

# **SPATIAL PRACTICES**

## **Modes of Action and Engagement with the City**

**Edited by  
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# SPATIAL PRACTICES

This book explores 'spatial practices', a loose and expandable set of approaches that embrace the political and the activist, the performative and the curatorial, the architectural and the urban. Acting upon and engaging with the public realm, the field of spatial practices allows people to reconnect with their own sense of agency through engagement in space and place, exploring and prototyping alternative futures in the here and now. The 24 chapters contain essays, visual essays and interviews, featuring contributions from an international set of experimental practitioners including Jeanne van Heeswijk (Netherlands), Teddy Cruz (Estudio Teddy Cruz + Fonna Forman, San Diego), Hector (USA), The Decorators (London) and OOZE (Netherlands). Beautifully designed with full colour illustrations, *Spatial Practices* advances dialogue and collaboration between academics and practitioners and is essential reading for students, researchers and professionals in architecture, urban planning and urban policy.

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## Reclaiming the city

### Bottom-up tactical spatial practices and the production of (social) space

Oscar Brito

There is an increasing awareness from those involved in processes of urban regeneration about the need, opportunities and challenges for promoting and nurturing the participation of local communities as stakeholders. However, there is often the assumption that local communities are passive subjects that need to be involved in a controlled way in the plans and projects initiated and delivered by spatial practitioners and developers. Such assumptions imply a lack of recognition of the agencies that local communities might have in such processes and their social and political implications, not just by the practitioners or developers, but also by the communities themselves. Conversely, there could be more awareness by local communities themselves, of the potential effect that their participation and engagement in processes of urban regeneration might have in the development of their own social and spatial agencies.

This chapter discusses the conceptual implications of the engagement of local communities in the production of their space. The discussion will be articulated with a brief introduction of a relevant political context, followed by the development of a theoretical argument mainly focused around the ideas of Henri Lefebvre about the 'production of space' and 'the rights to the city', which will be related to the analysis of a case study, the community-led urban regeneration at Granby Four Streets in Liverpool, UK.

The participation of local communities in the definition, planning and implementation of urban regeneration processes and their related social impact has often been hindered and inhibited by real or perceived barriers such as institutional, legal and financial frameworks that usually reinforce mechanisms of top-down governance and power structures. The current implementation of models of representative democracy, based on the ideas of the 'social contract' (Purcell, 2003, p. 565) and the inherent delegation of decision-making and governance, generates situations of clientelism that are often instigated and perpetuated for political aims. This has traditionally led to an increasingly passive approach from local communities in relation to their urban environment, expecting their needs to be addressed by public institutions and consequently resulting in a lack of vision and means to assert their own urban agency. For Colin Ward "policy assumes that people are helpless and inert consumers and ignores their ability and their yearnings to shape in their own environment. We are paying today for confusing paternalistic authoritarianism with social responsibility" (Ward, 1985, p. 10).

#### Is there a context for a 'Big Society'?

The recent financial and political crises, and their effect in the implementation of austerity policies, have increased the need, but also the opportunities, for socially responsible local activism and entrepreneurship. The emphasis on deficit control at different institutional scales, from the central government to local authorities, has pushed the public sector to radically scale back the provision of a wide range of public services demanding an increasing involvement of the third sector. In the specific case of the UK, in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis the conservative government promoted certain acts and policies to support the transfer or 'devolution' of power from central government to local governments and local



communities, through the neoliberal idea of the 'Big Society' and policies related to the Localism Act 2011. In his speech on the agenda of the Big Society, David Cameron identified three big strands: 'social action', stating the intention of the central government to "foster and support a new culture of voluntarism, philanthropy, social action"; 'public service reform', promoting the involvement of "new providers like charities, social enterprises and private companies" in the provision of public services; and 'community empowerment', stating the need to promote the feeling within communities and neighbourhoods that "if they club together and get involved they can shape the world around them," involving "the most radical shift in power from central government to neighbourhoods." For Cameron, building the Big Society, therefore, implies a "huge cultural change" (Cameron, 2010) in a way that would contribute to the long-standing neoliberal ambition of "building a leaner, more efficient state" (Cameron, 2013).

The promotion of the Big Society and the Localism Act 2011 were both intended to provide legal, political and financial frameworks to empower local councils and local communities to directly decide and act on a range of issues that directly affect them. From an optimistic point of view, such an approach could be argued to be related to the promotion of a higher degree of citizen participation, as defined by Sherry Arnstein (1969), moving beyond the usual tokenism, delegating power back to local governments and communities and aiming to enable a proper citizen control while reframing, and often reducing, the involvement of central government and the state. However, both the Big Society and the Localism Act 2011 were controversial in their intentions, feasibility and implementation. The actual roots of the Big Society can be linked to the Conservative affiliation to Red Toryism and libertarian paternalism, 'nudging' the third sector to engage in their empowerment whilst stepping into the same playing field as the private sector, thus encouraging a (neoliberal) way of thinking that is aligned to logics of the market economy (Corbett and Walker, 2013). The promotion of the Big Society was perceived as a deceptive neoliberal attempt to reduce the involvement and responsibilities of the state by passing many of its duties to the third sector, particularly in volunteerism, without fully providing the necessary support and resources for this. According to Jules Pipe, then mayor of Hackney Council in London and chair of the London Councils, the Localism Act was often a "cost-shunting exercise", devolving responsibilities without the necessary means or resources; however, it has shown that a "more radical approach" is needed in times of austerity (Pipe, 2013).

Even considering the issues and controversies related to the definition and implementation of the idea of the 'Big Society', it is worth exploring and analysing its potential and implications of reframing the social, political and spatial agencies of local communities. The promotion, and in some instances support, of individual and collective engagement in processes of planning and regeneration, and more generally in the development and improvement of their built environment, could be seen as an attempt to produce a framework for the development and reinforcement of meaningful stakes by local communities on local spatial conditions, having potential ontological repercussions in the way citizenship is defined and developed.

### **The production of space as the production of urban citizenship**

Traditional political systems frame citizenship as a legal status, granting rights and duties based on the participation in implicit or explicit social contracts related to structures of power (Purcell, 2003, p. 565), which could be affected by conditions such as hegemonies, domination and 'clientelism' that inform, and are informed by, the spatial settings in which such citizenship is performed. However, there are alternative views to the idea of citizenship related to the way we develop our relation to the city which consider urban environment and phenomena as the physical, conceptual and relational realms where our social and political identities are developed. Political philosophers and geographers, such as Henri Lefebvre, Edward Soja and David Harvey, advocate for ways of developing and asserting citizenship

through people's participation in spatial practices, attempting to develop conceptual frameworks to analyse the relation between the production of the physical, conceptual, social and political spaces and the definition of our social, political and urban identities and agencies.

For Henri Lefebvre, spatial practices are related to the production of the space defining the spatial settings of a social formation and consequently also the definition of its social space (Lefebvre, 1991). Edward Soja further developed the relation between the production of the material and social spaces, defining spatial practice as "the process of producing the material form of social spatiality, [it] is thus presented as both medium and outcome of human activity, behaviour, and experience" (Soja, 1996, p. 66). According to Lefebvre, spatial practices are also defined as the relation between the different scales of spatial conditions, including the individual 'daily reality', our everyday routines, as well as the 'urban reality', that frame the way we experience the city (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 38). These definitions of spatial practices have been formulated as part of a conceptual triad that Lefebvre originally developed which includes the previously explained spatial practices: representations of space (the intellectual conceptions, and therefore representations, of space that often control its configurations); and spaces of representation (also explained as the lived space, the direct experience of it). The analysis of the relation between spatial practices and the lived spaces of the spaces of representation is relevant to attempt developing a theoretical framework of the potentials and implications of the participation of local communities in the production of their (social) space.

For Lefebvre, the spatial practice of a society "secretes that society's space; in a dialectical interaction; it produces it slowly and surely as it masters and appropriates it" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 38). Therefore, the engagement of local communities in spatial practices could be approached as a process that could have potential ontological and epistemological implications.

The ontological relation between the way we inhabit space, our engagement in the production of space and the production of meaning and identity was also developed by Martin Heidegger in his essay "Building Dwelling Thinking". Through an 'etymological mining' (Sharr, 2007, p. 37), Heidegger establishes a system of relations between the original meanings of the words 'building', as our transformative acts on our environment, 'dwelling', as the performative acts through which we inhabit a place, and the ontological implications of the meaning of our 'being' in a place. Heidegger relates the way we dwell to the way we perform our existence in a place and, therefore, to the way we are and to the way we inform our identities. Furthermore, according to Heidegger, "the old word *bauen* which says that man is insofar as he *dwells*, this word *bauen*, however also means at the same time to cherish and protect, to preserve and to care for" (Heidegger, 2001, p. 145). Through his analysis, Heidegger relates the acts of building and dwelling with the act of 'care for', emphasizing the value of our actions in the development of a constant nurturing of our attachment to a place.

### **Urban citizenship and the right to the city**

Heidegger's ontological connections between dwelling, as proactive inhabitation, our attachment to a place and the definition of our identity, could be related to the ideas of Lefebvre and David Harvey about urban dwelling and 'the right to the city'. Making reference to Heidegger, Lefebvre explains that being an urban dweller, a citizen, implies more than the fact of living in an urban settlement, emphasizing the need 'to inhabit'. For Lefebvre, the act of inhabitation by an urban dweller has broader social implications, as "'to inhabit' means to take part in a social life, a community, village or city. Urban life had, among other qualities, this attribute" (Lefebvre, 1996, p. 76). For Lefebvre the 'right to the city' is developed by people's relation to the production of space, in its physical, conceptual and experiential aspects in their everyday lives. Lefebvre refers to the everyday relation between the

urban dwellers and the city, the act of inhabitation, as a creative endeavour, considering the city as an 'oeuvre' (Lefebvre, 1996, p. 154). For David Harvey, the right to the city is "a right to change ourselves by changing the city", which could be only approached as a collective endeavour (Harvey, 2008).

Lefebvre relates citizenship (*citadin*) to the condition of being an urban dweller, establishing a relation between urban dwelling and political consciousness (Lefebvre, 1996, p. 77). Lefebvre defines the 'right to the city' as a "cry and a demand" (Lefebvre, 1996, p. 158), an urban citizenship that may be developed through two mutually defined urban rights, which could be also read as duties, those of appropriation and participation (Lefebvre, 1996, p. 174). Appropriation for Lefebvre is not related to ownership of property but to a transformative act, similar to Heidegger's interpretations of 'building', to individual and collective desires that maximize the use value for residents (Lefebvre, 1996, p. 180), re-imagining and re-defining the production of space. Participation is related to the right of taking part in decision-making processes about the transformation of the urban environment which Lefebvre relates to governance and the principle of 'self-management' (Lefebvre, 1996, p. 145) in a way that could be linked to what Sherry Arnstein defined as 'Citizen Control'.

David Harvey, in the introduction to his book *Social Justice and the City*, first published in 1973, proposes some definitions to 'the nature of space' in an attempt to develop a conceptual framework to understand the relations between urban phenomena and society, emphasizing the relative and relational aspects of space. The development of the 'rights to the city', considering the city as the spatial, social and political territories of the collective, implies an engagement in processes of the production of space, in its material and social aspects, which are contingent and relational, and therefore affectable.

### **Tactical spatial practices and the production of social capital**

The ideas of Lefebvre in relation to the processes of appropriation and participation can be better explained in relation to place-making and a more specific approach to it, tactical urbanism. Place-making could be defined as a participatory process of incrementally improving the quality of a place (DUSP MIT, 2013). Place-making involves collaborative processes of participation and appropriation around shared and feasible goals, fostering the generation and reinforcement of opportunities of interaction and exchange within local communities, promoting their civic engagement and empowering through the development of a spatial agency. The reciprocal improvement of the spatial conditions and the quality of life of local communities by their own collective endeavours, particularly in relation to their public and social realms, nurtures a local bounding and attachment, a sense of dwelling, being and care, and therefore a meaningful inhabitation as explained by Heidegger and Lefebvre. Such involvement in the production of space, by collectively appropriating the urban environment as an *oeuvre*, thus asserting our rights to the city, fosters the generation of a shared civic pride that may have social and political implications.

The collective engagement in place-making processes, in the making of places, facilitates the production of social capital, which is defined as the production of "connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (Putnam, 2000, p. 19). Furthermore, the production of social capital through the production of space provides a concrete experience of social networks and a sense of belonging, knitting the social fabric (Field, 2003). The relation between the development of citizenship and the engagement of individuals and communities in place-making processes, linked to the creation of an improved urban environment and the subsequent production of social capital, could have an effect on the capacity of those communities to negotiate the conflicts and tensions related to integration, inclusion and coexistence. According to Putnam, the production of social capital "enables a community to resolve problems and fosters awareness of the ways in which their fates are interlinked and

encourages to be more tolerant, less cynical, and more empathetic" (Putnam, 2000, p. 10). The production of space therefore becomes a relational medium, rather than just the main aim or outcome, of the reinforcement and empowerment of local communities, fostering their sustainability and resilience.

The term tactical urbanism has been used to denote a range of bottom-up temporary urban interventions which are characterized by their immediacy in terms of scale, processes and resources (Lydon and Garcia, 2015). These interventions are aimed to reclaim and 'appropriate' the use of public space by planning and implementing tactics, which could be defined as "calculated actions" that "take advantage of opportunities and depend on them" (De Certeau, 1984, p. 36). The participation of the local communities in tactical urbanism is often initiated as response to gaps and issues in the official urban planning and provision. The engagement in devising and developing actions related to tactical urbanism imply certain positioning against the constraints of an existing urban setting, its potentials and issues, therefore providing the physical, conceptual and even discursive means for the local communities, as stakeholders, to "span the boundaries of democratic participation in urban development processes" (Dean, 2018).

### **The production of differential spaces and the emergence of 'counterspaces'**

Tactical urbanism has been defined as a kind of spatial practice that "embraces an ethic of experimentation and human togetherness to show that alternative ways of being, acting and doing are possible" (Walter and Earl, 2013, p. 147); therefore, the engagement of local communities in such practices offers the means of production of social capital whilst exploring the production of their own social spaces, informing their own lived space. For Edward Soja, the lived spaces are the spaces where perceived conditions of subjection and domination 'overlay' the physical space produced by spatial practices, and therefore are those spaces where the real, the lived and the imagined collide. For Soja, this overlay is the fertile ground for "the generation of 'counterspaces', spaces of resistance to the dominant order arising precisely from their subordinate, peripheral or marginalized positioning" (Soja, 1996, p. 68). The self-initiated and self-managed aspects of tactical urbanism offer local communities opportunities of producing alternative, even if ephemeral, spatial and social settings that, as such, can have certain experimental and even subversive quality from established urban and power structures, potentially producing, even if temporarily, 'counterspaces' that expand the conceptual and political frameworks for the production of space.

The feasibility of the emergence and development of bottom-up, community-led, spatial practices is often constrained by its relation to contexts controlled and dominated by centralized, top-down, neoliberal urbanism. It is mainly in the spatial and temporal gaps of the hegemonic control and governance over the spatial, social, financial and political organization of the territory, in interstitial situations of uncertainty, where such practices arise. It is "by exhausting non-monetary resources – such as derelict spaces, unofficial network and people power – these players succeed in inhabiting another form of city in zones that are temporarily unusable in traditional real-estate terms. Only here, beyond the controlled enclaves, can such temporary, informal and innovative practices unfold" (Oswalt, Obermeyer and Misselwitz, 2013, p. 11).

The interstitial conditions could be related to the relation between what Lefebvre defined as 'abstract space' and 'differential space' (Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 49–53). 'Abstract space' is defined and regulated by the logics of the neoliberal order, and therefore susceptible to be abstracted and commodified, prioritizing its exchange value. 'Differential space', instead, is informed by how its inhabitants use and appropriate it, prioritizing its social value. The differential space is "often a transitory space that can arise from the inherent vulnerabilities of the abstract space" (Leary-Owhin, 2015). In this sense, the emergence of the differential space

may be facilitated in the context of 'weak planning' (Andres, 2012) where the conditions expected by formal planning systems can't be produced. Furthermore, "weak planning is particularly fruitful for the appropriations of differential spaces as boundaries between legal/formal and illegal/informal activities are blurred as are the distribution of powers between the different stakeholders" (Andres, 2012, p. 7). The development of bottom-up spatial practices exploring those blurred boundaries could lead to the production of 'counterspaces', a powerful emergence of the differential space that could be related to the revolutionary potential of Lefebvre's concept of 'heterotopia'. According to David Harvey:

Lefebvre's concept of heterotopia ... delineates liminal social spaces of possibility where 'something different' is not only possible, but foundational for the defining of revolutionary trajectories. This 'something different' does not necessarily arise out of a conscious plan, but more simply out of what people do, feel, sense and come to articulate as they seek meaning in their daily lives. Such practices create heterotopic spaces all over the place ... the spontaneous coming together in a moment of 'irruption,' when disparate heterotopic groups suddenly see, if only for a fleeting moment, the possibilities of collective action to create something radically different.

(Harvey, 2012, pp. xvii)

For Lefebvre, "only social force, capable of investing itself in the urban through a long political experience, can take charge of the realization of a programme concerning urban society" (Lefebvre, 1996, p. 156). Therefore, community empowerment happens from within, from the ontological and epistemological transformations developed through engagement in processes of participation and appropriation of public and social spaces, and by exposure and interactions, through these processes, to expanded urban, social, political and financial networks. The engagement in processes of urban transformation of incremental complexity enables an increasing assertiveness in the way the local communities can participate in processes of urban regeneration and, consequently, in the way they interact with professional, corporate and public spatial practitioners and agents.

There is often the assumption that professional spatial practitioners have a fundamental role as initiators and promoters of processes of urban and social regeneration. In most cases, the social agency of architecture is overstated, for good or for bad, also by the public opinion and the media, in a simplistic understanding of the complexity of factors informing the social space. According to Lefebvre:

The architect, the planner, the sociologist, the economist, the philosopher or the politician cannot out of nothingness create new forms and relations. More precisely, the architect is no more a miracle-worker than the sociologist. Neither can create social relations, although under certain favourable conditions they help trends to be formulated (to take shape). Only social life (praxis) in its global capacity possesses such powers – or does not possess them.

(Lefebvre, 2012, pp. 150–151)

### **Granby Four Streets, seeding differential spaces and social capital**

The case of Granby Four Streets (G4S) in Liverpool, UK, is a good demonstration of the necessary role of the participation of local communities in defining, developing and maintaining the social relevance and sustainability of regeneration processes. Granby is a working-class ward of Liverpool characterized by its multiethnicity. It suffered the effects of social and economic decline of the 1970s and the 1980s, and a sustained institutional racial and class discrimination and harassment which led to the Toxteth events in 1981, which were defined by government and press as riots, and as uprisings by the local community, followed by



years of 'managed decline', social fragmentation and cleansing by depopulation and dispersal. By the mid-2000s the City Council had managed to cleanse most of the properties in the area, emptying it of most of its original tenants, stripping the 'perceived social stigma' (Thompson, 2015) by demolishing the original Victorian terraces and replacing them, through urban regeneration programmes such as the Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder Programme, with generic lower density estates. Such 'state-led gentrification', aimed to a market-appealing neutrality of, using Lefebvre terms, the 'abstract space'. Only four of the original Granby streets remained, although in a rather dire state with houses still being emptied and boarded, within a general landscape of stagnation, dereliction and institutional neglect. Those Granby Four Streets remained, therefore, in an interstitial condition (see Figure 8.1).

Such continuous social, urban and institutional disdain and exclusion made the remaining community develop its own social and political identity from within, as a way of resistance (Simon, 2018). It took one act of calm defiance, when in 2006 Eleanor Lee, a local resident, decided to appropriate the connection between her doorstep and the public realm by simply adding some plants, asserting her inhabitation of that in-between space with a display of care. That humble spatial practice prompted other residents to follow, starting from the practicalities of removing the junk and cleaning the area, to progressively reclaiming the street fronts and adjacent interstitial spaces through individual and collective actions of guerrilla gardening, urban art and tactical urbanism.

Once the public areas in front of the houses were cleaned, there was an increasing qualitative transformation of the public space into a social space, with residents opening their doors, taking tables out, engaging in conversations, and even setting their own street market, going out from their private backstage to the (shared) frontstage, hence visualizing the community (Simon, 2018). The evidence of their spatial agency, against the real and perceived institutional disdain, reinforced their urban and political identity, promoting a sense of self-managed urban commons. Their collective participation in the transformation of the social realm,



**Fig 8.1** Granby Four Streets community – reclaiming their space, 2006 (Eleanor Lee)



**Fig 8.2** Granby Four Streets community – guerrilla gardening, 2008 (Eleanor Lee)

through their engagement in spatial practices of participation and appropriation, fostered the production of social capital and civic pride (see Figure 8.2).

The reclamation of the space left in the interstices of the abstract space and in the context of ‘weak planning’ triggered, but also enabled, the appropriation of the production of space by the local community through their use of it and their engagement in its qualitative transformation. Such prioritization on the value for the use of the community is aligned to the production of what Lefebvre defined as ‘differential’ space, and what Soja defined as ‘Thirdspace’, as space of physical, social and conceptual confluence, an alternative “way of understanding and acting to change the spatiality of human life, a distinct mode of critical spatial awareness that is appropriate to the new scope and significance being brought about in the rebalanced trialectics of spatiality–historicality–sociality” (Soja, 1996, p. 57).

This subtle, community led, process of regeneration of the G4S started whilst the City Council was still outsourcing a formal regeneration of the area to private developers. The simultaneity of those processes created further tensions with an initial reluctance from the Council to engage with the local community, likely considering such engagement counterproductive to their top-down deterministic approach. Following the financial crisis of 2008, the top-down programmes of urban regeneration came to a forced halt, leaving the local government and private developers out of cash and ideas. This created a failure in the formal planning system, accentuating pre-existing conditions of ‘weak planning’, fading-out any remaining hope from the local community about the role of the local authorities in addressing the structural drivers of urban stagnation, such as the rehabilitation of the empty and often derelict properties in the area.

In this context, the communal and enterprising mindset developed in the local community so far, made them seek ways to upscale their tactical actions into a more ambitious endeavour of taking ownership of the regeneration of the derelict housing stock in their streets. Exploring alternative ways of accessing landownership, in 2011 the community decided to adopt the model Community Land Trust (CLT), forming the Granby Four Streets Community Land Trust (hereafter G4SCLT). The CLT is a legal mechanism, set up as part of the government Localism Act, and therefore related to its support for the Big Society, through which local residents may get access to land ownership to develop housing and regeneration projects for the interest of their community. The model of the CLT is particularly relevant in the UK as it is aligned to the local model of land ownership, which is detached to

**Fig 8.3** Granby Four Streets  
Community Land Trust,  
Liverpool (Eutopian)



the ownership of the buildings constructed on the land, as the land is leased rather than transferred; therefore, allowing local communities to keep a degree of ownership and control of their urban contexts, possibly preventing its commodification (see Figure 8.3).

In the case of G4S, making the most of the CLT was initially beyond their organizational and financial reach (Simon, 2018) but the specific contextual background and situations of G4S became a crucial enabler. The insurgence of the community of G4S against the odds of the urban neglect, their engagement in reclaiming their space and their lived space, attracted the attention of external actors and networks including fundamental financial support from a private investor (HDSI). Having secured financial backing, G4SCLT was perceived by the local government not just as a group of community activists, but as a proper urban developer, engaging in discussions that resulted in the transfer of ten properties at G4S to the G4SCLT, and therefore triggering a proper bottom-up urban regeneration process. Since then, the agency, networking and the visibility of the G4SCLT have continued to grow, including the appointment of Assemble and increasing their access to further support. Now the G4SCLT may evolve to expand their actions within their local community, providing local services to further ensure their resilience in face of the government cuts and austerity policies (Simon, 2018), hence promoting a more comprehensive model of self-reliance. “seeing how we became a group of friends, who improvised pragmatically around what was possible over several years and have achieved, with help, more than we’d thought we ever could. It’s been great. And continues” (Ronnie Hughes, founding member of the Granby Four Street Community Land Trust).

### **The need for double agencies**

In the ‘right to the city’, Lefebvre advocates for “a political programme of urban reform not defined by the framework and the possibilities of prevailing society or



subjugated to a 'realism'" (Lefebvre, 1996, p. 155). In this sense, the engagement of bottom-up spatial practices in tactical urbanism faces some risks in its relation to the neoliberal project. There are risks of being limited to the production of palliative solutions to urban issues linked to conditions of 'weak planning'; to a failure, or even refusal, of delivery from the formal planning procedures in the context of neoliberal austerity (Brenner, 2016); this may be the case in the context of the Big Society and the Localism Act, where there is an expectation for the local communities and the third sector to take over the provision of services that the central government is no longer able, or is no longer prioritizing, to provide. Giving access to local communities to become players in planning processes without providing the right structural and financial resources and support could be seen as a sophisticated tokenism rather than actual citizen-control. There are also risks of being commodified in the context of urban gentrification, where the endeavours of the local communities could be absorbed, or even hijacked, by formal urban agents, such as urban developers, shifting frameworks of value and control from the ethical and communal, to the aesthetic and financial, capitalizing the allure of urban 'authenticity' as a way of compensating the homogenization typical of the 'abstract space'. This is the case of the use of pop-up interventions that mimic temporary urbanism for commercial and promotional uses; and of the use of 'place-making' as slogans to qualify the impact of generic urban developments in a context, often following a process of social and urban cleansing.

The potentials and challenges arising from the bottom-up, collaborative engagement in spatial practices pose key questions about the role of professional spatial practitioners, as facilitators of those practices and as mediators of the dialectics between bottom-up and top-down spatial practices and forms of urban governance. The obvious challenge for the practitioners, considering their usual affiliation to the systems than enable their production as well as the ingrained notions of control and authorship, is how to position themselves in these scenarios and, consequently, how to define their role, and as such, their practice. A potential understanding and approach to the dialectics and tensions between bottom-up and top-down systems is proposed by Eileen Conn based on the 'complexity theory', where different systems which share and contest a 'social eco-system' can avoid the assertion of hegemonies by exploring interactions in an in-between 'space of possibilities'. The space of possibilities could be understood as a heterotopic space, as defined by Lefebvre and Harvey, where the 'adjacent possible' between the different systems could be explored (Conn, 2011). The role of spatial practitioners could be, then, to explore their capacity of negotiating the 'space of possibilities' and of exploring the 'adjacent possible' that would articulate the relations between the two systems, facilitating and empowering, without fully compromising or distorting, the potential that bottom-up practices could have in imagining and developing active citizenships, citizen control, articulating a meaningful participation and appropriation of the production of the social space.

In the context of increasing desire and need of meaningful participation by local communities in processes of urban and social regeneration, there is also an increasing demand, and opportunity, for spatial practitioners to engage in the complex endeavour of developing a double agency. Thus, to develop practices that can facilitate and negotiate open and experimental ways of bottom-up engagement in spatial practices, whilst simultaneously engaging in the production of urban, financial, legal and political frameworks that could effectively enable those participatory practices, beyond interstitial conditions. The role of the spatial practitioners would be, therefore, to promote a 'fundamental change of culture' not just in the communities and the third sector but, more importantly, at the governmental institutions, in order to foster and enable the production of a real 'Big Society'.



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