; Barton, 2016; Breyer and Voss-Andreae, 2013; Desmond and Gershenson, 2017; Ding et al., 2016; Ding and Hwang, 2016b; Gibbons and Barton, 2016; Huynh and Maroko, 2014; Kreager et al., 2011; Lim et al., 2017; Linton et al., 2015; Papachristos et al., 2011; Smith, 2014; Smith et al., 2018). Three studies related to sense of community/exclusion conceptualized gentrification as a process combining urban restructuring and political conflict (Anguelovski, 2015; Betancur, 2009; Smith, 2014).

3.3 Spatiotemporal considerations for rigorous research

A third challenge in the literature on gentrification and health outcomes is the ability to adequately capture the spatial and temporal dimensions of processes of neighborhood change. Gentrification is driven by varying dynamics across community, city, regional and national scales with urban neighborhood impacts, but it can also start on a single city block; it can be rapid, or the process can take decades to unfold (Beauregard, 1990; Brown-Saracino, 2017; Hwang and Sampson, 2014; Shaw, 2008; Smith, 2002). As Hwang and Sampson point out, traditional data sources do not capture multi-level political and economic forces, such as the nature of global capital flows, nor do census tracts allow us to assess gentrification's uneven nature within neighborhoods (2014). However, the scale and time periods at which gentrification is measured matters. As such, we assessed the scale and time period each article used to understand how and to what extent are the various spatial and temporal attributes relevant to gentrification reflected in current research (Table 2).

We focus first on spatial scale. Ten quantitative studies used census tracts as the unit of analysis (Abel and White, 2011; Breyer and Voss-Andreae, 2013; Desmond and Gershenson, 2017; Ding et al., 2016; Ding and Hwang, 2016b; Gibbons and Barton, 2016; Kreager et al., 2011; Smith et al., 2018). One analyzed data at the zip code level (Linton, 2017), one used Public Use Microdata Area (PUMA) boundaries ($n = 55$, median population in each PUMA = 149,447) (Huynh and Maroko, 2014), and three analyzed data at the neighborhood cluster or sub-borough level (Barton, 2016; Papachristos et al., 2011; Smith, 2014). Two qualitative studies used study participant and author perceptions of place to identify gentrifying neighborhoods (Anguelovski, 2015; Betancur, 2011).

Beyond the spatial, gentrification possesses temporal attributes requiring consideration when assessing the effect gentrification may have on health. It is a staged process that can occur

over time, in quick succession, or with varying levels of intensity. As such, we analyze the literature through these three different lenses. First, gentrification itself is a process and to reflect its temporal nature changes over time should be clearly articulated and reflected in both the conceptualization and measurement of variables. As shown in Table 2, all quantitative studies examined in this review except for three articles focusing on crime (as a result of the widespread availability of crime data over time), lacked measurement of change of both the exposure and outcome of interest (Macintyre et al., 2002). For example, Gibbons and Barton used self-rated health to assess how gentrification – a process inherently reproducing change – only at one point in time (2008).

Second, gentrification is a staged process which can occur in quick succession. To capture its health effects, it is necessary to design studies selecting outcomes where the exposure time of gentrification can theoretically trigger a change in health outcomes, employing multiple data points to capture any shifts in health outcomes, and allowing for adequate lag-time between the stage of gentrification and measurement of outcomes of interest. Particular outcomes can plausibly change within the finite period of time during the stages of gentrification; examples of these outcomes in the reviewed literature include crime, financial health, self-rated health, emergency department visits, and homelessness (Barton, 2016; Ding and Hwang, 2016b; Gibbons and Barton, 2016; Kreager et al., 2011; Lim et al., 2017; Linton et al., 2015; Papachristos et al., 2011; Smith, 2014; Smith et al., 2018). Diseases with a long pre-clinical phase or health outcomes resulting from stressful, severe life events causing weathering could be overlooked if the hypothesized exposure period is inadequate to theoretically induce the specific health outcome, if data collection is infrequent, or if lag-time between the exposure and outcome is absent thereby not permitting enough time for the disease to progress. As an example, a health outcome of interest that theoretically requires exposure over the life course is preterm birth (Luet al., 2010). This outcome, employed by Huynh and Marako's 2013 article was collected at one point in time between 2008 – 2010, which overlaps with the time period included in estimating gentrification as the community district level (population between 35,000 and 200,000). The large scale for measuring gentrification, selection of a health outcome that requires an extended exposure period, measurement of the outcome at one point in time, and overlapping time periods between health outcome and exposure increase the risk of misestimating the relationship between gentrification and health.

The inconsistent pace of gentrification over time, and the differential impacts pace may have on health outcomes requires longitudinal data for both the exposure and outcome. Regarding hypotheses of the varying intensity of gentrification over time, two studies explicitly mentioned the pace of gentrification (Ding et al., 2016; Kreager et al., 2011). As an example, Kreager hypothesizes that gentrification in 1980's Seattle was "spotty" and contributed to increases in crime yet with a more complete gentrification in the 1990s, gentrification was associated with decreases in crime (2011).

4. Discussion

Our results indicate a surge of gentrification and health research since 2015 within the United States context. A broad number of health and wellness outcomes are employed in

studies, ranging from crime rates to pre-term birth, with health outcomes generally measured at one point in time. The majority of studies conceptualized gentrification as a socio-economic process, primarily occurring at the individual level. Only three studies identified neighborhood and individual level mechanisms as integral factors in identifying the connection between gentrification and health and wellness. This is despite evidence that both individual, neighborhood level change (i.e. people and place policies) are intertwined and reinforce one another (Galster, 2017; Katz, 2004). Further, gentrification itself is a political and economic process spanning communities, regions, and institution, requiring examination of mechanisms across scales and levels.

Furthermore, while gentrification results from forces at various scales, the process can occur on a block by block or neighborhood basis. In the reviewed studies, the smallest unit of analysis was the census tract, with four studies using data of a larger spatial scale. Regarding temporality, only three studies studied the process of urban change by incorporating data for more than one point in time for both the exposure and outcome.

Narrowing the context to the United States allows for specification of the urban context, reflecting the history of formerly declining, under-resourced urban areas inhabited by marginalized populations. Through this lens we can assess the literature on gentrification and health while beginning to understand how health equity is reflected in current research. Implications of the findings and suggested avenues to advance the field are discussed below.

4.1 Conceptualization of gentrification and linkages to mechanisms

Integral to understanding the relationship between gentrification and health is developing conceptual clarity around gentrification itself and explicit articulation of the guiding principles for its conceptualization within each research study. With competing definitions, it is imperative to specify the aspect of gentrification guiding conceptualization of research. The majority of studies identified the broad term of socio-economic upgrading as the defining feature of gentrification. Only one study focused on the role of political and economic institutions, providing evidence of the rejection of critical perspectives of gentrification as evidenced by a pre-occupation with ideological differences in the literature and dominance of neoliberalism (Slater, 2006). Absent or muddled in the literature are the power dynamics inherent in gentrification, the differential valuing of individuals based on class and race, in addition to the upstream structural factors that drive gentrification and engender class and racial conflict. This prevents identification of who is responsible if negative health impacts are associated with gentrification, and the potential points of intervention (Krieger, 2001).

Social epidemiology's increasing focus on causality and policy-related research to guide action on how to improve population health (translational social epidemiology) requires clarity and rigor around the logical propositions linking conceptualization of a modifiable exposure to mechanisms that link exposures to outcomes (Oakes et al., 2015). Clear conceptualization of the exposure and mechanisms linking the exposure to the outcome of interest are critical from both policy development and causal inference perspectives. For example, conceptualizing gentrification as a socio-economic process, as identified in the reviewed literature, is related to various mechanisms of neighborhood and individual level

attributes. It spans levels and is connected with political, economic, and social institutions and community resources. As such, articulation of the mechanisms, associated levels, and measurement of these variables is necessary to understand the mechanisms that can be intervened upon to modify the relationship between the exposure of gentrification for instance and the outcome of interest. In terms of causality, violation of the consistency assumption threatens causality but is avoided when whichever facet of socio-economic upgrading is altered, the outcome is the same (Rehkopf et al., 2016). The “treatment” of gentrification encompasses various forms of socio-economic upgrading (such as business developments, employment opportunities, social networks, etc.) and the lack of specificity stemming from the conceptualization of the treatment can threaten causal inference (Rehkopf et al., 2016) and validity more generally.

Regarding explicit identification of the mechanisms linking exposures to outcomes to support a translational epidemiology, analyses indicate a lack of rigor in connecting the conceptualization of gentrification to the hypothesized mechanisms that influence health. First, we highlight three studies providing strong examples of concordance between the conceptualization of gentrification and the mechanisms and levels identified in research on gentrification and health. Breyer and Voss-Andrae (2013) conceptualize gentrification as a process that changes neighborhood food resources. They thus measure outcomes as the cost and availability of healthy food at the neighborhood level. This study provides a clear conceptualization between the process (gentrification), the mechanism (changing the types of grocery stores in a neighborhood), and its impacts on low-income populations (increased cost of food which may go against the goal of expanding access to healthy food). Kreager stipulates gentrification as a process changing both population and property characteristics such as high-end residential development and improving an area’s real estate and local infrastructure (2011). According to Kreager, gentrification is a form of urban restructuring that occurs when infrastructure development and real estate enhancement change area-level characteristics, which in turn results in area-level shifts in crime. This is different from a study that conceptualizes gentrification as a process that displaces low-income households. This too may lead to a reduction in crime, but in this case, area level investment in infrastructure would not be the appropriate mechanism.

Ding et al., examines how stage of gentrification, which alters affordability, moderates mobility patterns (2016). Among vulnerable residents living in neighborhoods of moderate or intense levels of gentrification are more likely to move to lower-income neighborhoods, shedding light on the importance of the outcome of residential moves (Ding, et al., 2016). Critical to the strength of this study’s research design is their clear conceptualization of gentrification as socio-economic upgrading within central urban areas in previously low-income neighborhoods whereby incoming residents are of a higher socio-economic status (2016). The authors also clearly state that while this conceptualization implies displacement, evidence is inconclusive. Given this, mechanisms linking gentrification and mobility (rather than displacement via eviction for instance) relate to affordability of the neighborhood. Affordability, an economic mechanism at the neighborhood level then directly is reflected in their research aim to “examine mobility patterns based on stage of gentrification, which neighborhoods residents move to, if it differs for the most vulnerable, and time at which gentrification commenced in the neighborhood” (Ding et al., 2016).

To illustrate ramifications of discordance and/or lack of clarity between conceptualization and mechanisms, we use one case example. To be sure, data constraints are a critical barrier, but it is instructive to identify theory to help reveal ideal research designs and considerations to drive methodological decisions. Huynh and Marako test the association between gentrification and pre-term birth (2013). In this study, gentrification is conceptualized as socio-economic upgrading, resulting in higher income residents and housing investment. This may cause changes in neighborhood economic attributes by providing additional opportunities or material resources, while also potentially resulting in increased stress and susceptibility to disease due to the displacement of health protective social networks and key community institutions, for example. This broad conceptualization of gentrification and potential mechanisms however does not specify the chronic or acute exposure to gentrification that can plausibly be linked to pre-term birth. Given this broad conceptualization of gentrification and lack of specificity and measurement regarding the hypothesized mechanisms that result in pre-term birth, the opportunity to develop policy recommendations to reduce health inequity as a result of this work is lost. In this case, a theoretical framework to identify what we know and assume would anchor firm hypotheses. For example, employing life course theory would lead to questions regarding length of time and intensity of exposure to gentrification, changes in material resources prior to and within the period of exposure, and distinctions between levels of exposure, timing and embodiment. This would then require a shift in mechanisms, measurements, and considerations of spatiotemporal scale.

4.2 Linking conceptualization, mechanisms and epistemology

The conceptualization of an exposure can reflect the worldview or epistemology of the researcher. Epistemology is not solely a way of knowing but systems of knowing and this knowledge is generated through the subjective experiences of individuals (Creswell, 2014, p. 20). Worldviews, tied to these systems, are influenced by the conditions in which people live and learn, and these can be formed by their gender, race, class, sexuality, language and other forms of difference (Ladson-Billings, 2000).

The scarcity of research focused on political conflict, despite substantial literature on gentrification acknowledging conflicts and tensions around race, class, and displacement provides an opportunity for developing research that is suited to uncovering these experiences and social meanings via interpretive methods. Analyses of two papers (Betancur, 2009; Anguelovski, 2015) employing political conflict as their conceptual frame and sense of community/exclusion as the mechanism of interest illustrates the manner in which conceptualization and identification of mechanism highlights epistemological standpoints. Explicit identification of these three facets of research can lead to identification of research methods best suited to answer the area of inquiry.

First, Betancur's aim was to identify if gentrification was an invasion, succession, or forceful relocation for a group of long-term Latino residents. He captures shifts in resident experiences, elucidating how intensifying gentrification resulted in transitioning from efforts around community building to a community defense. In addition, Anguelovski, explicitly identifies the powerful elite and articulates their goal of shifting ownership of the

community, from lower-income residents to outside sources of capital. This is illustrated by clear identification of investors developing properties for higher-income residents and municipal leaders labeling areas of reinvestment as “sites for revitalization and tourism” (Anguelovski, 2015). The author does not employ the conceptualization of gentrification as a form of socio-economic upgrading, unlike the majority of the other studies reviewed. Rather, conceptualization of gentrification as a political conflict incites a social justice framework and moves away from a positivist epistemology. Because of this framing, he focuses on “new socio-spatial patterns and experiences of exclusion, transforming amenities into locally unwanted land uses (LULUS)” (Anguelovski, 2015). Therefore, experiences of community and exclusion are the factors tying gentrification to health. By extension, the level of interest is the community-level, which aligns with the study aim to understand how gentrifying places establish new forms of exclusion and privilege.

Betancur and Anguelovski’s worldview focusing on conflict, experience, and justice lend itself to interpretive methods. It places priority on generating detailed rich description and using systematic procedures to uncover new knowledge that is situated within the context of the knower who is producing this knowledge (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, 2015, p. 10). Interpretive methods emphasize a deeper understanding of how does one know and that distancing in fact compromises a deeper understanding acknowledgement of the “messiness that is part of being human” (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, 2015, p. 430). These two papers use a case study design, centered on qualitative data collection that allows for redefining main research questions during data collection, unearthing and contextualizing experiences and meanings, and giving voice to individuals (Keene, 2018, pp. 194–195). Furthermore, moving away from generalizability acknowledges the heterogeneity of neighborhoods and supports employing case studies of extreme cases (Small et al., 2018). In addition, it allows for hypothesizing and examining distinct effects of gentrification across subpopulations (Small and Feldman, 2012).

4.3 Considerations of spatio-temporal scale

Analyses of these research studies through the lens of spatio-temporal scale reveal limited consideration of the implications of large scales, spatial dependencies, and research design implications resulting from the unevenness of gentrification itself. These considerations can be helpful in guiding clear, rigorous research. First, studies of gentrification employing large areal units such as PUMA boundaries, will likely face the modifiable areal unit problem (MAUP) where artificial units of spatial reporting of continuous geographical phenomena results in artificial spatial patterns; this issue is akin to ecological fallacy (Heywood et al., 1998, p. 8). Aggregated values will vary depending on which boundaries we use. For example, analysis of data aggregated at the county level will offer distinct conclusions in comparison to data collected at the census tract level. At smaller spatial scales, ranges or variations in data are more apparent. A larger spatial scale may obscure important extremes. Gentrification is often conceptualized as an uneven urban phenomenon. As such, larger areal units, such as PUMA boundaries and potentially census tracts, which range in population size between 1,800 and 8,000 individuals, with the optimal size being 4,000 individuals, may not capture the unevenness of gentrification. In early stage gentrifying areas, gentrification may not occur within a tract as a whole but on a block by block basis.

Understanding both the stage of gentrification and the density of the urban environment in which it is taking place will be helpful in identifying the most appropriate scale. Though the lens of density for example, the measurement scale of gentrification in Los Angeles may be distinct in comparison to the dense, older structural environment of New York City. Similarly, smaller scale measurement at the onset of gentrification may be able to signal incoming shifts of gentrification processes in comparison to larger whole-neighborhood changes.

Moreover, all census tracts do not have the same probability of being gentrified. Those census tracts that are least likely to gentrify due to continued lack of investment and marginalization may be clustered. Being surrounded by multiple disinvested tracts may have distinct implications for residents than living close to clustered resource rich census tracts (Diez Roux and Mair, 2010). This lack of independence, or spatial dependency between census tracts, may induce spillover effects beyond the imposed census tract boundaries and affect health outcomes (Diez Roux and Mair, 2010). None of the studies but one study by Ding et al., discussed spatial dependencies as a limitation in research or acknowledged the varying spatial contexts relevant to the gentrification process. Ding et al., both acknowledged and incorporated statistical analysis reflecting spatial dependencies by restricting their sample to residents of nongentrifying or gentrifying areas that are .5 miles away from gentrifying neighborhoods, assuming the amenities in gentrifying areas may confound the relationship between the exposure and outcome variables of interest.

Third, gentrification is a dynamic process that occurs in stages (Clay, 1979, p. 57; Helms, 2003; Hwang and Sampson, 2014). Health outcome data was collected and analyzed at only one point in time for the 12 quantitative studies that focused on non-crime related outcomes. This may increase selection bias, which occurs when the subjects identified are not representative of the target population. For example, collecting data at only one point in time during the advanced stages of gentrification may capture low-income residents who were not displaced, for example, because they owned their home or had strong family support networks; these households may not be representative of the population, therefore distorting any measure of association. Furthermore, collecting outcome data at one point in time prohibits accounting for past effects of the process of gentrification on health and identification of an appropriate latency period. Given gentrification's dynamic, staged process, one should consider the following: 1. the number of not only exposure data points to quantify urban change but importantly outcome data points used in the study and 2. hypotheses regarding whether gentrification is constant or accelerates at certain points in time and the resultant timepoints necessary to capture those changes.

5. Limitations and Conclusions

This is the first systematic review, to our knowledge, which provides an account of the conceptualization of current research related to gentrification and health, mechanisms identified across studies, and offers opportunities to strengthen current research as a result of this analysis. This review is limited by the search terms selected and the review protocol implemented. We conceptualized health and wellness broadly, aiming to include as many articles as possible. Although we used a combination of search strategies to find published

articles that met our eligibility criteria, it is possible that our search strategy missed some articles that would have been eligible.

Research on gentrification can pave the way to developing a process for understanding the influence of complex macrosocial phenomena on health. Debates may ensue regarding whether gentrification is a powerful determinant of urban poverty. Regardless, conceptual clarity, clear linkages to mechanisms, and intentional research design that responds to the methodological challenges of understanding gentrification and city and regional transformation are necessary to begin the process of illuminating social exposures magnifying health inequities. Furthermore, understanding linkages between gentrification and other processes of neighborhood change contributing to health inequity will encourage methodical and careful thinking and research about gentrification itself and economic shifts within cities (Brown-Saracino, 2016). It is by wrestling with this complexity that we will move from medical advancements for individuals to understanding how to advance population level health equity.

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Highlights

- An array of health outcomes was examined, ranging from crime rates to pre-term birth
- Health outcomes were generally only measured at one point in time
- The majority of studies conceptualized gentrification as socio-economic upgrading, overlooking power dynamics and structural factors
- Few studies consider small scales for analysis, spatial dependencies, and unevenness of gentrification itself
- We recommend studies explicitly identify the mechanism and associated levels linking gentrification and health, incorporate space and time and articulate an epistemological standpoint driven by their conceptualization of the exposure

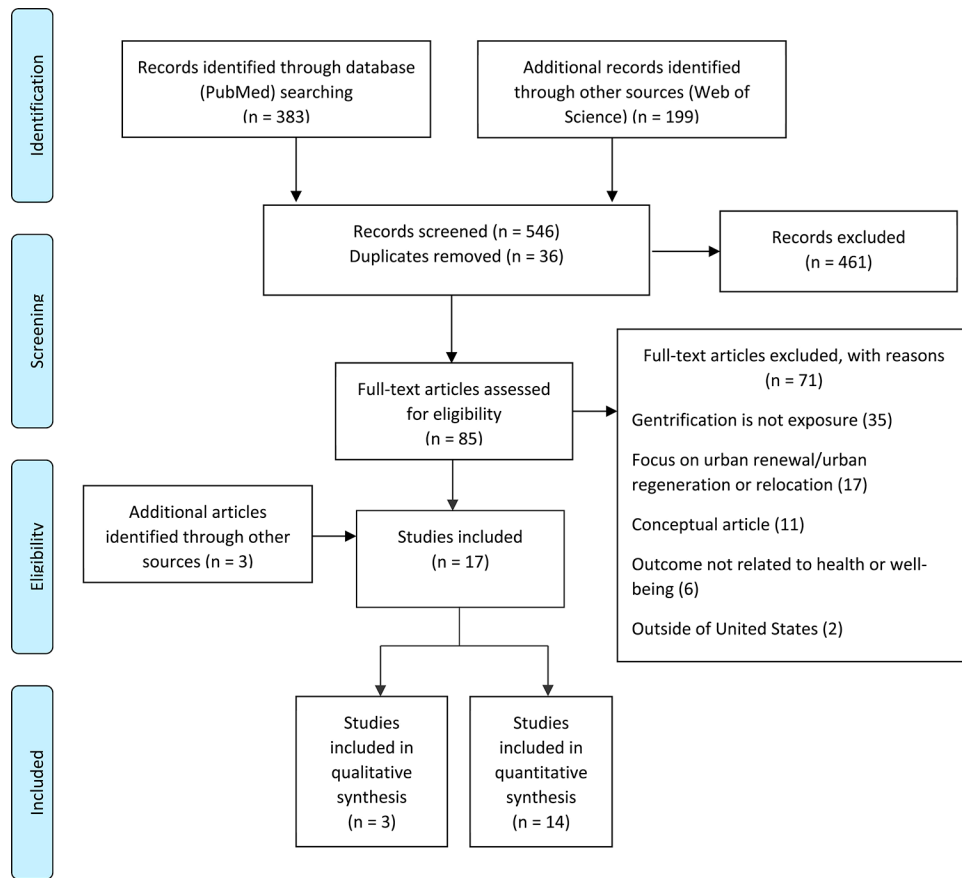


Figure 1:
Flow chart following guidelines in the PRISMA statement (Moher et al., 2010)

Table 1:

Categories of conceptualization and associated mechanisms

Author(s) and Year	Study Aim(s)	Mechanism and Level	Category of Conceptualization
Abel and White, 2011	Examine Seattle's sources of air toxic exposure and related uneven pollution risk and its relationship to inequitable development in gentrified areas.	Neighborhood attributes (infrastructure)	Socio-economic upgrading
Anguelovski, 2015	Socio-spatial patterns and exclusion are produced through decreasing access to resources and supermarket greenling, which are generally unwanted by local residents. This study aims to understand how these places establish new forms of exclusion and privilege.	Sense of community/exclusion	Urban restructuring and political conflict
Barton, 2016	Assess if changes in violent crime rates were associated with gentrification.	Neighborhood attributes (economic)	Socio-economic upgrading
Betancur, 2011	Explore if the experience of gentrification of Latinos is one of invasion, succession, or forceful relocation.	Sense of community/exclusion	Urban restructuring and political conflict
Breyer and Voss-Andrae, 2013	Assess if food mirages (numerous food outlets but with high priced foods, preventing healthy food consumption among low-income residents) converge with gentrified areas.	Individual health protective resources	Socio-economic upgrading
Desmond and Gershenson, 2017	Examine 3 mechanisms (1. discrimination; 2. life shock, and 3. concentrated disadvantage and gentrification, which is the focus of this matrix, and social isolation) that may be associated with disparities in eviction among low-income families.	Neighborhood attributes (economic)	Socio-economic upgrading/Displacement
Ding and Hwang, 2016	Examine the relationship between financial status changes and gentrification, in relation to mobility of residents and stage of gentrification.	Individual resources; Neighborhood attributes (economic)	Socio-economic upgrading/Displacement/and Stages of gentrification
Ding et al., 2016	Examine mobility patterns based on stage of gentrification, which neighborhoods residents move to, if it differs for the most vulnerable, and time at which gentrification commenced in the neighborhood.	Neighborhood attributes (economic)	Socio-economic upgrading/Displacement/and Stages of gentrification
Gibbons and Barton, 2016	Determine the relationship between gentrification and self-rated health. Assess if the relationship differs depending if gentrification results in an influx of white or black residents.	Neighborhood attributes (economic) Sense of community/exclusion	Socio-economic upgrading/Displacement
Huynh and Marako, 2014	Assess the association between gentrification and preterm birth (PTB).	Neighborhood attributes (economic); Individual health protective resources	Socio-economic upgrading
Kreager, 2011	Examine the relationship between crime and gentrification in the city of Seattle in the 1980s and 1990s.	Neighborhood attributes (economic and social cohesion)	Stages of gentrification
Lim et al., 2017	Compare rates of health care access and mental health status between those who remained in gentrifying neighborhoods and those who were displaced (individuals who moved from gentrifying to non-gentrifying areas).	Neighborhood attributes (economic); Individual health protective resources	Socio-economic upgrading
Linton et al., 2017	Examine the association between local-level housing and economic conditions with homelessness among persons who inject drugs (PWID).	Neighborhood attributes (economic)	Socio-economic upgrading
Papachristos, 2011	Examine the relationship between gentrification and neighborhood crime rates (homicides and street robbery) in Chicago from 1995 – 2005.	Neighborhood attributes (economic) Sense of community/exclusion	Socio-economic upgrading
Smith, 2014	Examine the effects of three forms of gentrification—demographic shifts, private investment, and state intervention—on gang-motivated homicides in Chicago from 1994 to 2005.	Neighborhood attributes (economic) Sense of community/exclusion	Socio-economic upgrading/Urban restructuring and political conflict/Stages of Gentrification

Author(s) and Year	Study Aim(s)	Mechanism and Level	Category of Conceptualization
Smith et al., 2018	Examine the relationship between gentrification and older adults' self-rated health and mental health, with a particular focus on those that are economically vulnerable.	Individual resources; Neighborhood attributes (economic)	Socio-economic upgrading
Whittle et al., 2015	Explore the experiences and structural drivers of urban policies shaping gentrification among food insecure people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) in San Francisco.	Political and economic institutions	Socio-economic upgrading

Table 2:

Temporal and spatial considerations and concordance with health outcomes

Author(s) and Year	Health Outcomes	Scale/Unit of Analysis	Data on Timing of Exposure
Abel and White, 2011	Air toxic exposure risk measured from 1990 – 2007	Census Block Groups	Two timepoints: 1990 – 2000
Anguelovski, 2015	Socio-spatial patterns of exclusion from 2011 to 2014	Neighborhood	Over time
Barton, 2016	Crime	55 sub-boroughs (40 census tracts with approximately 100,000 residents each)	Three timepoints: 1980, 1990, 2000
Betancur, 2011	Neighborhood based support and advancement over a period of 10 years	Neighborhood	Over time
Breyer and Voss-Andrae, 2013	Decreasing access to healthy food; food prices were collected in 2011	140 census tracts in Portland	Change between 2000 and 2010
Desmond and Gershenson, 2017	Nature of inequality, housing instability among low-income renters; eviction data was drawn from 2009 – 2011	Census Tracts	Two timepoints: 2000 and 2010
Ding and Hwang, 2016	Changes in financial health of residents; credit scores from 2002 – 2014	Census Tracts	Change between 2000 and 2010
Ding et al., 2016	Residential mobility patterns from 2002 – 2014	Census Tracts	1980, 1990, and 2000 and ACS estimates for 2009–2013
Gibbons and Barton, 2016	Self-rated health measured in 2008	Census Tracts	Two timepoints: 2000 and ACS estimates 2005 – 2009
Huynh and Marako, 2014	Preterm birth from 2008 – 2010	59 community districts (ranging in population between 35,000 and 200,000)	Two timepoints: 1990 and ACS estimates 2005–2009
Kreager, 2011	Crime, as measured by difference in crime indexes in 1990 (averaged across 1989–1991) and measured in 2000 (averaged across the three years spanning 1999–2001) crime indexes	Census Tracts	Two timepoints: 1990 and 2000
Lim et al., 2017	Emergency department visits and hospitalizations of recurring patients from 2006 – 2014	Neighborhoods were defined using Public Use Microdata Area (PUMA) boundaries (n = 55, median population in each PUMA = 149,447 according to 2014 ACS)	5 years post displacement for each individual
Linton et al., 2017	Homelessness within one year of 2009	Zip Code	Two timepoints; 1990 and 2009
Papachristos, 2011	Crime (homicide and robbery)	341 neighborhood clusters, which contain Chicago's 847 census tracts	Five time periods (3 year average between 1991 and 2000)
Smith, 2014	Crime (gang-motivated homicide)	Metropolitan Neighborhoods	Two timepoints; 2000 and 2010
Smith et al., 2017	Self-rated health and mental health among elderly and economically vulnerable population in 2011	Census Tracts	Two timepoints; 2000 and 2010
Whittle et al., 2015	Food insecurity; qualitative data collected in 2014	34 semistructured interviews	One point in time in 2014



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Global city densities: Re-examining urban scaling theory

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Understanding scaling relations of social and environmental attributes of urban systems is necessary for effectively managing cities. Urban scaling theory (UST) has assumed that population density scales positively with city size. We present a new global analysis using a publicly available database of 933 cities from 38 countries. Our results showed that (18/38) 47% of countries analyzed supported increasing density scaling (pop ~ area) with exponents ~% as UST predicts. In contrast, 17 of 38 countries (~45%) exhibited density scalings statistically indistinguishable from constant population densities across cities of varying sizes. These results were generally consistent in years spanning four decades from 1975 to 2015. Importantly, density varies by an order of magnitude between regions and countries and decreases in more developed economies. Our results (i) point to how economic and regional differences may affect the scaling of density with city size and (ii) show how understanding country- and region-specific strategies could inform effective management of urban systems for biodiversity, public health, conservation and resiliency from local to global scales.

200 word statement of contribution: Urban Scaling Theory (UST) is a general scaling framework that makes quantitative predictions for how many urban attributes spanning physical, biological and social dimensions scale with city size; thus, UST has great implications in guiding future city developments. A major assumption of UST is that larger cities become denser. We evaluated this assumption using a publicly available global dataset of 933 cities in 38 countries. Our scaling analysis of population size and area of cities revealed that while many countries analyzed showed increasing densities with city size, about 45% of countries showed constant densities across cities. These results question a key assumption of UST. Our results suggest policies and management strategies for biodiversity conservation, public health and

sustainability of urban systems may need to be tailored to national and regional scaling relations to be effective.

KEYWORDS

allometry, cities, complex systems, urban policy, macroecology, macroeconomics, urban ecology, urban sustainability

Introduction

Urbanization has significantly increased in recent decades. Developing a science of cities is necessary to understand, predict and manage the future of an urbanizing planet (Acuto et al., 2018; Burger et al., 2019; Bettencourt, 2021; Uchida et al., 2021). A general theory of cities should predict how variation in city size, infrastructure, and governance are linked to influence biodiversity, urban ecosystems, resource use, social interactions, innovations, economic activity, public health, crime, and urban sustainability (Bettencourt et al., 2007; Lobo et al., 2019; Bettencourt, 2020, 2021; Uchida et al., 2021). Indeed, while many socioeconomic, behavioral, ecological, and evolutionary processes are affected by urbanization, it is unclear how city size impacts these processes directly or indirectly *via* variation in human population density.

Several studies have recently extended scaling approaches from biology—where various organismal characteristics scale with size—to the study of cities (Bettencourt et al., 2007; Bettencourt and West 2010; Fragkias et al. 2013; Bettencourt, 2013, 2020; Oliveira et al. 2014; West, 2018; Lobo et al., 2019; Ortman et al., 2020). Urban Scaling Theory (UST; a.k.a Urban Settlement Theory) is a general scaling framework that makes quantitative predictions for many urban attributes spanning physical, biological, and social dimensions, and how they scale with city size. Similar to the scaling of traits with body size in biology, various attributes of cities scale as a power-law:

$$Y(t) = Y_0(t)N(t)^\alpha \quad (\text{Eqn. 1})$$

where Y is an attribute for a given city at time (t), N is human population size or total number of inhabitants in the city, Y_0 is the elevation and α is the exponent. The three main classes of scaling behavior are: (i) *Sublinear* ($\alpha < 1$), (ii) *linear* ($\alpha = 1$, aka isometric), and (iii) *superlinear scaling* ($\alpha > 1$). Analysis of initial data from modern cities in a few countries suggest $\alpha < 1$ for infrastructural quantities; $\alpha = 1$ for measures of resource use and waste production; and $\alpha > 1$ for social attributes including super-creative employment, crime, and infectious disease (Bettencourt et al., 2007). These empirical patterns have helped develop the mechanistic theory behind the scaling categories, with spatial filling networks and social interaction dynamics in growing urban systems as their determinants (Bettencourt, 2013).

A key underlying assumption of UST mechanistic theory is that densities increase with city size, which results in *economies of scale* ($\alpha < 1$) in space use (Bettencourt, 2013) that influences the scaling of several characteristics of cities, particularly those related to social outcomes. This results in exponents of $\alpha > 1$ for some urban features are due to efficiencies gained in communication and infrastructure networks in larger cities. More specifically, assuming optimal infrastructure and material use, UST proposes that circumscribing urban areas and the urban built area scale with population size as $\alpha = \frac{2}{3}$ and $\alpha = \frac{5}{6}$, respectively. However, it is essential to establish empirical foundations to advance general theory and applications for global urban management practices.

Population density is also a critical variable of study for other areas of fundamental urban science and practical purposes. Variation in human population density reflects the unique ecology of hyper-dense urban societies existing at several orders of magnitude denser (Burger et al., 2017; Burger and Fristoe 2018). Density fundamentally affects social interactions, the built environment, open/green spaces, demand for natural resources and impacts on landscapes. The null expectation is that population density is invariant of city size if city area scales isometrically with population size. However, UST predicts that city area scales sublinearly with city population size and, therefore, human population density increases with city size. Increases in population density suggests important underlying interactions and dynamics and has fundamental implications for the emergent behavior of many urban social attributes.

Despite the apparent importance of understanding variation in urban densities, there is limited understanding, however, of how the scaling of area with population size vary globally. Some studies have supported sublinear scaling of areas with population size based on ordinary least-square regression and limited data that is highly unrepresentative of cities especially in the tropics and “Global South”. For example, one seminal study was based on data for just four highly-developed nations: USA, Sweden, United Kingdom, and Canada (Bettencourt, 2013). Another study was based on historical societies with small city sizes compared to modern cities (Lobo et al., 2019). A recent global analysis of the scaling of area with population size using data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) showed mixed results where some

countries and regions scaled linearly and even superlinear, while others scaled sublinearly at 5/6 (Ortman et al., 2020). This study used Functional Urban Areas (FAU) defined as “spatial units whose outlines encapsulate daily flows of people, goods, and information” and hypothesized that countries conforming to UST predictions with $\alpha \approx 5/6$ are countries developing incrementally with homogeneous social-mixing, whereas countries where $\alpha \neq 5/6$ are experiencing rapid development and land expansion. So, advancing urban science and UST necessitates assessing if urban area scales sublinearly to what exponent. Doing so is the first step in developing a general scaling framework for managing urban biodiversity and sustainable cities.

Here, we examine the scaling behavior of city areas with population size. We test the assumption of increasing densities, people per area, and city size by using a publicly available global database that fills important gaps in urban scaling knowledge (Acuto et al., 2018), especially in tropical regions. In addition, we explored whether factors such as regional differences, economic development status, and time influence the value of the scaling relations of the log population vs log area relationship. We end by discussing the important implications of these findings for managing urban ecosystems and biodiversity at local, regional and global scales.

Materials and methods

The data

We assessed the scaling of urban area and population size for 933 cities in 38 countries globally. We used the publicly available Global Human Settlement (GHS; Melchiorri, 2022) Urban Center Database (https://ghsl.jrc.ec.europa.eu/ghs_stat_ucdb2015mt_r2019a.php; Pesaresi et al., 2019) and the associated Global Human Settlement Layer (GHSL) project (<https://ghsl.jrc.ec.europa.eu/index.php>; Florczyk et al., 2019). The GHS classifies the physical extent of human settlements – from large megacities to villages and towns using a consistent methodology across the globe with satellite remote sensing as a primary source of information. Supervised automatic data classification is used to build the GHS built-up area grid (GHS-BUILT) using open decametric-resolution satellite imagery collected by the Landsat and Sentinel missions. Using census data through spatial modeling techniques combined with GHS-BUILT, the GHSL project produces global population density grids (GHS-POP). The data integration process foresees the downscaling of the information from the national census district level to a regular, finer-scaled, gridded, built-up density information layer at the resolution of 250m² and 1 km². Importantly, the GHS does not assign cities and populations by political boundaries (e.g., MSAs, countries, counties), but rather by the clustering and proximity of the built-up environment classified as urban.

The combination of GHS-BUILT and GHS-POP produces the GHS settlement model (GHS-SMOD), building on the “Degree of Urbanization” concept (Dijkstra and Poelman, 2014). Distinguishing between three main typologies of human settlements based on population density cut-off values: Urban Centers, Urban Clusters, and Rural Settlements. The Urban Centers, which represent the most densely inhabited part of human settlements, are defined as “the spatially-generalized high-density clusters of contiguous grid cells of 1 km² with a density of at least 1,500 inhabitants per km² of land surface or at least 50% built-up surface share per km² of the land surface, and a minimum population of 50,000”, and are the core of the GHS-UCDB dataset. It considers all “Urban Centers” data from the GHS-SMOD 2015, 1 x 1 km² resolutions, leading to a database containing over 10,000 individual cities and characterizing each by a number of variables describing the geography and the environment of the place, as well as socio-economic parameters and the potential exposure of an Urban Center to natural disasters. Initial analysis of all the data produced erroneous results due to variation in the resolution of the combined datasets in GHS. Further inspection of ‘outlier’ cities by our international team of scientists further identified problems with small area cities in the dataset in Bangladesh, Nepal, and other countries. The GHS was notified and agreed this was problematic and should be corrected in future versions. So, we excluded cities with total urban areas of <100 km² similar to Ortman et al. (2020), reducing the number in our analysis to 933 cities from countries with at least five cities with >50,000 people.

Statistical analysis

We conducted both Reduced Major Axis (RMA) and Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression of log population size versus log area to estimate the scaling exponent (α) and elevation (β) for countries by years available in the GHS database (yrs. 1975, 1990, 2000, 2015) following Fuller and Gaston (2009) and Gudipudi et al. (2019). We report OLS and RMA regression statistics and scaling parameters in Appendix. We used the 95% confidence intervals (CIs) of scaling exponents to evaluate whether within-in country scaling relations were statistically indistinguishable from linear scaling (CIs bounding 1) versus providing support for allometric scaling (CIs not containing 1), including overlapping with $\alpha = 5/6$ as is common practice in the city scaling literature (e.g., Finance and Swerts, 2020). The general nature of the results were similar between RMA and OLS, so we report only RMA analyses in the text because it is the standard method for allometric scaling studies (see Appendix and Supplemental Material for more information). We assessed the effect of the development status of the countries over scaling exponents and elevation through an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA), where log(population) was the dependent variable and population and development status of the country and their interaction were the predictor variables.

Results

Country-specific scalings

Our analysis revealed that the scaling exponents (α) varied widely across countries (Figures 1, 2), from 0.63-to 1.08 (Appendix); 17 countries (47%) supported UST predictions of a sublinear scaling exponent of $\frac{2}{3}$ for built urban areas. In contrast, 18 countries (48%) had scaling relations indistinguishable from linear ($\alpha = 1$) including 8 countries with 10 or more cities of similar densities (Table 1). See Appendix for country-level statistics for all years.

We found greater variation in the elevation Y_0 between countries than within (Appendix). Development status had no detectable effect on scaling exponents (ANCOVA: $F = 1.929$, $p = 0.146$), but affected Y_0 (ANCOVA: $F = 311.254$, $p < 0.001$), being highest in the More Developed countries and lower in the Less and Least Developed countries. Those results indicate that cities in less and least developed countries are denser than the more developed countries for any given city size. For example, the highest density cities in the curated GHS dataset occur in countries of Asia (Surat = 24,117 ind km⁻²), Africa (Cairo = 12,451 ind km⁻²) and tropical Latin America (Salvador = 9,839 ind km⁻²) and are considerably higher for a given city size than densities in the USA (NYC = 2,963 ind km⁻²), Australia

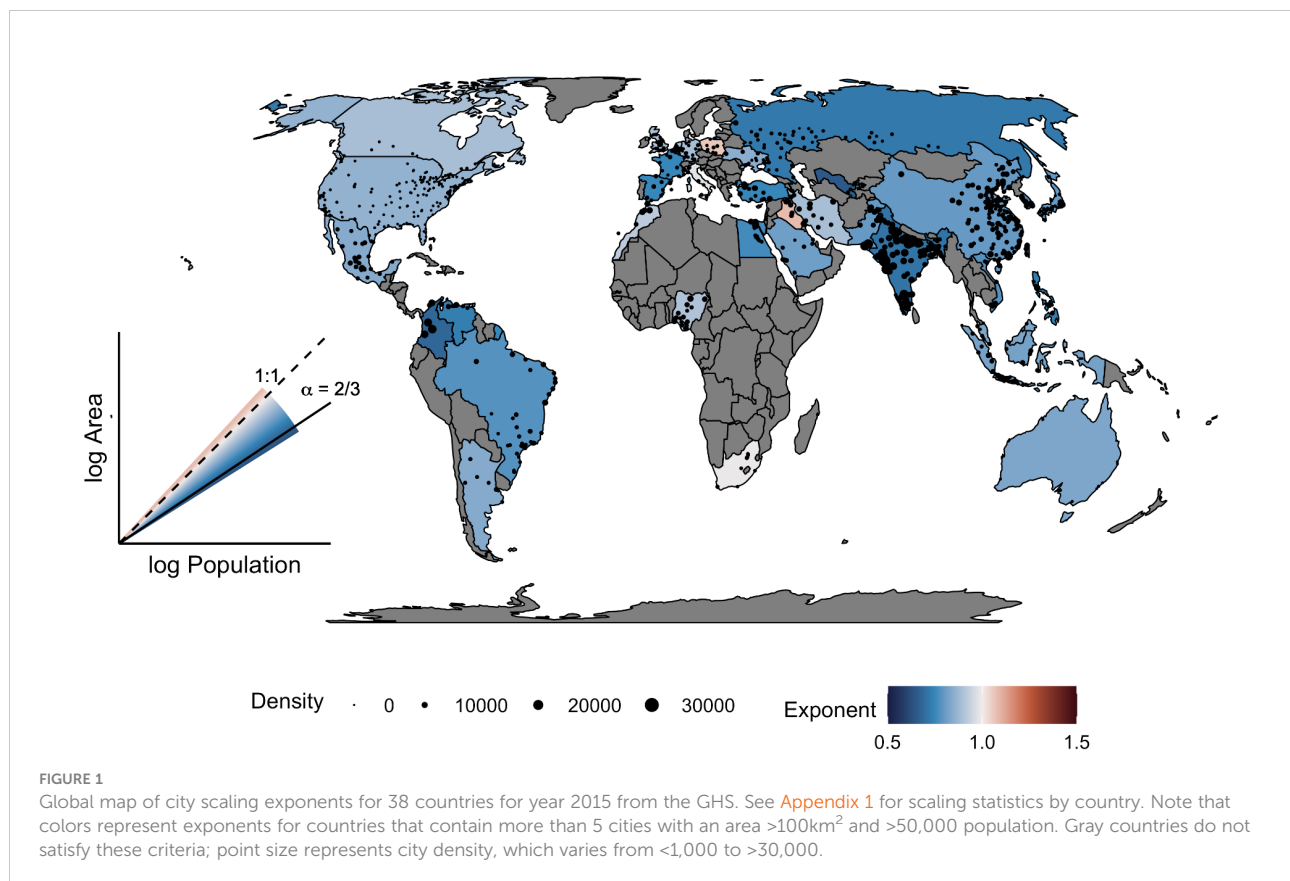
(Sydney = 2,762 ind km⁻²), Canada (Toronto = 2,990 ind km⁻²). Maximum densities for each country range from ~2,000-20,000 ind km⁻², and tend to be higher close to the tropics (Figure 1). See appendix for full statistics by country and years.

Temporal analysis

We found scaling exponents to vary over time for some countries and regions and remain invariant in others (Figures 3, 4; Appendix). Notably, the 95% CIs for the exponents of 13 countries overlap with one (linear) over three decades (Belgium, Colombia, Germany, Iran, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Poland, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Ukraine, and Venezuela) whereas 9 countries stayed sublinear (Brazil, Egypt, France, India, Japan, Mexico, Russia, Taiwan, and Uzbekistan). In contrast, Italy changed from superlinear to linear, and 12 countries changed from linear to sublinear (Argentina, Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, China, Indonesia, South Korea, Spain, Turkey, United States, United Kingdom).

Discussion

Using a new multi-decadal global-scale dataset, our results fill a gap in the literature by evaluating how commonly density



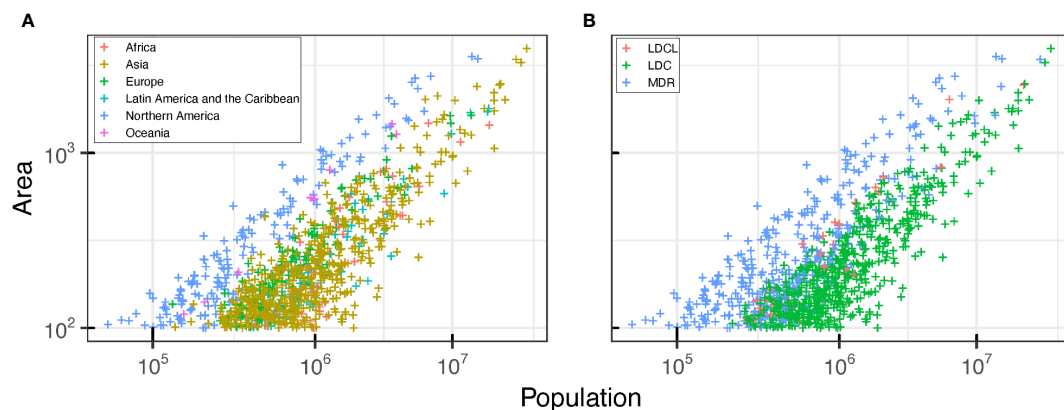


FIGURE 2

A scatter plot of 933 cities in 2015 used in this study colored by geographic region (A) and level of economic development status: LDC = low development countries, LDCL = least developed countries, and MDR = more developed countries (B). Note that the x and y axes are log10 transformed.

increases with urban population size across the globe, leading to sublinear scaling of area with population size. Our results show mixed support for the UST consistent with previous studies (Batty and Fargeson, 2011; Ortman et al., 2020). Sublinear scaling of area with population (increasing density) with an exponent of $\frac{1}{2}$ is generalizable for only ~47% of countries globally. In contrast, ~48% of countries showed scaling relations statistically indistinguishable from constant densities across cities. Some countries ($N = 13$) exhibited constant densities across cities for four time periods spanning three decades. Thus, we conclude that sublinear scaling as predicted by the UST is not the norm.

Why do we see variation in scaling parameters and a lack of support for UST in many countries? It is unlikely a statistical artifact since several of the countries not supporting UST predictions have sufficient (>10) cities. Our results are similar to Ortman et al., 2020, which used a different methodology in the OECD “Functional Urban Areas” data resulting in substantially different sample sizes. Our results are additionally incomparable because their results are reported mostly for regions instead of countries. However, Ortman et al. (2020) hypothesize countries that do not support UST predictions have experienced rapid growth and land expansion in recent decades, whereas UST assumes social-mixing and incremental development. It is possible that the countries that do not exhibit scaling to the $\frac{1}{2}$

UST prediction fail to meet these assumptions. In UST, the proposed mechanisms underlying increasingly denser larger cities are based on the capacity of the transport and communication system to connect all of its inhabitants and are assumed self-similar, maintaining their properties regardless of scale (Bettencourt, 2013; Bettencourt, 2020; Ortman and Lobo, 2020). However, such communication systems are costly, and the “ideal” (theoretical) connection proposed by UST may not be achieved in some countries. Countries with low per capita GDP may face greater challenges in investing and maintaining the needed transportation and communication connectivity costs for their inhabitants, potentially leading to lower-performing cities economically (Ortman et al., 2020). However, our analysis did not reveal differences in exponents by economic development status as suggested by Ortman et al. (2020). More and better quality data across cities, especially from the “Global South,” will allow us to better understand the links between city scalings, economic development, and country-level outcomes in urban scaling parameters. Our results showing variation in urban density scaling for 38 countries is a step in that direction.

Our analysis did reveal differences in elevation, Y_0 , by economic development status in the area-size scaling relations and only recently has this received attention in the UST literature (e.g., Bettencourt, 2020; Bettencourt et al., 2020;

TABLE 1 The number and percentage of countries in 2015 with scaling exponents from containing isometry ($\alpha = 1$) and/or the UST predicted values ($\alpha = 5/6$) based on 95% Confidence Intervals.

	RMA Totals	OLS Totals
# of countries with 95% CIs of α containing both 5/6 and 1	17 (0.45%)	12 (0.32%)
# of countries with 95% CIs of α only containing 5/6	18 (0.47%)	21 (0.55%)
# of countries with 95% CIs of α contain neither	3 (0.08%)	5 (0.13%)

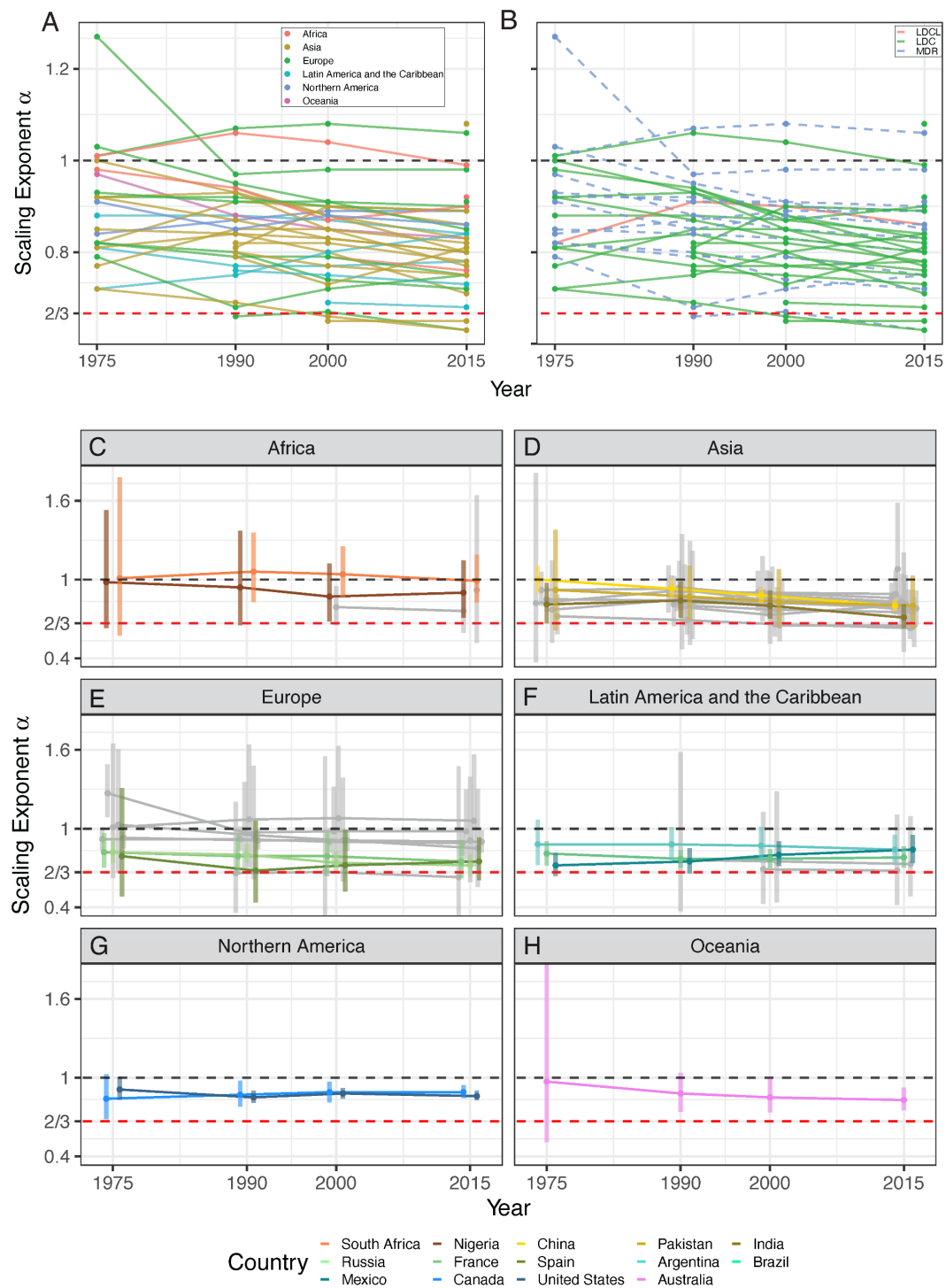


FIGURE 3

Scaling exponents over time by: (A) all regions, (B) 2015 economic development status, (C) Africa, (D) Asia, (E) Europe, (F) Latin America and the Caribbean, (G) Northern America, (H) Oceania. Note each line represents the exponent for a country over time and vertical lines 95% Confidence Intervals. Select countries listed in the legend are highlighted.

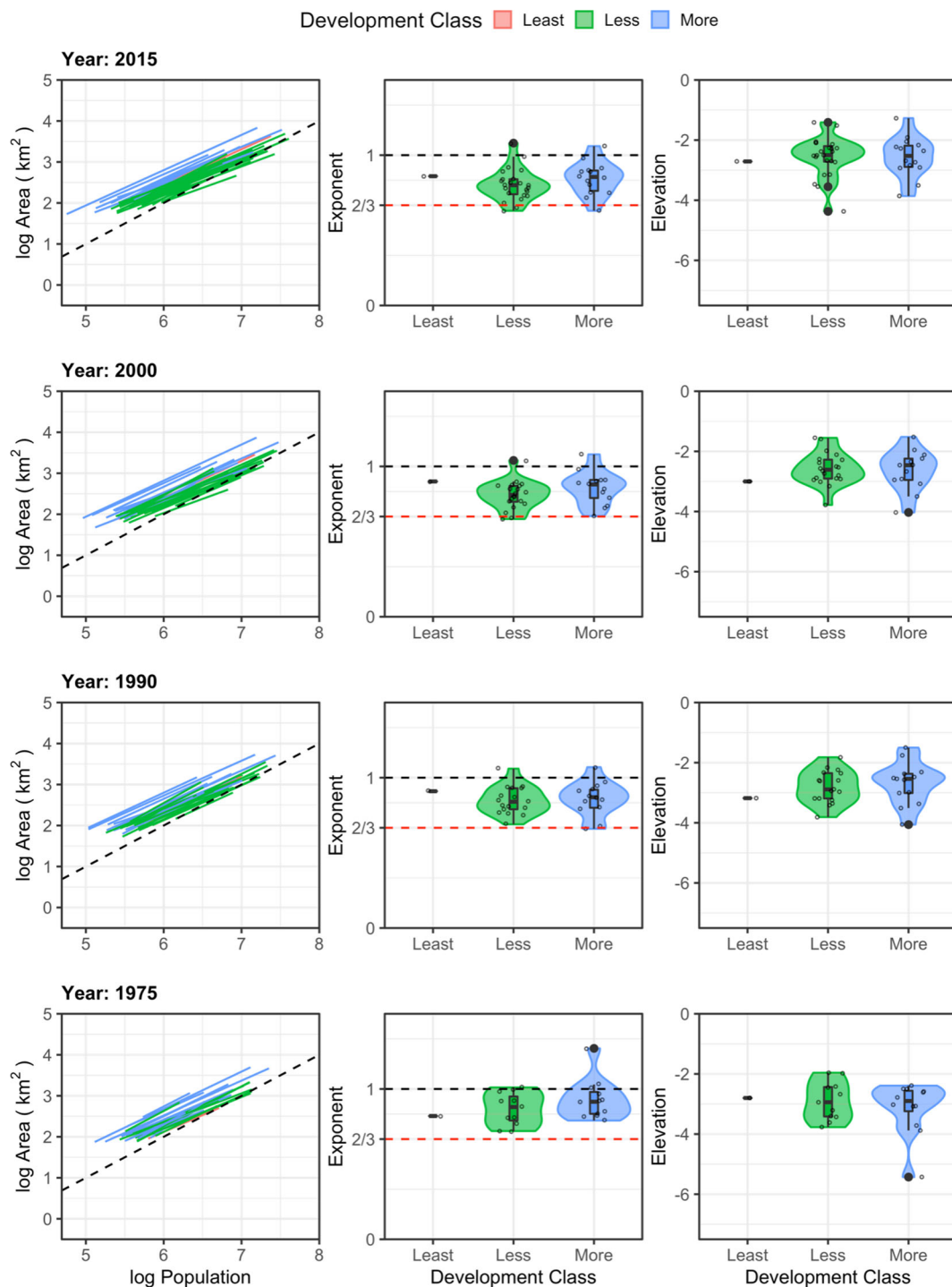


FIGURE 4
Comparison of log area~log population scaling for GHS dataset for different decades. Black dashed lines represent the 1/1 line (e.g., $\alpha = 1$). All regressions (Reduced Major Axis) are country-level with at least 5 cities of > 50,000 people and ≥ 100 km² for the specific year.

Ortman and Lobo, 2020). Our results show that Y_0 varies ~1 order of magnitude between countries and was related to socioeconomic and geographic drivers, with more developed economies having lower urban densities and occurring at higher latitudes. Perhaps counterintuitive, countries with high density cities and less developed economies are the countries that have been slower to urbanize and transition to service-based economies from predominantly rural, resource-based economies (Burger et al., 2019). Countries with the highest density cities (highest Y_0) and low economic development also have higher fertility rates and larger family sizes (Moses and Brown, 2003; DeLong et al., 2010; Burger, 2019) possibly related to high-density living. Interestingly, this latitudinal variation in urban densities and economic wealth mirrors gradients in biodiversity, with tropical areas having higher numbers of species of not only animals and plants (Brown, 2014) but also human pathogens and parasites compared to temperate regions (Guernier et al., 2004). Recently, urban scaling has been applied to understanding and managing the Covid-19 pandemic (Ribeiro et al., 2020; Stier et al., 2020). So, a possible practical avenue for future research is to understand the consequences of urban density scaling for contact rates, transmission and evolution of human pathogens and how to mitigate epidemics in countries with different scaling exponents and elevations. More investigation into the country- and region-specific drivers and consequences of variation in urban density scaling are thus clearly needed. Our results suggest that UST may need to be further refined and expanded to address this variation in scaling exponents and elevations theoretically with important practical applications.

Urban density and biodiversity

Understanding the scaling relations of urban densities has important consequences for green space and habitat for biodiversity (Callaghan et al., 2021; Uchida et al., 2021; Dunn et al., 2022). The country-specific parameter estimates in scaling exponents and Y_0 (elevation) provided in the Appendix have implications for country-specific management and policy. For instance, population density and city area are both fundamental variables for biodiversity conservation, influencing human pressures on habitats and the fragmented structure of habitats. If density increases with city size for a given country, different incentives may be put in place to allow compensatory green space in larger, denser cities. The scaling of green space, therefore, may impact biodiversity.

Uchida et al. (2021) hypothesized that urban areas have higher biodiversity than similar size non-urban areas where the scaling exponent of the Species-Area-Relationship may be steeper with higher log-log intercepts. However, this relationship has largely been investigated in cities of the temperate Northern Hemisphere. For example, in European

cities, bird species richness appears to increase with city area as power-law with exponent of 0.18. Given the shallow exponent, however, only a small number of species turnover is required in order for small cities to support more biodiversity per inhabitant. Indeed, for specific taxa like birds, species-area richness is found to be higher in urban areas compared to their rural counterparts (Ferenc et al., 2016; Callaghan et al., 2021; but see Fattorini et al., 2018 for Italy) and also depends on latitude (Murthy et al., 2016). However, this outcome may not necessarily be congruent with conservation priorities since urban areas often have greater numbers of species of both native and non-native generalist species resulting in part due to increased species introductions and resource availability by humans in urban environments (Ferenc et al., 2016; Murthy et al., 2016). Our study highlights a latitudinal gradient in population density where the highest density cities in the world are located in the tropics, where there is generally higher terrestrial biodiversity (Brown, 2014). Further studies are needed to understand how variation in density scalings impacts the species-area relationship in cities in temperate versus tropics cities and in different biomes (Uchida et al., 2021).

More broadly, our results highlight the need to better understand how other large-scale geographic, political, and socioeconomic factors drive variation in population density and shape the area-size scaling exponent (α) and elevation (Y_0). In countries in which the scaling of area with population size is linear, the effect of the size distribution of cities should be invariant for regional biodiversity. Yet, other attributes of cities for urban biodiversity could also be important that do not scale linearly with city size. Additionally, whether or not multiple small cities can support more total urban species richness (gamma diversity) than a few large cities of the equivalent population depend on the rate of turnover in species composition between cities and the exponent of the species-area relationship of cities (Uchida et al., 2021). Thus, resolving this dilemma requires a better understanding of the scaling of various biodiversity-relevant features of cities, such as how green space, biodiversity, net primary productivity, and habitat connectivity scale with city size. Additionally, the spatial distribution of cities of varying sizes undoubtedly affects the regional connectivity of habitats, influencing rates of colonization and dispersal between and within cities and rural areas. Our analysis of city area and population provide crucial information to advance more empirical and theoretical development to effectively understanding country-level scaling effects.

Extra-urban scalings

Cities are dependent on extra-urban interactions from regional and global trade networks (Burger et al., 2012) not currently considered in UST. The productivity of their

boundaries does not constrain modern cities due to the industrial revolution, and the use of fossil fuels to now import vast quantities of goods and services from global trade networks into cities (Krausmann et al., 2008; Meyfroidt et al., 2011, Burger et al., 2012, 2019; Schramski et al., 2015, 2019, 2020). An increase in urbanization within countries over time shows (i) greater dependence on the net import of raw materials from abroad, increasing the *actual* footprint of the city that is not being taken into account (Rees and Wackernagel 1996; Hidalgo, 2009; Meyfroidt et al., 2011; Burger et al., 2012; Schramski et al., 2019, 2020), (ii) a general trend of per capita increase in extra-metabolic and metabolic (i.e., food) energy sources and material consumption (Brown et al., 2011; Burger et al., 2017, 2019) (iii) an accelerated extinction of biodiversity and alterations of ecosystem function (e.g., Ceballos et al., 2015) that are so tightly related to the uncertainties behind the global change and the future Anthropocene era scenarios and our survival as species (Barnosky et al., 2012; Steffen et al., 2018). Future studies should advance linking urban scaling relations to extra-urban dynamics that are currently not accounted for in theoretical and empirical studies of the UST.

Conclusion

Using a global database of urban area and population size, we show the variation in population densities and scaling relationships between urban area and population size across the spectrum of socioeconomic development on Earth. Support for UST expectations of % scaling exponents was mixed, with nearly half of countries exhibiting scaling indistinguishable from linear and a surprising substantial number of countries maintaining this apparent linearity and invariance of population density over three decades. Further research is thus needed to understand the interactions among economics, demography, history, and culture that may underlie these context-specific relationships. While our study involves a wealth of data, including hundreds of cities and scaling analysis up to 38 countries over 4 time periods, we have only focused on area and population. Additional variables must be investigated at these large cross-country and cross-city scales. Whether or not a single general theory can manage urban biodiversity given the variation in urban density scaling uncovered here remains an open question.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/**Supplementary Material**. Further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Author contributions

JB led the conceptualization, execution, analysis, discussion, and writing with input from all authors. JB, JO, IH, VW, MS, KL, TB, AC, XF, CH-H, AK contributed to data analysis, interpretation of results and discussion. All authors contributed to editing the article and approved the submitted version.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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Supplementary material

The Supplementary Material for this article can be found online at: <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fcosc.2022.879934/full#supplementary-material>

SUPPLEMENTAL 1

Scaling parameters of all countries over time. **Countries that changed from linear to sublinear:** Argentina, Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, China, Indonesia, South Korea, Spain, Turkey, United States, United Kingdom. **Countries that stayed linear:** Belgium, Colombia, Germany, Iran, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Poland, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Ukraine, Venezuela. **Countries that stayed sublinear:** Brazil, Egypt, France, India, Japan, Mexico, Russia, Taiwan, Uzbekistan. **Countries that changed from superlinear to linear:** Italy.

APPENDIX 1

Summary OLS and RMA statistics of scalings of log area with log population for countries >5 cities of >100 km² and >50,000 population, per time frame (N = 933 cities in 2015, 738 in 2000, 591 in 1990, 416 in 1975).

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The refugees' right to the centre of the city: City branding versus city commoning in Athens

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Abstract

Over the years, cities have figured as exemplary places for neoliberal urban policies which tend to appropriate the right to the city through city-branding policies. However, as this article demonstrates, there are important claims of the right to the city raised by newly arrived refugees in the city of Athens. Although most refugees reside in overcrowded state-run camps on the outskirts of the city, there are many cases in which refugees enact the production of collective common spaces, occupying abandoned buildings in the urban core and claiming the right to the centre of the city. In this context and following the Lefebvrian notion of the right to the city and the spatial analysis on commons and enclosures, we explore the actions of refugees, and the way they engage in commoning practices that not only strive against the official state policies, but also often contest city-branding policies. In particular, we focus on the area of Exarcheia in Athens, which is an emblematic case of the conflicted nexus between investors' and refugees' right to the city.

Keywords

Athens, city branding, commons, refugees, right to the city

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摘要

多年来,一些城市已经成为新自由主义城市政策的典范,这种政策倾向于通过城市品牌政策侵占城市权。本文展示,雅典的新难民提出了与城市权相关的重要主张。虽然大多数难民居住在由政府运营的、位于城市郊区拥挤不堪的难民营,但在许多情况下,难民创造了集体公共空间、占据了城市核心的废弃建筑、并要求进入城市中心的权利。在这种背景下,遵循列斐伏尔 (Lefebvrian) 的城市权概念和对公共空间和封闭空间的空间分析,我们探讨了难民的行动,以及他们如何参与公共实践活动。这些实践活动不仅反对政府的正式政策,而且经常质疑城市品牌政策。特别是,我们关注雅典的埃克萨尔西阿 (Exarcheia) 地区,这是投资者的城市权与难民的城市权相互冲突关系的典型案例。

关键词

雅典、城市品牌、平民、难民、城市权

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Introduction

On 26 August 2019 on a morning TV show, the spokesperson of the Greek Police announced that ‘the police will suck up all the scum from Exarcheia progressively like a vacuum cleaner’ (Skai, 2019). On the same day, a massive police operation evicted four refugees’ squats in the Exarcheia neighbourhood in the centre of Athens, arresting 143 residents of the occupied buildings.

Although academic literature on refugees and urban space has addressed gentrification (Murdie and Teixeira, 2011; Newman and Wyly, 2006) and migrants’ housing (Darling and Bauder, 2019; Hatziprokopiou et al., 2016; Maeckelbergh, 2012), there have been few studies that link recent city-branding policies with the recent ‘refugee crisis’. This article attempts such an examination by focusing on Athens, a nodal spatial location along the recent refugee path called the ‘Balkan corridor’. During the years 2015–2019, more than 1.2 million refugees mainly from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan (Asylum Information Database and European Council on Refugees and Exiles, 2018) followed the ‘Balkan corridor’; Athens is one of the main hub cities on this route. The study of refugees’ housing usually focuses

on state policies or charitable actions by NGOs (Gabiam, 2012). Emerging literature has focused on immigrant activism (Agustín and Jørgensen, 2019; Della Porta, 2018; Squire, 2018; Trimikliniotis et al., 2015), and on new ‘sociabilities of emplacement’ enacted by collaboration between refugees and local solidarity groups (Çaglar and Glick Schiller, 2018: 213). This article highlights a new angle on those practices: the ways in which refugees’ commoning practices are able to contest not only official state migration policies, but also major entrepreneurial projects and city-branding practices at the heart of urban centres. Exploring this much-neglected angle of the refugees’ right to the city, we shift the discussion by centring it specifically on refugees’ right to the centre of the city.

The study presented in this article concerns the examination of the Exarcheia neighbourhood, a central area in Athens, which is a key location (see Figure 1b) for researching the conflict between investors’ and refugees’ right to the centre of Athens. Although the vast majority of the newcomers-refugees from the Middle East and North Africa are settled in remote areas in state-run camps, the Exarcheia neighbourhood is a notable exception, as it

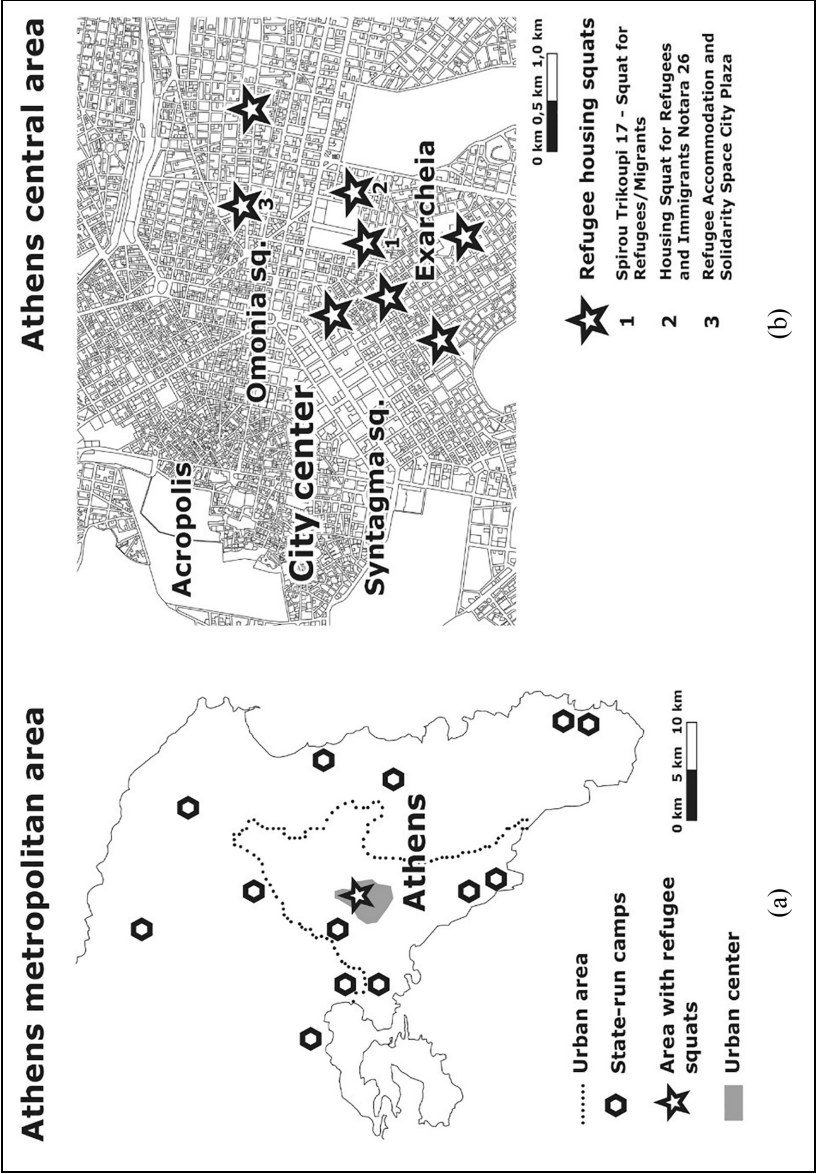


Figure 1. (a) State-run camps (on the left) and (b) refugee housing squats (on the right) in Athens.
Source: The authors.

constitutes a 'point of entry' for refugees to the city beyond official state policies. During the years 2015–2019, a network of occupied buildings in Exarcheia hosted hundreds of newcomers, who experimented with practices of commoning, self-organisation and claiming their right to the centre of the city. At the same time, Exarcheia has recently become a controversial city-branding location and investment/development project area. Specifically, the Exarcheia neighbourhood has become a representative example of the new right-wing government city-branding slogan of 'return to normality'.

In order to analyse the examined case of refugees' and investors' right to the centre of the city, our study is based on the critical urban theory of city branding (Kaika, 2010; Knierbein et al., 2010; Rossi and Vanolo, 2012), the Lefebvrian (1996 [1968]) concept of 'the right to the city' and related literature (Harvey, 2008; Merrifield, 2011; Simone, 2005) and the discussion on urban commons and enclosures (Chatterton, 2016; De Angelis, 2017; Stavrides, 2016).

Methodologically, the research was based on direct observation, ethnographic analysis and in-depth interviews with refugees in Athens. We conducted archival research on the reports of human rights organisations and collected material from refugee solidarity groups. Direct observation was conducted between autumn 2018 and summer 2019 when we conducted weekly visits to 13 state-run camps in the perimeter of Athens and 10 self-organised housing projects in the Exarcheia neighbourhood in the city centre. During the same period, we conducted 45 semi-structured interviews with refugees, on average two interviews per housing structure, i.e. two per camp or squat. We also held several informal conversations with refugee NGOs' volunteers and activists from refugee solidarity groups. The interviews lasted between one and four hours. They

were conducted in English and Greek, and interpreters were used when there was a need for translation from Arabic, Urdu or Farsi. The interview participants were 55% males and 45% females; they had lived for more than six months in Athens; and their countries of origin were Syria, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan. The names of the research participants have been changed in order to protect their identities.

The structure of the article is as follows. The next section discusses a range of theoretical approaches to city branding, commons and the right to the city. In the following two sections, we discuss the emerging refugee squats and the city-branding processes in the case of the Exarcheia neighbourhood in Athens. In the final section, we present the conclusions reached on the ongoing conflict between investors' and refugees' conceptions of the right to the city.

Who has the right to the centre of the city? Theoretical approaches to city branding and refugees' urban commoning

So-called 'city branding' has been one of the dominant neoliberal urban transformation strategies in recent decades. Flagship mega projects, iconic buildings, global events and local culture, history and landscape have all become parts of the city-branding kaleidoscope (Kaika, 2010). These are the processes through which the 'image' of a city is 'launched' in the global competition to create a 'good reputation' and to attract the so-called 'creative class', as well as new investments, tourists, students and high-income residents (Belabas et al., 2020; Braun et al., 2013; Swyngedouw et al., 2002). To achieve this goal of an emerging entrepreneurial city, local authorities increasingly pursue policies that resemble business and marketing strategies, seeking to promote the city as an

attractive product (Knierbein et al., 2010). In fact, the city is treated as a 'commodity', while the targeted residents, tourists and investors are treated as 'customers'. According to the supporters of city branding, the city is a commodity product which should be advertised to demonstrate its advantages, and places that fail to be promoted face the risk of economic decline (Kotler et al., 1993). While city-branding policies concern mainly the regeneration of urban centres, critical approaches to these policies point to an important consequence of city branding: the dispossession of undesired social groups like squatters, homeless people, low-income residents and migrants (Rossi and Vanolo, 2012). At this point, the question arises as to who has the right to the city and specifically to the centre of the city.

Against the neoliberal policies of city branding, there is a rich body of critical urban theory literature on 'the right to the city', a concept that was introduced in the homonymous work of Lefebvre (1996 [1968]). Lefebvre (1996 [1968]: 173–174) conceptualises the right to the city as a 'superior form of rights: right to freedom, to individuation in socialisation, to habitat and to inhabit. The right to the oeuvre, to participation and appropriation (clearly distinct from the right to property), are implied in the right to the city'. These features of the right to the city are particularly important in the examination of refugees' squats vis-a-vis isolated state-run camps in the case of Athens. Important for our research on the refugees' or the investors' right to the centre of the city, as a superior form of rights, is the Lefebvrian concept of 'centrality'. In Lefebvre's (1996 [1968]: 179) words, the right to the city is the right to the 'urban life, to renewed centrality, to places of encounter and exchange, to life rhythms and time uses, enabling the full and complete usage of these moments and places'. Also, in a later work, Lefebvre (1996 [1968]: 34) considers the

centre of the city as the crucial location for claiming rights, and emphasises that the right to the city 'would also cover the right to the use of the centre, a privileged place, instead of being dispersed and stuck into ghettos (for workers, immigrants, the "marginal")'.

Several critical urban theorists have extended and deepened the discussion of the right to the city during the last few decades. For example, Harvey (2008: 23) argued that 'the question of what kind of city we want cannot be divorced from ... what kind of social ties ... we desire', highlighting the transformative character of the right to the city which is 'a right to change ourselves by changing the city'. Responding to the same consideration, Simone (2005: 324–325) asked 'who has the "right" to do what in [...] cities' and argued that the right to the city should include people 'as creators of life and not just consumers or victims'. In this respect, Simone's comment is extremely crucial for examining refugees' right to the city beyond victimisation or entrepreneurialism. Merrifield (2011: 475) emphasised the right to the urban centre, pointing out that the right to the city should be considered 'not a simple visiting right ... no tourist trip ... at a gentrified old town ... but a right to participate in life at the core'. Moreover, as Mitchell and Heynen (2009: 616) argued, the concept of the right to the city has a significant 'capaciousness' which 'is valuable because it allows for solidarity across political struggles ... focusing attention on the most basic conditions of survivability, the possibility to inhabit, to live'. Finally, Garbin and Millington (2018: 151), focusing on Congolese migrants' protests in central London, pointed out that claims for the right to the city include an 'inventiveness' in order to 'claim rights that do not formally exist, that are not granted to them and whose possibilities remain, as yet, unbounded'. In the case of the examined neighbourhood of

Exarcheia in Athens, we will show how ‘capaciousness’ and ‘inventiveness’ open up new avenues for solidarity practices between locals and newcomers, as well as between different nationalities, in transnational common spaces.

At this point, in order to examine the features and aspects of the emerging refugees’ common spaces, we draw particular attention to the literature on commons and especially on ‘urban commons’ that has recently enriched the radical spatial vocabulary. The discussion around the commons often refers to a specific range of models – private (Welch, 1983), state (Ophuls, 1973) and collective (Ostrom, 1990) – for managing ‘common pool resources’ (e.g. resources without a clearly defined ownership status). However, beyond the managerial resource-based discourse, numerous critical theory scholars (De Angelis, 2017; Federici, 2012; Stavrides, 2016; Tsavdaroglou, 2020) have recently emphasised the verbal form of commons, the so-called ‘commoning’, that further describes the social relations that have the ability to produce and reproduce, constitute and reconstitute, invent and reinvent the commons. This theoretical shift marks a variety of studies that highlight the productive and transformative character of commons. According to Chatterton (2016: 407), commons ‘are full of productive moments ... and create new vocabularies, solidarities, social and spatial practices and repertoires of resistance’. An important analysis that proposes to rethink urban commons through the prism of the right to the city is offered by Stavrides (quoted in *An Architektur*, 2010). As Stavrides suggests, commons ‘can be produced through encounters that make room for new meanings, new values, new dreams, new collective experiences. And this is ... a way to see commons beyond the utilitarian horizon’ (quoted in *An Architektur*, 2010). Under this prism, Stavrides (2016) conceptualises the common space as a threshold

open to newcomers. This analysis is particularly interesting in the examination of refugee squats as urban commons of newcomers, since, as Stavrides (2016: 56) underlines, ‘thresholds explicitly symbolize the potentiality of sharing by establishing intermediary areas of crossing, by opening the inside to the outside’. Our analysis illustrates the potentialities of common spaces / squats in Athens, in sharp contrast to the state-run camps, to open up the inside of the city, the centre of the city, to the newcomers-refugees.

For the purpose of our research, it is also important to stress that according to several scholars (De Angelis 2017; Dellenbaugh et al., 2015; Jeffrey et al., 2012), commons represent the antipode of private and state enclosures, of the multiple market-led or state-led physical, political and social borders and of different historical and social processes such as the British ‘enclosures acts’ of common lands in the transition from feudalism to capitalism or the border closures in the Balkan countries during the recent refugee crisis. However, as Balibar (2004: 109) reminds us, ‘borders have changed place’, as not only are they ‘at the edge of territory’ but they ‘have been transported into the middle of political space’. Yet, as Nicholls and Uitermark (2017: 3) have emphasised, where there are borders there is resistance; and if the ‘political’ is the place of encounter with the ‘police’ (Rancière, 1995), then the question of the possibility of the Athens refugee squats to claim the right to the city centre against the urban internal borders of police-controlled state-run camps becomes crucial.

Using this analytical approach, we will examine the neighbourhood of Exarcheia in Athens, a highly contested location where the newcomers-refugees struggle against spatial exclusion and segregation, claiming their right to the centre of the city. Their claim is enacted through commoning practices of

sharing, mutual help and self-organisation that create a counter example to both the enclosures enacted by state immigration policies and the marketisation of city branding.

‘Say it loud, say it clear! Refugees are welcome here!’: Refugees’ housing commons in Exarcheia

Athens has received a large number of refugees during the last three decades, initially in the 1990s from Eastern European countries, then in the 2000s from Africa and central Asia and more recently from the Middle East. One of the differences for the most recent arrivals is that the Greek state, following the European Union’s mandates (Government Gazette, 2018), undertakes the responsibility to organise refugee camps for the newcomers. Subsequently, Greece must follow the European standards for the hospitality of refugees, which determine that ‘only by making housing equally accessible to refugees ... as well as stimulating multicultural living environments will integration succeed’ (ECRE, 2007: 2). Over the period of 2016–2019, 13 state-run camps were created in the Athens metropolitan area, on former military bases or in abandoned industrial buildings, all of them at great distances from the urban centre (see Figure 1a). Therefore, state-run camps are isolated ghetto-like spaces, cut off from the urban social life, while numerous reports (Greek Council for Refugees, 2019; Refugee Support Aegean, 2018) have documented the inadequate living conditions of refugees. According to the reports, and our personal observations, state-run camps are overcrowded, with poor hygiene conditions, where most of the refugees suffer from psychosocial distress. At the same time, the limited public transportation to the urban centre and the dramatically restricted access to education, hospitals, local markets and employment opportunities

show that in state-run camps there is no room for the refugees’ right to the centre of the city (see Figure 1a).

For instance, as Mahmud a Syrian refugee who lives at Ritsona camp, describes:

The camp is very far from the city, in the middle of nowhere. Even if someone wants to go to the nearest bus stop, he or she has to walk at least half an hour to get the bus and then another hour to get to the city centre.

Fatima, a refugee from Iraq who is a nine months’ pregnant and lives in the Elefsina camp, explains that:

It is very difficult to be pregnant here ... The camp is in an industrial area of the port. It smells of petrol all day. There are many pregnant women in the camp and many have had miscarriages. We are far away from everything. We are also far from the hospital. The doctor visits only during the morning hours and there is no female doctor ... We really suffer from the fact that we are not safe. (Refugee Support Aegean, 2018)

Thus, the Athenian refugee camps constitute a ‘regime of marginality’ (Wacquant, 2007: 67) defined by the way that life is ‘kept at a distance from the ordinary social and political world’ (Agier et al., 2002: 318) and by policies that aim to ‘separate, segregate and manage specific populations or groups of individuals’ (Martin et al., 2020: 745) who have no ‘right to have rights’ (Arendt, 1967: 296). A number of scholars (Dalal, 2018; Oesch, 2017; Ramadan, 2013) have emphasised the agency of refugees who have the potential to contest, subvert and reshape the spatialities of the camps regime. We argue that in the case of Athens, this contestation manifests as a physical move of the refugees’ presence away from the camps, and a claim of their right to be present and live in the centre of the city. From 2015 onwards, refugees who refuse to live in the camps have

occupied abandoned buildings in the city centre in collaboration with local solidarity groups, and have attempted to transform them into collective housing projects.

According to estimations by the municipality of Athens (Georgiopolou, 2017), around 3000 refugees currently live in more than 15 occupied buildings / squats (see Figure 1b). In contrast to the isolated state-run camps, the most important spatial element of the occupied buildings is that they are located in the centre of the city, in or around the perimeter of the Exarcheia neighbourhood. Exarcheia is a highly politicised site where urban social movements, political and social centres and anarchist and radical left groups create an alternative and counter-culture area (Arampatzi, 2017; Tsavdaroglou, 2018). Moreover, Exarcheia hosts several university buildings, and so has played a key role in the protests mobilised by the student movements that shaped the country's modern political history. Neighbouring Exarcheia to the East is the high-income residential neighbourhood of Kolonaki, as well as Syntagma Square, the seat of the Greek parliament, ministries and embassies. To the North, Exarcheia neighbours low-income neighbourhoods, and to the West it neighbours the central square of Athens, Omonia Square. Thus, Exarcheia is located in the midst of mixed land uses and socio-economic constituencies and has therefore become a significant hub for high-impact demonstrations and uprisings, such as the anti-dictatorship uprising in November 1973 and the youth uprising that followed the murder of Alexandros Grigoropoulos by a police officer in December 2008.

Although Exarcheia is not a homogeneous neighbourhood and not all local residents welcome the squats, it is in this contested neighbourhood that numerous refugee housing occupations flourish, with

the support of local and international anarchists and left-wing solidarity groups. There are two main reasons why refugee squats have emerged in Exarcheia. First, the political background of the neighbourhood, with its plethora of anarchist and left-based housing occupations, social centres, bookshops, community gardens and older migrant-solidarity groups, provides a relatively safe social place for the newcomers, as well as the material and knowledge support for the new squatted buildings. Second, Exarcheia is a very central neighbourhood, thus refugees have access to social services like schools, hospitals and employment opportunities. The first refugee housing projects were created in the autumn of 2015 to cover the immediate needs of the refugees who were crossing Greece, as Athens was a main hub between the country's eastern island borders and the northern borders with Balkan countries. After the closing of the Balkan corridor in spring of 2016 and the opening of state-run camps, refugee squats multiplied as new refugee solidarity initiatives occupied abandoned buildings in Exarcheia to host the growing number of refugees. In the words of Lafazani (2017), who is a member of the Refugee Accommodation and Solidarity Space City Plaza (see Figure 1b):

the decision to squat came as a 'radical answer', activating a multi-scale response to the re-establishment of borders. What we proposed—namely, co-habitation in dignified conditions in the heart of the city—went against the social and spatial exclusion of the camps.

As we suggest, these squats can be seen as forms of housing commons, since their organisation is based on commoning practices of solidarity, togetherness, mutual help and self-organisation (Agustín and Jørgensen, 2019; Lafazani, 2018; Squire, 2018; Tsavdaroglou, 2018). In order to clarify this argument and better understand the

character of these squats, we cite here the words of Alireza, an Iranian refugee squatter. As he explained to us in front of a squat banner saying ‘Say it loud, say it clear! Refugees are welcome here!’:

Exarcheia is more than a place of immediate shelter and basic humanitarian aid for migrants ... it is a place where the vulnerable can find community, where those that have been ... ostracized by the state can decide – together – how they wish to live their lives. (Personal interview, 21 August 2019)

This testimony sketches the basic features of common spaces, which according to several scholars (Chatterton, 2016; De Angelis, 2017; Federici, 2012) are community, commoning and a common pool resource. Specifically, the commoning practices of solidarity, mutual help and experiences of cohabitation create the emerging transnational refugee community of Exarcheia neighbourhood, which is established in specific spatial forms of the occupied buildings – housing projects, neighbourhood daily life and the various protests for the refugees’ rights.

As Ramiz, an Afghan refugee, described:

The main reason that I really like Exarcheia neighbourhood is that I feel safe in this area. I know that if I am arrested by the police or if fascists attack me, there will be people around the neighbourhood who will protect and support me. I would do the same if I saw someone else threaten a refugee or an anarchist and leftist comrade. I mean that there is a strong feeling of solidarity, that we are a nice family in the Exarcheia neighbourhood and in the refugee squats. (Personal interview, 28 August 2019)

Javed, a refugee from Pakistan, added that:

In other neighbourhoods, where only Greeks are living, when they understand by the colour of my skin or my clothes that I am a refugee,

they do not seem very friendly. In Exarcheia there is no such discrimination. Regardless if I am local or refugee, I can walk around freely without others looking at me in a strange way. People in Exarcheia are friendly, kind and want to learn about my country, my language and my culture. It is this sense of solidarity and care that has prompted me, even though I am a foreigner, to participate in demonstrations and protests both on issues concerning refugees but also in protests of local political groups. (Personal interview, 28 August 2019)

Thus, common space here is not defined only by a shared ethos and abode, but also by the creation of what Rancière (2006: 42) calls a ‘common world’, which ‘is always a polemical distribution of modes of being and “occupations” in a space of possibilities’. In the case of refugees’ housing occupations, the principles of sharing often interlink ‘with antiauthoritarian, antiracist and feminist values and principles’ (Spirou Trikoupi 17 – Squat for Refugees and Migrants, 2019; see Figure 1b). In addition, as a statement by the Housing Squat for Refugees and Immigrants Notara 26 (2016; see Figure 1b) emphasises, there is a sharp distinction between the squats and the state-run camps and the squats have declared their refusal to collaborate with the state or with NGOs. As it stresses, ‘this project doesn’t stand for philanthropy, by the state nor private, but rather for a self-organised solidarity project, wherein locals and refugees-immigrants decide together’ (Housing Squat for Refugees and Immigrants Notara 26, 2016: 2). This cohabitation, which transcends the mainstream discourse of refugees’ ‘victimhood’ (Mezzadra, 2010: 128), reveals pockets of agency amidst the sharing practices of refugees as commoners that strengthen and empower social and political consciousness. Yet, it should be stressed that by commoner we do not mean a ‘category of sameness’ (Jeffrey et al., 2012: 1249) that refuses

differences, but, as per Hardt and Negri (2009: 124), an 'affirmation of singularities' that produces the common space in a non-'homogenisation process' (Stavrides, 2016: 33). Indicative are the words of Syrian refugee Ramiz, who lived for two years in state-run camps and then moved to City Plaza, the Refugee Accommodation and Solidarity Space squat:

At the squat we are like the fingers of a hand. Each finger is different from the other, although all together create the palm. Thus, we have different countries, languages, religions, genders, but we are all together, united, we are fighting together, so we are not weak. If you are alone in an isolated camp out of the city, you are weak. There is care and love here, people care if you need a lawyer, if you need a doctor, and most of all they look you in the eyes with love. The walls of your container residence in a camp will never look at you with love. (Personal interview, 12 April 2019)

It should be noted, however, that the process of self-organisation in the refugee squats requires a lot of effort and commitment. Power relations are always there, and power struggles between groups of different ethnic origins, or gender power relations, often become obstacles to participation in decision-making processes. As Lafazani (2018: 902) outlines:

many, perhaps due to the sociopolitical structure of their countries of origin and through the process of crossing the European borders, carry a sense of subalternity face-to-face with ... European solidarity activists. They do not perceive themselves as equal interlocutors who can be involved in decision-making processes.

Thus, usually a model of subgroups with mixed nationalities and genders is followed in the daily jobs like cooking, cleaning, childcare and security/safeguarding shifts. Many housing squats organise women's

groups and workshops in order to increase awareness of gender issues. Specific rules like the prohibition of alcohol, drugs and any form of violence are common principles in most of the refugee housing projects, decided by the members of the community. Therefore, common space does not suggest the absence of principles and boundaries, but on the contrary, as Stavrides (2016: 31) argues, 'common worlds tend to be defined ... as worlds with recognizable boundaries. In them, belonging crafts consent and consent crafts belonging'. Overall, the features of the common space derive from a procedure of continuous negotiations with the multiple identities and perceptions of the commoners-residents of the refugee squats. In the words of Ahmed from Syria, who lived at the Housing Squat for Refugees and Immigrants Notara 26:

My stay at the squat taught me how to communicate and especially how to accept the other. I come from a country that has only one point of view, the point of view of the dictator, which everyone should obey. Here, I learned how to accept different points of view, to accept the other. To accept your point of view and you to accept my point of view, as if we are two friends who care about each other, who listen to each other. The squat offers me the opportunity to meet people of many nationalities and break down [my own] prejudices and stereotypes. (Personal interview, 17 March 2019)

Another crucial feature of refugees' squats concerns the practice of collective appropriation against private property. According to Mayer (2013: 2), squatting practice 'is prefigurative of another mode of organising society and challenging a paramount institution of capitalist society: private property'. As the squatters of the Refugee Accommodation and Solidarity Space City Plaza (2018) emphasise, 'we are not claiming ownership

of the building, we are simply using it ... City Plaza is a workshop of solidarity and resistance'. What is interesting in the case of the Athenian squats is that the Lefebvrian concept of appropriation against private property is enriched with transnational solidarity, abolition of national borders and the emergence of the right to cohabitation. In the words of Amira, a Syrian refugee resident in the Housing Squat for Refugees and Immigrants Notara 26:

The squat is a great example of solidarity for all refugees without national borders. It doesn't matter what is your nationality, no one asks you. We are solidarity people in a big house. However, this house has some special features, it's not like privately owned houses, here there is no room for bosses, this is a collective house, and this is very important. (Personal interview, 12 February 2019)

All in all, the refugee squats in Exarcheia enact the Lefebvrian 'right to the city' connected to notions of habitation, appropriation, freedom and socialisation as well as to the potentialities of productive and transformative commoning relations. According to Dikeç (2002: 96), the right to the city 'implies not only a right to urban space, but to a political space as well'. In fact, the bottom line in the aforementioned features of the refugee squats is that they constitute an explicit political struggle not only for the refugees' right to housing but for a political, collective and transnational right to the city centre, for a 'renewed right to urban life' (Lefebvre, 1996 [1968]: 158). For instance, as a statement by the Refugee Accommodation and Solidarity Space City Plaza (2019) underlines, there are two main goals in this endeavour: 'to create a space for safe and dignified housing for migrants in the centre of the city', and 'to function as a centre of struggle in which political and social demands by migrants and locals will

interweave and complement each other'. Thus, a renewed political and social right to the city centre emerges. According to the analysis of Geuder and Alcântara (2018: 130), 'protests produce centrality and appropriate existing centralities to make their claims'. In a similar way, we argue that the Athenian refugee housing commons must be seen as a constant social and political struggle that produces centrality manifested in the appropriation of abandoned buildings in a central neighbourhood.

Return to normality? Foreclosing refugees' right to the city centre

Several cities in the Global North are promoted through city-branding policies as 'tolerant', 'cosmopolitan' and 'superdiverse' (Hassen and Giovanardi, 2018), and define 'migration and diversity as an asset that strengthens their economy and global positioning' (Belabas et al., 2020: 2). Other cities cultivate practices of hospitality towards refugees and endorse pro-immigrant policies in ways that allow them to proclaim themselves to be 'welcoming cities' (Watson, 2019) or 'sanctuary cities' (Darling and Bauder, 2019). Yet, it is important to note that the process of city branding should be equally co-created by different stakeholders, particularly residents, since they can 'make or break the whole branding effort' (Braun et al., 2013: 23). It seems that these two aspects of city-branding strategies – public participation and tolerance to refugees – are not included in the case of Athens.

In fact, the sustainability of refugee housing common spaces in the centre of Athens is threatened by state policies that aim to criminalise, control and suppress the refugees' squats. In April 2019, police brutally evicted four squats in Exarcheia where around 300 refugees lived. A refugee woman described the police operation as follows:

I suffer from psychological problems. My doctor instructed me to not stress myself. Yesterday in the morning we woke up by the sound of shouting and suddenly ... police entered the place we were sleeping in. Some of us got pushed. I had two panic attacks the last two days. Half of my body got paralysed from the fear. I am still under shock. (Infomobile, 2019)

These police operations are not unusual, as the area of Exarcheia has been targeted by police several times since the 1980s. A nexus of state and mainstream media, exercising a 'politics of fear', constantly misrepresents and stigmatises the neighbourhood as a centre of 'anomie' (lawlessness) and as an 'avaton' (no-go area), in order to 'discipline the "public" by making an example of those who transgress certain normative boundaries' (Koutrolikou, 2016: 175). After its election in May 2019, the right-wing 'Nea Dimokratia' government promoted its central goal of a 'return to normality'. After 10 years of severe austerity and financial crisis and strong social movements, and four years of the left party 'SYRIZA' in government, the new right-wing government promises to restore 'normality', and Exarcheia has become once again a site of symbolic significance for the state to show its power. It becomes a novel material and symbolic city brand for the revanchist return to normality. As the current Prime Minister Mitsotakis (2017) announced, 'if we cannot control our inner Exarcheia then we cannot face the true Exarcheia of social life'. At the same time, the newly elected right-wing mayor of Athens, Kostas Bakoyannis (2019), has argued that:

our plan for Exarcheia is to make it a model neighbourhood. Our starting point is to end the 'we must' discourse. It is now time for the 'we will' discourse to begin. 'We will' end the hostage situation in the [Exarcheia] neighbourhood.

It thus comes as no surprise that shortly after the elections the new government announced a plan to evacuate 23 squats in Exarcheia, 12 of which host refugees and 11 of which host anarchist groups. Meanwhile, the Minister of Public Order and Citizen Protection announced a reinforcement and permanent presence of 250 riot police officers in the area of Exarcheia to protect the evicted buildings from anarchists' attacks (To BHMA, 2019). At the same time, a new metro station in the central square of Exarcheia is foreseen in the medium-term planning, while the proposed urban renewal plan provides financial incentives for new businesses and incentives to renovate aging buildings. Finally, the Exarcheia renewal plan aims to remove the School of Architecture from the historic buildings of the National Technical University of Athens, and to convert the space into a new section of the nearby National Archaeological Museum. However, these university buildings, at the corner of the Exarcheia neighbourhood, constitute a vital assembly space for students and political groups, especially during times of protests and uprisings. Between 2015 and 2020, the university buildings hosted hundreds of homeless refugees. This tremendous transformation of the university space from a central place of commoning to a sterilised museum, from lived space to spectacle, evokes Lefebvre's (2014: 204) thesis:

[t]he historic center has disappeared ... All that remains are, on the one hand, centres for power and decision making and, on the other, fake and artificial spaces. It is true, of course, that the city endures, but only as museum and as spectacle. The urban, conceived and lived as social practice, is in the process of deteriorating and perhaps disappearing.

Concomitantly, Athens is increasingly transforming into a 'hot' tourist destination, with

Exarcheia being the second favourite area in Athens on the Airbnb platform (Roussanoglou, 2017). Thus, it seems that the marketisation of the neighbourhood is already happening, with rental prices rising more than 30% in 2018 (Roussanoglou, 2017). While foreign investors buy old buildings and convert them into tourist apartments, there are more than 780 units in the Exarcheia neighbourhood available on Airbnb (Roussanoglou, 2017). To sum up the big picture, Athens as the locomotive of the Greek tourism industry reached more than 5.1 million tourists in 2018, becoming one of the 15 most popular European city destinations for international visitors (Euromonitor International, 2018).

In this context, the neighbourhood of Exarcheia has been discovered by investors and the state as a new profitable area. As becomes clear, the Athenian city branding policies follow the global trend that 'forecloses ... politicization and evacuates dissent' (Swyngedouw, 2007: 10). In the case of evictions of refugee squats in Exarcheia, the foreclosure entails the restriction of the refugees' right to the centre of the city. Therefore, the struggle of who has the right to the centre of the city is an ongoing and unpredictable process.

Entrepreneurial city branding versus refugees' city commoning

Between the sub-systems and the structures consolidated by various means (compulsion, terror, and ideological persuasion), there are holes and chasms. These voids are not there due to chance. They are the places of the possible ... The conditions of the possible can only be realized in the course of a radical metamorphosis. (Lefebvre, 1996 [1968]: 156)

This study of the refugees' squats in the contested area of Exarcheia in Athens

demonstrates that even in the centres of entrepreneurial investments there are possible 'holes and chasms' to be triggered. The examination of conflicts between the refugees-commoners' and the investors' right to the city in Athens points to four main arguments which, we hope, open up new perspectives and radical imaginaries for critical geographies.

First, the state policies in Athens aim to criminalise and stigmatise refugees' squats and make legitimate the eviction operations and the enclosures in isolated state-run camps outside of the city. Thus, city branding accompanies and reinforces the exercise of a politics of fear and xenophobic rhetoric. The neighbourhood of Exarcheia became a paradigmatic example of the violence that a call for a 'return to normality' can entail, as this return to normality was enacted through a combination of city branding and brutal police operations against refugee squats. These practices are an antithesis to the response that several cities (i.e. Cincinnati, Glasgow, Munich, San Francisco, Sheffield, Toronto) of the Global North have launched in response to the refugee intake. These cities have launched policies to rebrand themselves as 'diverse cities', 'welcoming cities' or 'sanctuary cities' whereby the refugees themselves are encouraged to participate in 'urban rebranding efforts' (Watson, 2019: 984). In the case of Athens, however, recent city-branding policies have aimed solely to secure the physical and social enclosures of refugees in state-run camps at the urban periphery, excluding them from the right to use, live in, be part of and be active producers of the city centre.

Second, the case of Athenian refugee squats made clear that refugees have the ability to challenge dominant state policies of marginalisation and claim the right to the city centre. The examined area of Exarcheia is an interesting case study, as the refugees contest the regulatory norms of state-run

camps – the fencing, the mobility restrictions, the internal borders and the securitised policies. At the same time, in the examined area a common space is created by refugees through commoning relations that are based on horizontal practices of solidarity, sharing and mutual care, and that have allowed the refugees-commoners to create a sense of intimacy, belonging and trust. These crucial elements of refugees' commoning are remarkably productive and transformative, as they have produced collective claims for the right to the city centre.

Third, our analysis shows that the refugees' practices for collective production of alternative housing (e.g. clandestine squats) share many characteristics in common with what Lefebvre identified as claiming the right to the city: namely, freedom and socialisation, appropriation against private property, habitation. Claiming freedom, many of the refugees refuse to accept the spaces allocated to them in state-run camps at the city's outskirts as their living spaces, and relocate to the city centre. In search of alternative forms of habitation, they enact appropriation against private property institutions and practices, which often take the form of squats of abandoned buildings in the city centre in collaboration with local solidarity groups. Once occupied, these buildings become novel forms of habitation with strong elements of commoning and cohabitation. Hundreds of newcomers experiment with these forms of co-living and togetherness, often together with local and European activists. Apart from meeting housing needs, these housing forms become significant tools for refugees to participate in the urban social and political life. Therefore, though precarious, vulnerable and ephemeral, these new forms of cohabitation produced by refugees claim a right to the city; they act, 'cry and demand' (Lefebvre, 1996 [1968]: 173) freedom of movement, appropriation of

housing, cohabitation and collective participation in a 'renewed urban life' (Lefebvre, 1996 [1968]: 158). Given these characteristics, we argue that the Lefebvrian concept of the right to the city is most appropriate for understanding and explaining the refugees' self-organised housing practices.

Fourth, important here in understanding how the Athenian refugees' squats highlight the Lefebvrian 'renewed centrality', that is, a renewed right to access and change the city centre, is the concept of 'thresholdness' (Stavrides, 2016) as a critical feature of common spaces. Through the notion of 'thresholdness', we can approach common spaces not as places demarcated by homogeneous groups with a common political or social basis, but as porous 'thresholds' open to difference and to the newcomer. Therefore, in our analysis we aimed to enrich the concept of the right to the city by bringing to the fore the way the reinhabited abandoned buildings in the centre of Athens became common spaces constituted as threshold passages through which refugees could inhabit the city centre and participate in urban social life. Thus, the city centre emerges as 'the possibility of reinvention' (Simone, 2016: 212) and a threshold space that 'opens the possibility of studying practices of space-commoning that transcend enclosure and open towards new commoners' (Stavrides, 2016: 5). Indeed, the occupied common spaces made accessible and opened the centre of Athens by welcoming refugees as newcomers-commoners, while reshaping the city centre as a potential threshold of solidarity to refugees. At this point, it is important to notice that the refugees' housing squats in Athens' Exarcheia are connected to the strong political tradition of the neighbourhood and their sustainability is based on the solidarity activities and continuous support of affinity political groups. Therefore, the violent attempt by the state to 'squash' Exarcheia and to ban the

refugees' right to the centre of the city is an ongoing process. Exarcheia has always been a contested neighbourhood, shaped by the relation between authoritarian oppression policies and threshold practices for new imaginaries. Thus, there are local histories of self-organised structures, memories of solidarity and repertoires of resistance that uphold the potentiality to reactivate the paths for a transnational and threshold right to the centre of the city.

Overall, we argue that refugees' common spaces demonstrate not only the possibility for generating hindrances to city-branding policies, but also a remarkable 'capaciousness' (Mitchell and Heynen, 2009: 616) and 'inventiveness' (Garbin and Millington, 2018: 151) for a new transnational right to the city. The 'capaciousness' and 'inventiveness' become evident in the way the refugees' right to the centre of the city is exercised, a right that is not taken for granted, nor an institutionalised right, but on the contrary is forbidden in violent ways by the authorities. Admittedly, and beyond the city branding / city commoning binary, the most important qualities of 'capaciousness' and 'inventiveness' concern the way they emerge as locals and refugees from many different countries, and, across a wide range of ethnic, religious, language and cultural background groups, find ways to communicate and negotiate their multiple identities. These encounters and everyday practices include mixed ethnicity groups carrying out daily shifts of building maintenance, language lessons, awareness groups on gender issues, tolerance and understanding towards different cultural customs, common principles against physical and psychological violence and abuse, as well as non-hierarchical decision-making processes based on consensus. Through these capacious and inventive qualities and modes of communication, the newcomers create bridges of mutuality, solidarity and reciprocity and participate in the evolving

communities-in-the-making that establish the experiments of housing common spaces. Subsequently, the commoning experiences of solidarity, togetherness and cohabitation among people of different nationalities nurture a fertile ground for transnational struggles for the right to the city centre.

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