# Enabling Urban Alternatives

## Crises, Contestation, and Cooperation

Edited collection
**Jens Kaae Fisker, Letizia Chiappini,
Lee Pugalis, Antonella Bruzzese**

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# Introduction: Introducing Urban Alternatives

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## Introduction

Humanity is currently confronted by an extraordinary array of social, economic, political, and environmental challenges. Most, if not all of these, have a significant urban dimension. Accelerated and unbridled urbanisation exerts multiple and considerable pressures on ecosystems everywhere (Seto, Sanchez-Rodriquez, & Fragkias, 2010). Key culprits include deforestation and the loss of natural habitats, resource depletion, pollution of air, water and soils, and the greenhouse gas emissions that fuel the looming climate crisis. Meanwhile, the financial crisis and subsequent recession that shook global capitalism in 2008 not only harmed the most vulnerable urban dwellers but also originated in ruthless financial speculation over urban real estate (Harvey, 2012). The persistence and aggravation of extreme poverty are also closely tied to urban processes with an estimated 900 million people living in slums in what the UN defines as 'developing regions': an increase in absolute numbers of 28 per cent between 1990 and 2014 (UN-Habitat, 2016, p. 58). In short, the collective fate of humanity seems to be bound up with that of urbanity. That is the fundamental recognition from which we proceed in this book.

Unfortunately, the trajectories of urban processes that currently prevail do not offer much hope in this regard. Decades of neoliberal urban policy regimes (in various guises) have produced a situation in which the course of urban development is more often plotted by capital than by urban inhabitants. With capital at the helm, cities become instruments for the generation of profits rather than places where people live. At the same time, urbanity is still haunted by the persistent ghosts of colonialism, racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination that hamper the possibility of urban life forms that are truly inclusive, dignified, and just. Hopeful trajectories, then, are generally not to be found in the mainstream of urban thought and practice. Alternative imaginaries and ideas as well as practices and policies are urgently needed. Fortunately, these do exist, and it has been the mission of this book to seek them out and to ask how their realisation can be enabled. The purpose is to illuminate, theorise, and communicate the conditions, techniques, and strategies that enable urban alternatives to come to fruition and to critically examine their radical potential.

By placing the notion of 'enabling' front and centre, we have deliberately positioned the book between a diagnostic approach aimed at exposing cur-

rent urban ills and a prescriptive approach aimed at figuring out what desirable urban futures may look like. Both of these approaches are in abundance elsewhere (e.g. Brenner & Theodore, 2002; Bridge & Watson, 2011; Datta & Shaban, 2017; Davis, 2006; MacLeod & Ward, 2002; Vasudevan, 2015a, 2015b). We seek to complement such work by establishing productive connections between the diagnostic and the prescriptive. This necessarily involves elements of both; if the enabling of alternative urban futures is our journey, then we need diagnosis to ascertain our current location and prescription to figure out where we are heading. What makes this journey exceedingly difficult is the fact that neither our current location nor our destination can be known with full precision. And to complicate matters further, we are not talking about a single journey but about multiple trajectories embedded in the complex contingencies of our interconnected urban worlds.

Implied in the recognition of these linkages is the key assumption that urbanity can be envisaged as comprising our shared social condition, whether we live in global cities, in small towns, in villages, in the countryside, or in any other spatial parcel. That is, contemporary human life across the planet is both defined and conditioned in significant ways by urban processes as they unfold in all their variety and particularity within and beyond places across all continents (Brenner & Schmid, 2015). Urban processes, in this view, comprise key targets for efforts to address and resolve the aforementioned set of interrelated crises. This engenders a challenging collective task of reconstituting the direction of urban processes in ways that engender new hope for urban futures. The task at hand has been phrased with both clarity and simplicity by David Harvey:

> Not only is it vital to step back and think about what can be done, and who is going to do it where. It is also vital to match preferred organizational principles and practices with the nature of the political, social, and technical battles that have to be fought and won. (Harvey, 2012, p. 127)

We take up this task by deliberately emphasising the key question of how to make alternative urban futures possible—how to enable them, that is—rather than simply spelling out what they might look like. In other words, we focus less on the destination and more on how to get there, on the grounds that knowing what needs to change is not the same as knowing how to make that change happen. These questions, however, cannot be completely separated. It is thus doubtful whether desirable

destinations of urban futures can be fixed before embarking on journeys towards them. Whereas some measure of utopian thinking is indispensable in establishing orientations for political practice, it would be misguided to attempt to divorce the destination from the journey. In taking the process of enabling as our focal point, we want to stress that there can be no single destination, just as there can be no single route map for the journey, that is, urban alternatives are both imagined and realised through the process of their enabling. In this spirit, we have cast our net widely in order to capture a diversity of moments in which seemingly entrenched sociopolitical situations are sought to be overcome with the purpose of producing urban alternatives. In this introductory chapter, we begin by briefly outlining the diagnoses of the urban condition currently on offer, before turning to one of the new urban agendas that have emerged from these variegated views. We then go on to establish a shared point of departure for conceptualising urban alternatives. In the last section, we account for the specific entry points—thinking, governing, performing, and producing the urban differently—that guide the four parts of the book. In this context, we also briefly introduce the individual chapters that make up each part.

## Diagnosing the Urban Condition

One of the most divisive traits of urban literature in recent years has been the stark contrast between voices that proclaim the urban to be 'triumphant' (e.g. Brugmann, 2009; Florida, 2011; Glaeser, 2011) and others who issue urgent warnings about its socially unjust, environmentally unsustainable, and broadly destructive character (e.g. Gleeson, 2014; UN-Habitat, 2016). These disparate perspectives, however, converge on the recognition that the common fate of humanity is bound up closely with the fate of urbanity. But whereas the former tend to position urbanity as the saviour-elect of humanity, the latter identify the reconstitution of urban processes as one of our primary common challenges (see Gleeson (2012, 2014) for a detailed critique of 'triumphal' urbanism). It should be clear that we side with the view of the urban as a challenge to be faced rather than a salvation to be awaited. Yet, we also discern in the apparent

gulf between such perspectives an important truth about the urban condition: if it is our greatest common challenge, then it is also our greatest common opportunity. The triumphal urbanists have focused one-sidedly on the prospects of the latter while turning the blind eye on "the netherworlds that now harbour much of the human urban experience" (Gleeson, 2012, p. 934). We would thus be well advised to proceed from the identification of key challenges produced by current urban trajectories but without losing sight of the possibilities and opportunities that emerge through those very same processes.

We cannot hope to present a comprehensive and exhaustive account of key challenges and possibilities here. Instead, we offer a limited selection of challenge-possibility pairs—all emerging from recent urban scholarship—that we find particularly pertinent for the present volume:

- *Exclusion and segregation*. **Challenge**: Urban space is increasingly characterised by exclusions and segregations, sometimes physically manifest and violently enforced, sometimes hidden and internalised in everyday practices. Such urban exclusion and segregation are embodied by housing evictions and slum clearances (Brickell, Arrigoitia, & Vasudevan, 2017; Sassen, 2014), forcible removal of the homeless and other unwanted elements from public spaces (Iveson, 2014; Stuart, 2014), gated communities that shield the affluent from the urban poor (Atkinson & Blandy, 2006; Borsdorf et al., 2016), sharp divides between informal and formal urban settlements (UN-Habitat, 2016), and so forth. Rising levels of inequality thus manifest in urban spaces, where the aggravated contrasts between rich and poor and the sharp divides between included and excluded become most visible. **Possibilities**: Whereas informal urban settlements are presented by the UN purely as a challenge to be overcome (through formalisation), many such areas are situated in contexts where the partial autonomy from oppressive regimes cannot be viewed entirely in negative terms. Informality presents its own array of difficult issues around social justice, environmental protection, provision of basic necessities, and so on (UN-Habitat, 2016), but it also reflects opportunities for bypassing prevailing hegemonies, thereby allowing such areas to evolve beyond the effective reach of existing regimes. This is most obvious in

cases of oppressive urban and national governments, but it also extends to broader hegemonies such as global capitalism which relies on the formalisation of urban economies in order to penetrate and extract surplus value from them. Informal urban settlements can thus be envisioned as enclaves where special conditions for the enabling of alternative urban becomings are present (McFarlane, 2011; Roy, 2011; Vasudevan, 2015b).

- *Persisting poverty and increasing inequality*. **Challenge**: Economic inequality is on the rise globally (Piketty, 2014), while extreme urban poverty persists despite being a top policy priority for decades (UN-Habitat, 2016). Poverty and inequality are inextricably linked and "the problems of the global accumulation of poverty cannot be confronted (…) without confronting the obscene global accumulation of wealth" (Harvey, 2012, p. 127). **Possibilities**: The recognition that poverty cannot be eradicated without addressing inequality is becoming more widespread; even the New Urban Agenda of the UN acknowledges as much. This represents an opportunity for pursuing the development of non-exploitative social relations of production as a means for combating poverty. In other words, the proliferation of non-capitalist urban economies may enter the repertoire of international development agencies, NGOs, and other actors working to end urban poverty. On the ground, the urban poor are already pushing in this direction but could be strengthened in their efforts if this array of internationally connected actors would align themselves more closely to such an agenda.

- *Urban sprawl and changing land-use patterns*. **Challenge**: The UN-Habitat (2016, p. 7) estimates that a doubling of urban populations in developing countries by 2030 will result in a tripling of the area covered by cities. This urban sprawl covers suburbanisation for the emerging middle classes, the spread of slums as people migrate from the countryside, the growth of industrial areas as global capital relocates and expands production, and the expansion of infrastructure needed to cope with these growth patterns. Many of the environmental issues produced by urban processes are directly associated with these changing land-use patterns (Seto et al., 2010). Moreover, urban sprawl can have adverse effects on local and regional food systems as cultivated

land gives way for housing, industry, and infrastructure (UN-Habitat, 2016, p. 35f). **Possibilities**: Both changing land uses within already urbanised areas and the 'breaking of new ground' at the peri-urban fringes imply highly politicised moments. Therefore, they are also moments of potential rupture where new directions can be, and indeed are, pushed for. For instance, Benjamin (2008, p. 722f) uses the term 'occupancy urbanism' to illustrate how urban inhabitants in Mumbai use 'the subtle occupancy of terrain' and informal alliances with sympathetic low-level bureaucrats to ensure 'de facto tenure' of land formally designated for global capital.

- *The spatial frames of urban policy*. **Challenge**: Politico-administrative territoriality can be a barrier for effective urban policy measures. The difficulties of urban policymaking and the effectiveness of policy implementation are often negatively affected by issues associated with spatial jurisdictional boundaries, the scalar distribution of powers, and so forth. In short, the problems consist in a mismatch between the spatial and scalar framing of urban policy and the actual issues that policy is meant to address. **Possibilities**: The proliferation of multiscalar governance structures and the emergence of new governance spaces open up myriad possibilities for the establishment of more appropriate spatial frames for urban policy (Soja, 2015). At the same time, this new landscape of urban governance also reflects opportunities for co-opting pockets of the governance system for counter-hegemonic purposes (Ferguson, 2009).

## New Urban Agendas for a Crisis-Ridden World

In preparation for the Habitat III conference in October 2016, the United Nations Human Settlement Programme (UN-Habitat) produced a detailed and well-informed diagnosis of the contemporary global urban condition. The conference resulted in the Quito Declaration, which was later adopted by the UN General Assembly as a resolution on a New Urban Agenda. While engendering the kind of optimistic outlook that is to be expected of such publications, the report is noticeable for the vocal way in which it sounds the alarm on prevailing directions of contemporary

urban processes. Readers are made aware of its critical content even before they reach the table of contents, as Joan Clos, Executive Director of UN-Habitat, makes clear in his introduction, "the Report unequivocally demonstrates that the current urbanization model is unsustainable (…). It conveys a clear message that the pattern of urbanization needs to change in order to better respond to the challenges of our time" (UN-Habitat, 2016, p. iv). The New Urban Agenda harbours the same sense of urgency and is equally explicit in emphasising the complicity of urban processes in generating planetary challenges such as extreme poverty, inequality, climate change, and environmental degradation (UN, 2017).

Thus far, we share the key concerns voiced by the UN in both the report and the resolution, and as such, these documents represent useful shared vantage points for the explorations of alternative urban futures that comprise this book. Discursive changes in the international policy community such as these are encouraging to our project of enabling urban alternatives because they indicate that the time is indeed ripe for questioning and dismantling taken-for-granted 'truths' whose tight and long-lasting grip has served to entrench and paralyse urban policy making. Yet even if 'trickle-down economics' and other once-celebrated truisms are slowly being denounced (UN-Habitat, 2016, p. 148), it can hardly be expected that policymakers everywhere are ready to turn on a plate and give up the inherited wisdoms that continue to sustain neoliberal urbanism around the world. The solutions suggested in the New Urban Agenda indicate as much: they mostly adhere to received orthodoxies and thus fail to push ahead adequately. As noted by Kuymulu (2013), it is encouraging that the right to the city has found its way into UN discourse, but it is disheartening to observe how the Lefebvrian focus on urban use values is sometimes substituted for a conception that sees the urban primarily as a set of exchange values. Moreover, whilst few urban policymakers would promote the much maligned trickle-down growth theory or recognise it in their policies, such thinking, nevertheless, continues to permeate practice.

The acknowledgement that neoliberal policies have failed on a number of accounts and that certain features of capitalism have been, and continue to be, complicit in creating the problems we are faced with is a

potentially important opening in the edifice of prevailing hegemonies. But it should not be mistaken for a readiness to question the desirability of capitalism and neoliberalism per se. Fortunately, we do not have to constrain ourselves in this way. We take the new discursive openings as encouragement in terms of the feasibility of cooperation with established authorities, but we also want to stress the continued need for contestation of hegemonic urban agendas. Therefore, we mobilise the contradictory tension between contestation and cooperation as a particular entry point for analysis, discussion, and conceptualisation of urban alternatives. Moreover, we find it crucial to follow through on the obvious caveat that while the making of lofty resolutions is one thing, translating the implied commitments into material change on the ground is quite another; the New Urban Agenda may say all the right things, but we have to face the prospect that it is unlikely to engender radical change. For this reason, we are not satisfied merely by conjuring up images of the kinds of alternative urban futures that might be considered more desirable to inhabit. Rather, we want to get to grips with the very process of enabling their realisation. To be able to engage this process meaningfully, we need to take some initial steps towards conceptualising urban alternatives.

## Conceptualising Urban Alternatives

To establish a shared point of conceptual departure, two steps of conceptualisation are necessary at this point: Firstly, we need to come to terms with 'the urban' as our shared object of study. We do so by reviewing and situating the book in recent ontological and epistemological debates in urban studies. Secondly, we need to elaborate on the meaning that we attach to 'alternative' and also begin to unfold the kind of processes and practices that may be implied by 'enabling alternatives'. This has required us to dwell on some fundamental notions concerning difference, change, and agency. In both steps, we have been careful to remain largely unrestrictive; that is, we are not attempting to draw frames or establish boundaries but rather to locate conceptual meeting places from which heterogeneous journeys into the urban world can be embarked upon and where we can again meet up upon our return.

## From Methodological Cityism to the Study of Urban Processes

In recent years, debate in urban studies has been marked by an eruption of disagreement about what the proper object of study in the field should be taken to be. A particular frontier has emerged between Brenner and Schmid's (2015) propositions for a new urban epistemology based on the study of urban process and Scott and Storper's (2014) insistence upon the possibility and desirability of a general concept of the city—based on agglomeration and the urban land-use nexus—as the proper object of study for urban studies. Alongside these rather entrenched positions, the adoption of several variations of 'assemblage urbanism' has proliferated as an undercurrent that disrupts both (e.g. Farias & Bender, 2009; McFarlane, 2011). Still others have turned to postcolonial and subaltern urbanism (e.g. Bishop et al., 2003; Roy, 2011; Roy & Ong, 2011), and urban political ecology (e.g. Angelo & Wachsmuth, 2015; Lawhon, Ernstson, & Silver, 2014), in order to define an object of study sufficient for the academic challenges presented by the urban condition today.

For the purposes of this book, we consider it beneficial to follow the example of Brenner & Schmid by positing urban processes as our shared object of study. This is not to be seen as a denial of the important parts played by agglomeration and the urban land-use nexus; on the contrary, these remain central to the understanding of urban processes. What we want to avoid is the kind of methodological cityism that Scott & Storper arguably advocate, which "renders the city as a logical, linear, sequential and (more damagingly) exclusively economic technological system" (Mould, 2015, p. 167). The key point here is that cities, towns, and villages are merely some of the most obvious outcomes of urban processes, and that it would be detrimental to the vitality of urban studies if we were to limit ourselves to the narrow study of this particular set of outcomes. In many ways, it would preclude urban scholars from playing an active and constructive part in directing the new urban agendas discussed earlier and would thus court political irrelevance. Hence, we prefer to study what Angelo and Wachsmuth (2015, p. 20) has called "urbanization as a set of processes that are not reducible to the city". The challenge-possibility

pairs presented earlier give suggestive hints about what kind of processes this may involve.

Importantly, the identification of urban processes as object of study also entails a rejection—implied by the array of spatial parcelisations mentioned earlier—of a dichotomous foundation for urban theorisation that relies on the dualistic naming of an urban 'outside' or 'other' such as rural, wilderness, or simply non-urban. This does not amount to the pointless assertion that 'everything is urban', which would render the term meaningless. It is simply an implication of enrolling a processual perspective: Processes and relations cannot be bounded but must be pursued and questioned wherever they lead. In this context, it is worth bearing in mind Jazeel's (2017) recent critique of the implications of urban theory without an outside. It is also worth mentioning that the New Urban Agenda exhibits small, but potentially important, steps towards taking seriously the fact that urban issues cannot be analysed and addressed adequately if the urban processes that produce them are arbitrarily bounded by dichotomous distinctions. While still employing urban-rural terminology, it does so in the softened guise of 'the urban-rural continuum', and beyond this, the language of the agenda leaves little doubt that its creators have been well aware that the urban cannot be reduced to the city (UN, 2017, p. 10).

Beyond these basic points, we see no reason to constrict ourselves from engaging with any of the myriad approaches currently on offer in urban studies literature, including those whose approach is some kind of de facto methodological cityism. In fact, we see a rich potential for dialogue among different perspectives, not only in the sense of a cross-pollination of ideas, concepts, and methods but also through the cautionary brakes that one approach can often apply to another. The debate between assemblage urbanists (Farias, 2011; Farias & Bender, 2009) and critical urban theorists (Brenner, Madden, & Wachsmuth, 2011) is a good example of how this can be mutually beneficial. To be sure, this does not imply that every strand of urban thinking currently in vogue is represented in the book; merely that it has been produced in a spirit of open dialogue that invites a multiplicity of views, voices, and ways of understanding. It also implies that our reflections in the concluding chapter include more elaborate discussions on these matters.

## The Process and Practice of Enabling Urban Alternatives

It follows logically from the earlier discussion that we understand 'urban alternatives' to be urban processes that follow alternative trajectories. By this, we mean trajectories that divert significantly from the prevailing directions of urban processes today. Whereas some of these general directions are shared broadly, even globally, others are particular to specific urban realities and spatiotemporal conjunctures. Significant difference is the key term here; derived from Donna Haraway's (2003) notion of significant otherness, it implies more than a glorification of difference per se. It requires us to look actively and consistently for the moments in which difference becomes politically significant. In our case, this refers to urban becomings capable of bending or disrupting the trajectories of the urban processes into which they are born. This conception stands in stark contrast to the celebration of homogeneity masquerading as heterogeneity, which has been one of the most recognisable traits of neoliberal urbanism (e.g. Turok, 2009). The difficulty of recognising the differences that matter, then, stands as a key analytical challenge. A useful set of distinctions can be drawn from Henri Lefebvre who was diligently alert to this challenge:

> Naturally it happens that *induced* differences—differences internal to the whole and brought into being by that whole as a system aiming to establish itself and then to close (for example, the suburban 'world of villas')—are hard to distinguish either from *produced* differences, which escape the system's rule, or from *reduced* differences, forced back into the system by constraint and violence. (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 382, emphasis in original)

Making distinctions between induced, produced, and reduced difference in this way may be helpful to assess the transformative potential of urban alternatives. An induced difference cannot constitute an alternative in and by itself, but it may provide openings that can be exploited to enact produced differences; its political significance is only latent but it is, nevertheless, present. A reduced difference, by contrast, implies that a

produced difference has already been present, or at least under formation, only to be captured and harnessed by hegemonic forces; its political significance is therefore historic, but the harness may still be broken if circumstances allow. For the current purposes, produced differences that can be sustained and amplified are obviously our primary interest, but both induced and reduced differences may hold insights that are just as valuable to our project by pointing towards latent possibilities and past experiences, respectively.

Politically significant urban difference may, in other words, take on a range of forms and guises that are all capable of informing the pursuit of alternative urban futures. In each case, however, we need to carefully assess what kind of difference we are dealing with if we want to be able to ask the right questions. What we ask, and how we seek answers, then depends on (1) the spatiotemporal conjuncture to which the questions are put, (2) the nature and the political significance of the urban difference(s) observed, and (3) the specific modes of enabling encountered in these moments. Each of these points implies conceptual and methodological choices with implications for the kind of analysis that can be pursued and thereby for the scope of possible answers. These choices and considerations apply to all the chapters that follow, even those that are explicitly conceptual in scope. As such, we proceed from a vantage point where all knowledge production is considered to be spatiotemporally situated in ways that inevitably affect it considerably.

The scope of processes and practices that could legitimately be considered relevant for investigation in this book is deliberately broad. This reflects an awareness of the indeterminate complexity of urban processes. Some aspects of these are visible at first glance, whereas others are well hidden in the entangled mess of urbanity, requiring sustained investigative work to be teased out. Some appear extraordinary and spectacular, while others appear mundane and vernacular. But such characteristics say little if anything about their significance, and for this reason, it has been a particular priority to include alongside each other examples of enabling processes and practices that exhibit a mix of such ostensible traits (visible/hidden, extraordinary/mundane, material/discursive, etc.).

## Structure of the Book

The chapters of the book have been organised into four parts that reflect the key mode of enabling that they engage with. Thus, all the chapters in the first part deal with the ways in which thinking urban space differently can enable alternative urban futures. Similarly, the following three parts deal with governing, performing, and producing as distinctive, but related and overlapping, modes of enabling. In the following subsections, each of the four parts is briefly introduced along with the individual chapters that comprise it.

### Thinking the Urban Differently

This section is composed of chapters making a diverse series of cuts into the ways in which the urban can be thought differently. Their shared purpose is to highlight how modes of thought, language, and imaginaries can play crucial parts in both elucidating and obscuring the political possibilities for generating alternative urban futures. But they also go beyond this to suggest new ways forward for urban thinkers and practitioners alike, that is, for alternative urban enablers of all stripes.

George Francis Bickers (Chap. 2) leads the charge by exploring how 'thinking the urban' has important ramifications for spatial practice and lived urban experience. He does so—inspired by the spatial theories of Edward Soja—through an investigation of how fictional literature set in Los Angeles functions as a palimpsestual map of the urban, sometimes with the effect of reinforcing hegemonic conceptions, sometimes helping to subvert them. Jens Kaae Fisker (Chap. 3) then pulls urban politics into explicit attention by exploring how the 'terrains of urban politics' can be put to work as a trope whose attendant spatial imaginary is conducive to differential urban becomings. This reflects a theoretical take on some of the key themes brought up by Bickers. Finally, Sam Vardy (Chap. 4) provides a London-based example—the Wards Corner Coalition—of how urban politics may play out very differently when urban inhabitants begin to think the political space of the urban in alternative ways. Drawing on the work of Rancière and Lefebvre, he suggests that dissensus

politics and spatial self-organisation are needed if the urban is to be repoliticised and thereby salvaged from the post-political grip of neoliberal consensus politics.

## Governing Urban Space Differently

All chapters in the second section are preoccupied with urban governance in a broad sense of the term and carry forward the discussion opened by Vardy earlier. They attend to the emergence and evolution of urban policies, governance arrangements, and collaborative spaces in which urban alternatives are enabled through the interaction of diverse groups of actors brought together in novel constellations. Their shared concern pertains to dynamic power relations among these heterogeneous actor constellations, which variously hinder and enable the generation of alternative urban futures. The analytical focus directs attention to the ways in which grassroots work strategically with existing arrangements of policy and governance to appropriate them in the service of pursuing alternative agendas, as well as to state-sponsored initiatives set up specifically to foster urban alternatives. Moreover, they all go beyond the diagnosis of current conditions to make constructive suggestions with direct relevance for actors variously involved in governing urban processes towards alternative trajectories.

Nina Vogel, Peter Parker, and Lisa Diedrich (Chap. 5) start out by shedding critical light on 'temporary urbanism', one of the latest fashions among urban planners and politicians, emphasising how temporary use can both reinforce hegemonies and enable alternatives. They suggest how the former can be avoided in pursuit of the latter. Janet Merkel and Friederike Landau (Chap. 6) take us from conceptual discussion to deep empirical engagement by investigating how urban governance is 'made' and how political actors are constituted in complex processes involving diverse actor constellations. The chapter is based on research in Berlin and revolves around the making of cultural and creative urban policy. Zsuzsa Kovács, Peer Smets, and Halleh Ghorashi (Chap. 7) follow suit with an ethnographically informed chapter that highlights the 'possibilities machine' engendered by the participatory

systems of urban governance often favoured by neoliberal regimes. This is grounded in the particular experience of community-based actors in an Amsterdam neighbourhood.

## Performing and Producing Urban Space Differently

The materiality of the urban is continuously (re)appropriated by inhabitants and other users through heterogeneous performances of urban life. While urban design, architecture, and planning often attempt to manipulate behaviours, the performativity of urban life opens up vast spaces of possibility for alternative urban becomings that do not conform to the scripts of planners, designers, and businesses. Yet, at the same time, performances are conditioned and constrained precisely by those attempts at scripting the urban. Moreover, when this performative aspect is brought together with the previous notions of thinking and governing, we begin to approach something closer to an encompassing view of producing the urban. Chapters in the third part reflect such a progression from performing to producing.

Andrew Barnfield (Chap. 8) takes up the seemingly mundane act of running in the city through an ethnographic study grounded in Sofia. He shows how recreational running clubs can challenge neoliberal visions by replacing their own alternative ethos of urban life. Raffaella Camoletto and Carlo Genova (Chap. 9) offer a contrasting case on urban youth whose performances of style in a variety of subcultural activities exhibit a deepening engagement with urban materialities. They challenge the apparent superficiality of style by showing how its performance is actually co-constitutive with urban space. Moving into a more encompassing view, Antonella Bruzzese (Chap. 10) presents a palimpsestual conception of the urban in which urban processes are marked by the continuous production of spatiotemporal gaps that various stakeholders attempt to fill. She explores this vision of urban politics empirically by analysing the spatiotemporal life cycles of alternative urban spaces in Milan. Sonia Lam-Knott (Chap. 11) proceeds from a comparable conception of urban politics but turns attention to the recent surge of protest and alternative urban becomings in Hong Kong. Based on ethnographic fieldwork, she investigates the interrelations

between land-use policies and spatial appropriations by political youth groups. Finally, with Stefania Palmisano and Alberto Vanolo (Chap. 12), we travel back to Italy but to a radically different urban setting: the Damanhur spiritual community, where urban reality has been recreated from scratch. They explore how ideals of a communitarian lifestyle mix with new-age spiritualism and neoliberal subjectivities to shape an urban process which is both recognisable and radically alternative.

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