Cities to be Tamed?
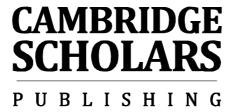# Spatial Investigations across the Urban South

Cities to be Tamed?
Spatial Investigations across the Urban South

Edited by

Francesco Chiodelli, Beatrice De Carli, Maddalena Falletti and Lina Scavuzzo

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PREFACE

This book draws on the conference entitled '*Cities to be Tamed? Standards and Alternatives in the Transformation of the Urban South*' held at the Politecnico di Milano, Italy in November 2012. The significant response to the call for papers and the productive debates that were a feature of the conference's thematic and plenary sessions persuaded us as curators to seek avenues to extend the discussion and capture some of its highlights in a publication.

The contributions included in this book consist of a selection and reworking of some of the papers presented at the symposium. In an attempt to reflect the cross-disciplinary exchange that underpinned the conference debates, we have organised the essays into two parts, ignoring the divisions among fields of study that commonly characterise the vast area of urban research. Long-standing frictions among spatial planning, urban design, architecture, policy-making, sociology, and anthropology have been set aside in favour of establishing thematic confluence around two main topics, both of which are centred on the manifold relationships between *space* and *conflicts* in non-Western cities.

The first part of the book focuses on the contested *agency of design* and spatial analysis in contexts of 'informality'. The contributions proposed address the physical and material dimension of social tensions and the spatial interfaces between diverging individual and societal purposes and aspirations. By suggesting alternative approaches, investigating 'ordinary anomalies', or documenting the shortcomings of official planning recipes, these writings explore the spatial challenges posed by conditions of rapid urbanisation, scarce resources, and increasing social inequalities.

The second part of the book investigates the substantive and procedural *political character* of space regulation and moulding. The nexus between space regulation and the political sphere has been studied extensively, in particular with reference to the global North, and the contributions in this part of the book explore certain peculiarities of this nexus with reference to specificities of the global South in an attempt to generate new points of view that may build a Southern perspective on the interrelation between space and power. The aim is not only to cope more effectively with

problems relating to these contexts, but also to rekindle research on this topic in the North.

The preparation and quality of this book depend on the efforts of a number of institutions and individuals who by their contributions to the planning of the '*Cities to be Tamed?*' conference helped shape its arguments and opened the way to this publication. We would like to thank the School of Architecture and Society, the Department of Architecture and Urban Studies and the Laboratory of International Cooperation at the Politecnico di Milano for their support. We put a steering group in place early on, and this group provided critical advice at the initial stage of this work, so our thanks go to its members: Alessandro Balducci, Camillo Boano, Bruno De Meulder, Jorge Fiori, Nabeel Hamdi, Agostino Petrillo, and Antonio Tosi. We are also grateful to the chairs and discussants of the debates: Paola Bellaviti, Scott A. Bollens, Massimo Bricocoli, Viviana d'Auria, Omar Nagati, Gabriele Pasqui, Ruba Saleh, Marialessandra Secchi, and Erez Tzfadia, without whom the event would not have been as successful as it was. Finally, and above all, we are exceptionally grateful to all the participants at the conference for collectively nurturing and shaping a rich dialogue, which we have attempted to channel into this book.

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ContestedSpaces/SpaziContesi[1]
Francesco Chiodelli, Beatrice De Carli,
Maddalena Falletti and Lina Scavuzzo.

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[1] *ContestedSpaces/SpaziContesi* is an urban research platform that investigates the spatial dimension of conflicts in cities of the Global South.

PART I

SPACES OF FORMAL/INFORMAL INTERPLAY

CHAPTER ONE

FORMAL/INFORMAL INTERPLAYS:
SPATIAL TENSIONS AND DESIGN PRACTICES

BEATRICE DE CARLI
AND MADDALENA FALLETTI

1. Two tales, as a way of introduction

Guiles. In the early 2000s Brazilian architect and urban theorist, Paola Berenstein Jacques, advanced a thought-provoking plea for the spatial logics of *favelas*, emphasizing the relationships between time, movement, and the processes of production of 'informal' urban spaces (2001a, 2001b). Furthering a wider discourse on the oppositional nature of contemporary urban forms and formative processes, Berenstein Jacques recalls the words of Milton Santos to describe the Brazilian city as a binary field made of the 'opaque', yet fluid and creative spaces of *favelas*, emerging in opposition to the dominant 'luminous, mediatized and spectacularized' spaces and misplaced projects of the planned city (Berenstein Jacques, 2011). Elaborating on the work of artist Hélio Oiticica, she illustrates the spatial ordering of *favelas* as one that is based on bodily experiences and material practices, as opposed to the rigid abstractions of 'technocratic urbanism': moulded by the multiple, simultaneous life-trajectories of dwellers/city-makers, the space of *favelas* is an open on-going production. In this manner, Berenstein Jacques reconnects dwellers' everyday life practices to De Certeau's understanding of 'tactics': guileful ruses that operate from within the gaps of overarching spatial and social structures (De Certeau, 1984). This understanding of residents' daily-life activities as guiles particularly highlights *favelas* as simultaneously spaces of exclusion from the preordained structures of power and decision-making, and as reserves of creativity and ingenuity that hold the potential to generate avenues for unsettling the surrounding, normalised city. Far from pleading for any architectural or planning mediation, this definition of *favelas* refers

to the unfixed interaction of multiple individual histories and daily activities as a value as such. As Jorge Fiori and Zeca Brandão highlight in their commentary, according to Berenstein Jacques 'the informal city, as a space in movement, with its own culture and identity, will negotiate its own way through the rest of the city. As such, it does not need control, or "integration"' (Fiori and Brandão, 2010: 189).

Manipulations. Parallel to the investigations of Berenstein Jacques, the city of Rio de Janeiro was undergoing profound changes, grounded in a set of benchmark urban regeneration and public-works programmes implemented by the local government. This included the by-now iconic Favela-Bairro programme, which was crafted in the mid-nineties with the intention 'to build or upgrade the urban structure of long-standing medium sized existing slums, and provide the environmental conditions to change and integrate them into city neighbourhoods' (Magalhães, 2010: 153-154). Marking a substantial shift from previous attempts to eradicate *favelas*, Favela-Barrio had the ambition of breaking long-standing oppositions between the formal and the informal city (Segre, 2010), based on the terming of the informal city's inherent problems as an urban rather than local question. At the same time the focus of attention was placed on physical and symbolic dimensions of the on-going opposition, and therefore on two operative dimensions of integration: 'urban interconnections between road and service systems', and the construction of 'a new perception of urban diversity' (Magalhães, 2010). The initiative, financially backed by the Inter-American Development Bank, initially targeted fifteen *favelas* and developed through a number of architectural competitions, whose premises and outcomes signalled the role that public space interventions would come to play, as a means to articulate the newly unified city. Widely acclaimed nationally and internationally, the approach of Favela-Bairro is still echoed in a number of public-space, public-facility based interventions in 'informal' urban settlements.[1] At the same time, however, this approach is also fiercely opposed by a variety of different actors. Shortly after the programme's implementation, Broudehoux (2001) presented a thorough account of these critiques, positioning them within a wider appraisal of image-driven urbanism in Rio de Janeiro. Among the points she raises is a critique to the programme as 'architectural cosmetics', or a form of 'extravagant spending' in light of the more pressing social and material needs of dwellers. Further, she reports criticism to the underlying 'normalising approach' of Favela-Bairro –

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[1] Among many possible examples, it is worth citing the renowned Proyectos Urbanos Integrales being carried out in the informal areas of Medellin, Colombia. For a recent architecture oriented overview see, among others: P.E.A.R. (2013).

implying that the realised projects promulgated a totalising spatial narrative, which was largely alien to the socio-spatial ordering of *favelas* themselves.

2. Cross-scalar mediations: Informality and the practice of architecture

Notwithstanding the diversity of aims and instruments that underpin these two tales, their reciprocal tensions and the intense critiques raised by both in the following years, allow for at least an insight into the potential scope and limitations of architecture and urbanism in the *contested urban landscapes* of today. With villages turning to cities in the blink of an eye, urban agglomerations in the global South are commonly described as the accumulation of dichotomies, with global forces and endogenous patterns of life, luxury and extreme poverty, social exclusions and networks of solidarity, co-occurring (Loeckx et al., 2004; Murray and Myers, 2007; Nederveen Pieterse, 1995). Here, the compression – both in space and time – of multiple influences, intentions, cultures, material practices and spatial imageries, generates layered and conflictive urban fields whose complex articulations tend to escape any simple analytical and design approaches. It is against the background of this growing complexity that, since at least the 1990s, a despair as to the capacity of comprehensive master-planning to respond to the pace and magnitude of urban transformations has opened the way to the resurgence of 'informality' in the architectural discourse, including a renewed attention to the sphere of everyday life practices and to the spatial responses enacted by the urban poor: either individual or collective, completely self-organised or partially carried out with external support, capable of operating in a regime of urgency and often forcibly working *hic et nunc* (Angélil and Siress, 2010; Gandy, 2006; Myers, 2011).

Variously situated within this wider stream of reasoning, the experiences previously described are emblematic of some of the ambivalences and contradictions that still characterise the practice of architecture and urbanism in contexts of 'informal' urban development. Whereas Favela-Bairro emphasizes a drive for the spatial inclusion of informal urban areas within larger frameworks and practices of city-making, with critiques highlighting the problematic implications of a predominantly technical and symbolic understanding of this challenge, the explorations of Berenstein Jacques stress the flaws of an understanding of socio-spatial particularities which does not include a critical revision of their different components: the existing social and cultural specificities to

nurture, and those underlying inequalities to challenge. Both seek to articulate a positive way into the contemporary landscapes of rapid urbanisation and growing social disparities by somehow leveraging on architectural practice or knowledge, yet both concurrently elude the possibility to endorse a more radical engagement of architecture with the inherently cross-scalar social and physical dimensions of city transformations. In one case, architecture's room for manoeuvre is negated by the predominance of the micro-scale, and the inadvertent reproduction of the binary model of power-impotency, which reduces the opportunities for introducing more transformative change;[2] in the other, a focus on urban relations and dynamics is eventually crystallized within the world of static form, and the provision of physical and material solutions.

The shortcomings of both approaches have contributed substantially to a widespread, long-standing scepticism regarding the purposes and chances of success of architecture and urban design in contexts of rapid urbanisation, dramatic socio-economic disparities and overarching informal urban development. This has been underpinned by the idea that no design-related intervention could possibly attempt to modify the status quo without superimposing exogenous orderings, repressing difference, and thus reproducing on-going spatial tensions or imbalances (Escobar, 1995; King, 1990). At the same time, however, a postmodernist reliance on 'informality' as a self-sufficient system of ingenuous spatial solutions has neglected notions of 'agency' and 'change' from the practice of architecture and urban design (De Boeck and Plissart, 2004; Roy, 2005; Varley, 2013). Thus over the course of the past ten years, architecture's engagement with informality has often shifted in favour of romanticised, surrendering approaches which lay dangerously close to pure *laissez-faire*, and to the mal- or misrecognition of the complex relational and conflictive processes defining spaces of informality – and informal housing in particular – at multiple social and geographical levels. It is against this two-fold background that urbanist Camillo Boano recently posed his call,

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[2] In her examination of 'alternative' art practices, Jelinek (2013: 5) lucidly highlights: 'Clichés of resistance, that come from simply reproducing the orthodoxies within a particular art tradition, end up reproducing the binary model of powerful-powerless. Inherent in the cliché is the idea that we are powerless and so we use the only tactics available to us. The powerful have one set of strategies; the powerless a different set of tactics (De Certeau, 1984). This demarcation sets limits on the type of art imagined as disruptive, dissenting, and because the binary model fails to tackle ourselves as sites of both power and potential resistance – instead imagining that power always lies somewhere else – it fails to address power as we perform it'.

'architecture must be defended' (Boano, 2013): advocating for the discipline's engagement with the wider social-political-economic discourse of urban development, as well as presenting a defence from its self-confinement within the realm of aesthetic and technical manipulation.

Indeed, informal urban development capitalises upon the most powerful social infrastructures available in the city, which often stem from pre-colonial social orders: namely kinship, lineage, ethnicity, gender, class, status or locality. Based on strong cultural constructions, these multiple networks allow for the incessant absorption of the poor and the newcomers into the city, by producing employment, accommodation, infrastructures and basic services. Not without frictions or ambivalences, collective solutions are adopted that allow the preservation and welfare of individuals and groups. The city is thus a field to be either challenged or used flexibly and instrumentally, in between formal episodes and artefacts, either parallel or in contrast with global development forces and the exclusive abstraction of state-led planning solutions. In this process, resources are assembled with creativity, traditional knowledge is continuously updated, and economies adjust to contemporary demands. Together with the urgency of problems and the absence of valid alternatives, it is the practical sophistication and imaginative capacity of this adaptable *modus operandi* that makes informal urban development a preponderant force in the urbanisation of many areas across the global South.

Yet evidently the great capacity of 'informality' to use, organise and create urban space, cannot be understood in isolation from the larger social and spatial conditions around, within, and in resistance to which individual and collective life trajectories take form. At the same time, often preoccupied with survival, the practices of adaptation and resistance of 'informality' can seldom mediate with the long term, the public interest and the large scale of urban transformations, which in turn instruct the field of urbanism.

A hypothesis might therefore be advanced, constituting the base argument of this introduction: either the scarcity of results or the adverse effects of design-oriented interventions can be (at least partially) ascribed to a lack of critical engagement with the way in which the built environment is intertwined with articulations of power and difference across multiple scale levels – which in turn is premised upon the misrecognition of the intrinsically *mediatory* character of space, and thus of architecture and urban design. For this reason, a disciplinary diversion appears necessary. An urban design engagement with informal urbanisation that strives to address the concrete needs and aspirations of

dwellers, needs to build upon micro- and macro-realities at the same time; an architectural engagement with 'informality' that aspires to go beyond form-making and eventually challenge the status quo, needs to negotiate its position in relation to local contexts, as well as to the constraints and opportunities presented by wider urban development patterns.

The present-day informal city thus calls for a profound reorientation of the way in which we, as architects and urbanists, act upon it. Against the backdrop of a notion of architecture and urban design not as isolated technical disciplines, but rather as ones that are integral to and critically compromised by the multiple urbanisation processes that are at play on the ground, a number of questions are open to experimentation: how to qualitatively intervene as an architect and urbanist in the contested urban landscapes of the urban South? How to engage with the highly contestatory sites of 'urban informality' to simultaneously cultivate the existing resources and opportunities for change, while critically responding to the external conditions within which the morphologies of poverty, exclusion and marginalization develop? And even more importantly, how to structure actions, urban visions, and spatial solutions, in order that they gain strategic value across multiple scale levels, and contribute to challenging the way in which the city develops?

It is this constellation of issues that we wish to emphasize with this introduction and explore throughout the first section of this book. Through this text and the volume's composition, we mean to underscore the urgent priority of constructing a new, more generative interface between 'informality' and the practice of architecture and urbanism, which is grounded in a meaningful engagement with the spatially-specific contingency of local realities, individual stories, and contextual agencies, as well as with the wider cross-scalar dynamics that these intersect. The writings included in this collection help us to question our understanding of the spatially specific conditions in which architecture and urbanism operate, as well as the transformative processes that they might contribute to generate.

3. Grounding architecture: Shifting modes of engagement

In recent years, architecture and urban design knowledge have been subjected to a widespread revision of the sites and modes of their engagement with ethics and social realities, including an on-going interest in questions of urban informality. As d'Auria (2010) interestingly posits it, this disciplinary shift is particularly symbolised by a number of emerging practices in the global South that operate at the nexus between design,

research, and politics (Urban Think Tank, Venezuela; Morar de Outras Maneiras, Brazil; Elemental, Chile, to name but a few). Concurrently, a renewed fascination with issues of 'informality' in the built environment has lately underpinned a series of international exhibitions in mainstream architectural contexts.[3] Among the many directions undertaken by these explorations, it can be argued that a few innovative practices and projects have particularly endeavoured to deal with the spatial manifestations of informality as an alternative and an opposition, rather than an exception, to contemporary 'formal' urban spaces and processes – and therefore as 'a resource to be shaped and directed, not eradicated in the ethos of *tabula rasa* planning' (Boano, 2013). Even more importantly, these practices and projects are underpinned by a desire to leverage on architecture and urbanism as a means to contest the existing conditions of urban production, and engage transformatively with the wider spatial and societal structures within which informal urban development is embedded. In so doing, they have highlighted the inherent contingency and context-specificity of 'design' as a means to question and eventually challenge the broader issues of social exclusion, poverty, environmental sustainability and rapid urban growth, that are so evidently tangible in the production and reproduction of informal urban areas.

Historically grounded (though often insentiently) in the 1970s emergence of 'human settlements' as a body of knowledge and a field of practice (d'Auria et al., 2010), the innovative position of such practices reflects an on-going debate concerning the wider 'critical recalibration' of architecture.[4] This recalibration has frequently implied a focus on the 'intelligence of place' (as Nabeel Hamdi defines it later in this book), in tension with the exclusive and generic 'world-class city' visions that are so often foregrounded by powerful urban interests and actors in rapidly changing cities. In other words attention has been placed on a mode of architectural practice capable of cultivating the possibilities for transformative change offered by informal urban development, by means of generating actions, visions or spatial solutions that are tuned, precise and relevant for the contexts that these are engaging with. As such, these projects and practices draw from notions of 'critical regionalism' (Frampton, 1998; Lefaivre, 2003) and geographic and temporal specificity

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[3] It is worth recalling, among others: 'Small Scale, Big Change' (New York, 2010-2011), 'Testify! The Consequences of Architecture' (Rotterdam, 2011), 'Design with the other 90%: Cities' (New York, 2011-2012).

[4] Such a 'critical recalibration' has been widely explored by Awan, Schneider and Till in their seminal publication *Spatial Agency* (2011), and explicitly evoked by Boano and Hunter (2013) in relation to the practice of design.

(Burns and Kahn, 2005, *inter alia*) to articulate possible routes to more inclusive and responsive forms of urban development that are grounded in the nuances of context-specific claims and socio-spatial configurations. In this way they also foreground the possibility of engaging with informal realities as a way of addressing the concrete needs and aspirations of urban dwellers, as well as of revising the cultural influences, political pressures and economic dynamics that operate on local contexts at various scales – at the city as well as the national and global level.

This multi-scalar yet locally grounded foundation of the critical interface between architecture/urbanism and 'informality' brings with it a number of characterising features. In forging a tentative landscape of practices it is proposed here that these can be roughly schematised as follows: a strong sense of situatedness; the capacity to advance reframing diagnoses and produce new knowledge on the existing; and an attention to built environment transformations as open, iterative and dialogical processes. An initial act of profiling such key characteristics might allow for defining a minimal navigational route into this emergent disciplinary landscape.

The notion of *situatedness* focuses on the possibility of explicitly engaging with architectural practice as a means to work with and within informality, or better, with and within the complexities, tensions, constraints and social struggles that materialise in specific informal urban environments. This idea radically moves away from the familiar world of pre-conceived formal assumptions and from an uncritical faith in both disciplinary expertise and the potential of building-oriented interventions, to rather highlight architecture as a reflective and investigative spatial practice. It furthermore emphasizes space, and therefore the disciplines that act upon it, as dependent on a multiplicity of forces, relations, actors, and forms of knowledge, which 'professional knowledge' can in turn potentially engage in dialogue with, harness, and finally amplify – as Criqui's examination of the infrastructural networks of Lima evidently suggests later in this volume.[5]

It is also argued that for architectural practice to be able to meaningfully engage with the multiple levels and dimensions of urban transformation that impact on local contexts and vice versa, it needs to be able to critically examine the constraints and opportunities that the wider context presents, and produce new knowledge through a question-posing, *reframing* approach that questions not only physical reality, but also its multiple material and immaterial connections to individual lives and

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[5] Laure Criqui, '*New Planning Tools? Extending Water and Electricity Networks in Irregular Settlements of Lima, Peru*', in this publication.

preoccupations, local as well as global social structures, decision-making processes, ecological fluxes. This point stresses design thinking as a means to deepen and rearticulate problems, and research and analyse the socio-spatial processes of the production of urban environments. It is this form of design thinking that informs, for instance, the work of d'Auria and De Nijs on the Michenzani blocks in Zanzibar, and their compelling account of the processes of re-appropriation to which these have been subjected since their first construction.[6] This point thus foregrounds the possibility to use design creativity, imagination and craftsmanship as a means to generate frameworks for understanding that question and eventually challenge routine and dominant discourses on the city – rather than operating through problem-solving mechanisms (be they micro or macro) that fail to confront the 'business as usual'.

Finally, the dimension of *dialogical processes* refers to the notion of urban transformations as interactive and collective processes – 'shifting from the idea that only architects are involved in the creative production of the urban environment' (Awan et al., 2011: 28). The emphasis here is two-fold. On the one hand, the embracing of spatial modifications as dialogical processes points to built environment interventions as a collective operation that necessarily takes place through negotiations or deliberation: be it implicit, taking the form of informal appropriations and modifications of urban spaces, or explicit, through the positing of planned transformations within the city's political arenas. On the other hand a dialogical understanding of architecture and urbanism implies the recognition of the radical discursive potential of spatial visions and actions, and of the contribution that the projection of possible future scenarios can bring to the dialectic dynamics of building the city (Viganò, 2010, *inter alia*). Within this stream of work, different experiences position the primacy of 'participatory design' as an activist practice, and a catalyst of social change (Frediani et al., 2011). Others, as Mendoza-Arroyo[7] in this collection, emphasize the notion of 'negotiation by design' (De Meulder et al., 2004: 194), and the role of the 'design project' as a broker for cross-scalar and cross-sectorial relations.

Against this background, it can be additionally argued that the tradition of architecture and urbanism offer a range of operative, methodological reflections that a critically grounded architectural practice might eventually draw from. In particular the methodologies of strategic urban

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[6] Viviana d'Auria and Annelies De Nijs, '*Crossover Modernisms: Life and Afterlife in Michenzani, Zanzibar*', in this publication.

[7] Carmen Mendoza-Arroyo, '*Socio-Spatial Assemblages: The Backbone of Informal Settlement Regeneration*', in this publication.

design elaborated from the eighties/nineties onwards by (among others) Joan Busquets, Manuel De Solà Morales, Bernardo Secchi, have interestingly included the notion of 'descriptive urbanism' as a mode of practice (Secchi, 1992; Corboz, 2001; Dehaene, 2002), and more recently of 'mapping' as a form of reflective architectural and urban design intervention (Corner, 1998; Shannon, 2008, 2009). As formulated by Ilaria Boniburini (2013), 'mapping' the path to urban transformation involves, first and foremost, understanding the nature of the contemporary patterns of urban development. In a similar direction, descriptive urbanism offers a view of architectural and urban projects as a form of design-based engagement with the city that is grounded in the overt critical understanding of the existing. It might thus be argued that a recalibrated toolkit of descriptive urbanism intersects large-scale readings of urban morphologies, material resources, actor dynamics, and deliberative processes, with the bottom-up reconnoitring and recognition of places and the individual and collective practices and struggles that shape them. As it surfaces from the work of Khasawneh and De Meulder[8] on the patterning of urban and open spaces in Amman, this approach to urban design practice is underpinned by an understanding of 'design' as a simultaneously research-based and creative act that is grounded in exploration and critical reflection.[9] Such practices thus mix large-scale, top-down cartographic readings of physical and environmental structures, with an exposure of the ways in which space is conceived, used, and appropriated by powerful actors as well as 'ordinary citizens'.

It is exactly the often-contradictory interplay between these different dimensions of analysis that might eventually allow for overtly revealing – and thus openly engaging – cross-scalar conflicts in the use of space, as well as in its perception, envisioning and planning. Likewise it is in these maps, diagrams, and talks that an attempt to critically challenge the status quo might be grounded, to eventually question abstract urban design themes and ready-made solutions, as well as self-contained understandings of specific localities. Therefore while the by-product of these explorations might be an enhanced understanding of layered coexisting urban dynamics, it is in the context-specific manifestation of their reciprocal frictions and resistances that the ground for understanding the nature and

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[8] Joud M.I. Khasawneh and Bruno De Meulder, '*Chequered Urbanism: Confrontations Between Culture and Economy in Urbanising Amman*', in this publication.
[9] The exploratory potential of architecture has been widely addressed in the volume *Atlas. Geography, Architecture and Change in an Interdependent World* (Tyszczuk et al., 2012).

spatiality of contemporary urban development is defined, as well as for leveraging on local agencies to further alternative urban imaginaries and production processes. Such understandings will have considerable implications for the character, articulation, and potential outcome of any interventions.

4. Rescaling architecture: Addressing change

The points discussed here, as well as many of the essays contained in this first section of the book, allow for an insight into the ways in which questions of societal embeddedness are addressed by an emergent constellation of practices and reflections in the fields of architecture and urban design. In this manner, they highlight the potential for an approach to architecture and urbanism that transcends the boundaries of object-driven interventions, and possibly expands the notion of architectural practice to include a wider set of spatial interrogations, mappings, localised actions and site-based conversations, which leverage on a designerly understanding of urban reality to generate multiple means of operating transformatively in a spatial context. This suggests the possibility of defining a trajectory of critical engagement with the sites of 'urban informality' not only through a continuous process of analysis of the wider socio-spatial conditions in which the built environment develops, but also through a radical expansion of the operative possibilities of architecture and urbanism (Awan et al., 2011).

At the same time, however, the practices and projects mentioned so far in this introduction, as well the papers in this collection, do not converge on a unitary nor explicit idea of what constitutes a desirable urban future, nor on the trajectories and mechanisms that might eventually lead to building a 'better city'. Nonetheless it seems possible to argue that they all align or connect to wider calls for new types and modes of urbanisation, new socio-ecological and political-economic relationships (Harvey, 2003; 2008), which aim to confront the exclusionary 'generic' and 'world-class city' visions of neoliberal urban development, and the globally diffused predominance of profit-oriented practices of production of urban space.

As highlighted by Heynen and Wright, the socio-spatial articulation of alternatives to neoliberal development paradigms and tools across the urban South, including 'an on-going interest in David Harvey, Manuel Castells, and the legacy of John F.C. Turner', has largely remained outside the focus of mainstream architecture theory, but has nonetheless informed the work of many politically oriented architecture-related authors and practitioners (Heynen and Wright, 2012: 42-43). Their work primarily

relates to a larger resurgence of questions of democracy, equality, recognition and inclusiveness in urban studies, and particularly to the increasing centrality of the debate on the right to the city among urban social movements, organisations, and urban scholars.[10] In her recent introduction to the volume *The City as a Common Good*, Kigali based urbanist Ilaria Boniburini (2013) has traced a comprehensive topography of the concepts and urban experiments related to this notion. Pointing toward the on-going repositioning of planning disciplines around the concept, Boniburini articulates Lefebvre's definition of the right to the city into different base components: the right to *appropriation*, the right to *participation*, the right to *public space*, and the right to *pro-poor welfare state*. Furthermore, she introduces the distinction between 'urban practices' and 'urban imaginaries' as a means to clarify the aims and methods of different 'counter-hegemonic socio-spatial projects' that invoke radical changes in contemporary urban contexts by operating, respectively, on the discursive and the material level. Whereas imaginaries refer to 'comprehensive and multidimensional projects stressing social relations, urban organization, rights, and ecology by highlighting principles and approaches', practices 'give account of procedures, tools, knowledge and actors involved in specific localities' (Boniburini, 2013: 24-27).[11]

It is from within this debate and against this background that we would like to return to our initial question, concerning the ways in which architecture and urban design can potentially operate beyond the contingency of localized interventions in informal urban areas, and contribute to enabling wider processes of urban socio-spatial change. As a definite operative path in this direction does not obviously exist, the focus of interrogation is particularly set as to how this has been done in specific localities, and the mechanisms and operative frameworks that might allow for examining change, and planning further action.

Of course there are no easy answers and/or recipes to this question, but it can be argued that strategic spatial planning and strategic urban design literature and practice can possibly suggest a loose framework to monitor

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[10] This refers to the notion of the 'right to the city' as coined by Henri Lefebvre (1968), as well to the manifold related conceptualizations that have spurred from this notion, particularly over the last two decades.

[11] The experience of HIV and AIDS policies in South Africa shows how crucial the articulation of spatial imaginaries is for operating transformatively, and being able to push for substantial changes in urban development patterns. See: Colin Marx, '*The Spatial Imaginaries of Informal Settlement, HIV and AIDS, and the State in Southern African Cities*', in this publication.

and examine the outputs and outcomes of 'recalibrated' architectural and urban design projects – ones that are grounded in the critical understanding of architecture's societal embedding and multiple authorship, while also pointing to the construction of alternative modes of production of urban spaces. In her examination of the transformative capacity of 'strategic action planning' in cities of the global South, noted urban planner Caren Levy (2007) defines 'three related conditions to support a process of social change': synergy between civil society, private and public sectors; a multiplier effect in the impacts of planned actions on the social and material dimensions of change; a capacity to expand the room for manoeuvre. Similarly, urbanists De Meulder, Loeckx and Shannon (2004) outline the base qualifiers of 'strategic urban projects' as: the capacity to link, mediate and organise multiple actions and actors; structural impact and leverage effects; feasibility, visibility, and innovation. Although directed to profoundly different and at points divergent fields of knowledge and practice, both approaches engage with strategic spatial planning debates (Healey, 1997; 2007; Olstrom, 1996, *inter alia*) to articulate urban transformations that draw from the 'intelligence of place' and the ingenuity of local contexts to produce multi-dimensional transformations across multiple social and geographical scales. Drawing from these debates, it is argued here that at least three main components can become relevant to the definition of an architecture-oriented framework of analysis. These are illustrated through a number of cases – each not necessarily comprising all these features, but rather allowing for the clearer definition of some.

The first component is defined as *disruption.* Disruption is about the centrality of innovation, and the capacity for identifying and multiplying 'anomalies' in the on-going processes of production of urban environments. A focus on anomalies is a means to take a critical view on normative values and standard procedures, in order to propose drastic alternatives to the status quo. Thus disruptive socio-spatial projects do not avoid nor cover but rather emphasize discontinuities, vexed questions, contested spaces and spatial tensions (be they latent or manifest), as a means to draw attention to the existing cracks or gaps in the dominant forms of urban transformation, where possible ways to do things differently can potentially insinuate and expand. By stressing these fissures, disruptive projects operate as skilful deceptions – allowing insights into the existing windows of opportunity for doing things differently, and thus into the possibility of fostering transformative change.

Probably among the most explicit examples of this approach is the work of the Belo Horizonte based group MOM, Morar de Outra Maneiras,

whose 'design interfaces' draw from the informal production of space in *favelas* to re-shape the links between 'expert' architectural knowledge, and the necessity-driven, self-organised practices of building in informal urban settlements (MOM, 2008). Or in the interventions of Estudio Teddy Cruz along the US-Mexico border, which capitalise on the ingenious ways in which informal settlements 'creatively reuse waste materials and make flexible spaces' (Awan et al., 2011: 144) to suggest new ways of inhabitation, and critically re-map the politics of inclusion-exclusion and the polarization of formal and informal systems across the North-South 'political equator' (Cruz, 2005).

The second component that needs emphasising is *overlay*. This echoes the possibility to leverage on spatial interventions as a means to generate previously unforeseen connections across multiple actors and actions within the city. For urban change to take place 'at scale', transformations necessitate negotiation and deliberation across different socio-political-economic agendas: in this sense, overlaying projects are capable of capitalising on anomalies and tensions to generate forms of temporary alliance or 'periodic consensus' (Levy, 2007) among otherwise diverging interests and questions. This is something that many transformative spatial practices have in common: an urge to acknowledge the layered coexistence of conflicting agendas, and at the same time a pulse for the production of possible – however temporary – overlaps, by generating time- and space-limited solutions that cut across multiple sectorial divisions and link/ mediate/ confront/ organise multiple actors.

The community-led redevelopment of the Talbiyeh Palestinian Refugee Camp in Jordan dramatically shows a most interesting exploration of 'overlapping agendas' in contexts where spatial interventions are charged with multiple political and cultural questions. This open-ended project aims to overcome the limitations of aid-driven, top-down planning and ad-hoc physical interventions, and explores an alternative spatial development process where questions of shelter/infrastructure provision, physical decongestion, and poverty alleviation are tackled at once – simultaneously furthering the construction of long-denied, participatory decision making arenas where refugees' voices can finally emerge and find new, emancipatory articulations. At the same time the project of Talbiyeh draws attention to the fragility of this kind of process, due to its intertwining with the extreme set-up of the geo-political and economic parameters within which all actors involved in the project operate (UNWRA, 2012).

The third feature or point of attention is the capacity for *reverberation*. Reverberation is about the capacity of projects to have a leverage or multiplier effect, and to produce structural impacts on the material as well

as organisational and institutional dimensions of urban transformations. It might consist of broadcasting alternative forms of knowledge and production of urban spaces, which implies, for example, channelling the practices and bottom-up solutions enacted by 'ordinary citizens' and grassroots organisations. Reverberation comes as well from explicitly seeking key, fundamental changes in the realm of physical relations – in the ways in which buildings and urban spaces are materially built, organised, and occupied. Or from pursuing profound changes in social and organisational structures: for instance through the introduction of new and collective forms of design, ownership and management of built spaces, that might eventually have an impact on ordinary planning standards and norms. A key component of this aspect is thus the setting of precedents, and the pragmatic generation of concrete, specific examples of how things can be done 'otherwise'.

The activities of the Indian Alliance of the urban poor and particularly of SPARC[12] and the women organisation Mahila Milan in Pune, 180 km south east of Mumbai, India, clearly illustrate this point. Here, among other activities, the organisations leveraged on a collaboration with the architecture platform Urban Nouveau to develop an incremental housing strategy to be piloted in the upgrading of the Yemeranda neighbourhood. As anticipated by Appadurai (2001) in his seminal text, *Deep Democracy*, the Yemeranda pilot project concretely shows the Alliance's capacity to steer institutional change through setting precedents: in this case, a house design developed by dwellers, that responds to collectively negotiated design principles, and can be built cheaper than public or private agencies. With its impacts extending far beyond its acclaimed morphological components, this project, as many others by the Alliance, demonstrates the possibility to use concrete built environment interventions to negotiate recognition, political support, and finally changed urban policies at scale.

In conclusion, this framework allows for putting into focus the manifold possibilities offered by a thorough revision of the ways in which we define the intersections between architecture and urban design, and the contexts of informal development – recognising some aspects of informality as respected and relevant, resisting and challenging others, attempting to generate transformative linkages at scale. These experiences

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[12] SPARC, the Society for the promotion of Area Resource Centres, is an Indian NGO founded in 1984 to address urban povery in Mumbai. Together with the women organisation Mahila Milan, and the National Slum Dwellers Federation, it forms the renowned Indian Alliance, linking to the wider coalition of Slum Dwellers International (SDI). A compelling account of the Alliance's struggles and urban strategies can be found in Appadurai, 2001.

and the papers included in this collection thus help us not only to enrich our understanding of the interface between 'informality' and architecture/urbanism, but also to question the ways in which such disciplines conceive and define notions of 'urban change' and 'scale': notions which, in light of the complex negotiations that any transformation of the built environment implies about cultural, economic, political matters, continually call for revised conceptualizations.

5. Six investigations

The following section of the book begins with the chapter '*Practice in the Mess of Informality*', reporting a transcript from the keynote speech given by Nabeel Hamdi during the conference '*Cities to be Tamed? Standards and Alternatives in the Transformation of the Urban South*'.[13] Drawing from extensive practical and teaching experience, Hamdi explores here some of the complexities challenging architects, urban designers, planners and other built environment specialists working in urban development, particularly in light of the growing inequalities wrought in cities across the globe by neoliberalism. From within this framework of understanding, Hamdi exposes the shortcomings of unquestioning, problem-solving approaches to 'informal' urban environments, basing his thorough revision of urban development practice on the examination of two interrelated issues. The first refers to the notion of 'becoming strategic'; the second concerns the meaning and organisation of place and what he defines as the 'sociable side of practice'. According to Hamdi, the challenges of supporting enduring change in informal urban contexts can be articulated into a number of components, primarily revolving around the necessary re-articulation of what is meant by 'change', and the centrality of backward reasoning: meaning that new ideas, sites of knowledge and transformative strategies can surface in practice, without a preponderance of planning. Reasoning backwards is implied by Hamdi to be a more effective means for finding a generative way forward, with significant improvements to the quality of place. This notion is reinforced by what he presents as the 'PEAS' agenda: 'four integrally related sets of actions vital to good development practice: Providing, Enabling, the capacity to be Adaptive, the capacity to Sustain' (Hamdi, 2010: 141). By delving into these points, Hamdi finally highlights how a change in urban development processes requires a change in the

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[13] Nabeel Hamdi was amongst of the keynote speakers invited to the conference. Other keynote lectures were given by Bruno De Meulder and Erez Tzfadia.

logics of professional engagement with space and place, as much as a change in the norms and procedures of urban development planning.

Running throughout Hamdi's text and this collection is the conviction that informal urban settlements emerge in intersection with wider social-cultural-political-economic contexts, which are in turn experienced, and contested, locally. However, the definition of the interactions between global, national and urban processes with local histories and (material) cultures often remains ambiguous in disciplinary discourses and practices. In the second and third contributions of this section, d'Auria and De Nijs, and Khasawneh and De Meulder attempt to unravel aspects of this relationship with reference to the nuances and complexities of two very different cases.

In their contribution '*Crossover Modernisms: Life and Afterlife in Michenzani, Zanzibar*', Viviana d'Auria and Annelies De Nijs question our presumptions regarding the ties between the architectural production and the cultural construction of meaning, by exploring the patterns of occupation of a modern architectural icon. Taking up the heritage of Garth Myers, they focus their attention on the case of the Michenzani blocks in Zanzibar, calling these 'an archetype of colonial urbanism'. Here, in the course of the 60s, 'native' settlements were erased to make way for this centrepiece of newly established infrastructural systems and urban structures. The authors point out that these developments were couched in a rhetoric of radical 'urban re-foundation', allowing the symbolic affirmation of the rising socialist state. Yet while at first glance the urban remaking of Zanzibar seems to be an outright annihilation of the 'vernacular landscape' in favour of a radically 'political' one, it turns out that the out-scaled functionalist intervention of the Michenzani blocks has also given way to spatial appropriations of all kinds – triggering a variety of emancipatory practices that have deeply transformed the intended nature of the buildings. Most interesting in terms of the trajectory of this collection, is the authors' preoccupation with the ways in which such practices of inhabitation are intertwined with individual and collective histories and material cultures, as well as with the freedoms and restrictions offered by the given context. Thus following the way in which individuals and families have (or have not) found ways of negotiating their life trajectories within the blocks of Michenzani, the authors highlight the way in which a myriad of interconnected actions have unpredictably broken down a monument of international modernism into an intricate living mosaic – thus telling the story of a 'cultural reversal' moving from the top-down to the bottom-up.

The following chapter of the section, '*Chequered Urbanism: Confrontations Between Culture and Economy in Urbanising Amman*' by Joud M.I. Khasawneh and Bruno De Meulder unravels yet another facet of the interplay between local and global cultures, socio-political-economic pressures, and diverging agendas which inform contemporary urbanisation processes. The authors' view particularly emerges from the careful observation of the layered drives for both urban transformation and open space conservation in the city of Amman, Jordan, and their subsequent impacts on the patterning of urbanisation. The focus of attention is placed on the city's fragmented urbanised landscape, which is commonly associated to the dynamics of 'sprawl' and low-density urbanisation, and is labelled 'chequered' in this contribution. Focusing on the neighbourhood of Al-Sahel, the chapter develops through a methodical mapping of urban patterns and material conditions to eventually uncover the veiled societal and political forces at play in the production and reproduction of this specific urban form. These forces derive from a variety of parallel processes: the political and economic circumstances governing the region, referring to Amman's continuous absorption of waves of refugees and returnees who seek protection from political disruption; the legal and procedural aspects that steer the city's development, including the dominant role of the private real estate sector; and finally the local social and cultural values that connect people and places, with a focus on the nomadic traditions of land conservation. By deciphering the interplay of these diverging forces, the authors conclude that the case of 'chequered urbanism' in Amman stimulates a radical shift in perspective – challenging the usual understanding of urban development as a process of urbanisation, in favour of a perspective where un-built spaces are also termed as manifestations of the interplay of local and cultural values with the speculative process of urbanisation itself.

The following two contributions in this section take up the politics and practices of intervention in informal settlements, and their connections to locally produced spaces and social relations – taking two different stances on the methodological tools to put in use.

Carmen Mendoza-Arroyo is interested in the intersection between urban design and community dynamics in the *in situ* upgrading of informal settlements. In dialogue with a wider array of upgrading projects taking place in informal urban settlements throughout Latin America, her contribution '*Socio-Spatial Assemblages: The Backbone of Informal Settlement Regeneration*' particularly addresses the opportunities and limitations of an urban design practice that is grounded in the recognition of existing relations of support and reciprocity, as well as of the multiple

forms of collective organisations which are found in these contexts. The chapter draws from Kim Dovey's examination of 'socio-spatial assemblages' to define residents' place-making activities as the backbone of informal settlement regeneration. In this manner, it aims to explore the possible interplays between bottom-up/community-led and top-down/technical methodologies for a successful regenerative outcome that goes beyond the limitations set by the formal-informal dichotomy. The 'integrated approach' to upgrading advocated by Mendoza-Arroyo is articulated in a number of steps. The first one is based on mapping – encompassing both participatory mapping techniques and an investigation of the larger morphological and ecological structures that form context to the community. The second step is aimed at making more visible the existing patterning of infrastructures and collective and shared spaces within a community, and projecting the ways in which these could inform the upgrading process. Finally the third step focuses on particular localities within the community, and foregrounds the design of specific public-space interventions as a basis for initiating the wider processes of upgrading. Thus Mendoza-Arroyo aligns with a wider call for 'integrated approaches' to the upgrading of informal settlements, capable of accompanying physical interventions with a reconfigured engagement between communities and city authorities, and based on the interaction between the physical and social singularities of informal urbanism with principles of strategic urban design.

Following this chapter, Laure Criqui examines the potential revisions of urban planning procedures in the context of informal settlement upgrading, departing from a different perspective. Her contribution '*New Planning Tools? Extending Water and Electricity Networks in Irregular Settlements of Lima, Peru*' investigates the role of services and infrastructures in the consolidation of the city's irregular settlements. As a starting point, Criqui questions once more the notion of the informal city as being approximate, unstructured, 'unplanned'. In Lima, the design and realisation of water and electricity networks in irregular settlements is indeed based on the orchestration of technical and political arrangements that are by no means rough or naive. As sophisticated as more conventional urban planning tools, they nevertheless differ from the latter by being extremely flexible and context-specific: following the rapid expansion of settlements in the peripheries of the city up to its steep hillsides, such arrangements literally stem from the ground, constantly adapting to changing needs and capitalising upon local abilities, material practices, and social networks. The provision of water and electricity in the irregular settlements of Lima hooks on the heritage of a formerly

official document – the 'layout plan' – which consists of a basic descriptive map only subsequently detailed depending on necessity. No more than an operational device, the 'layout plan' challenges the formal determinism of the 'master-plan', inadequate to cope with the precarious and mutable nature of irregular settlements. Criqui's investigation concludes with a reflection on the shortcomings of Lima's experience, ascribable to the incapacity of the 'layout plan' to affect the city beyond its own local boundaries. Water and electricity networks are extended piece by piece, in the continuous effort to overcome landscape constraints and consolidate new neighbourhoods, without connections with the larger scale at which the urban region develops.

Finally, the last chapter of the section, '*The Spatial Imaginaries of Informal Settlement, HIV and AIDS, and the State in Southern African Cities*', discusses a further aspect of urban informality – thus opening the way to an entirely new set of questions on the agency of both space and spatial imaginations. Here, Colin Marx questions standard approaches in development planning by addressing a tragic facet of the informal city: namely the epidemics of HIV and AIDS. He articulates the failure of on-going development programmes vis-à-vis a matter of life and death, and highlights how analyses and programmes carried out and tailored from above do not grasp the material and immaterial relationships between health and poverty, nor the links between space and economic-cultural-social dynamics. Health, with particular reference to epidemics, is deeply grounded in the way cities develop. As a consequence Marx stresses the need to imagine a more 'horizontal', concrete and spatial field in which to read and implement new measures to address informal settlement, HIV and AIDS – altogether. The author thus develops a critique concerning the way the state calculates features of informal settlements, HIV and AIDS, normalising local specificities in order to 'vertically' address the phenomena. In this manner, he emphasizes the necessity to further new spatial imaginations and visualisations where different dynamics can be addressed in the interwoven relations.

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