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EDITORIAL

DIGNITY AND PLANNING: FRAMING THE ISSUE

The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted on the world’s population in unprecedented terms, both with regard to its economic and socio-spatial implications. Social distancing measures and restrictions on the use of public spaces are permanently changing our relationships with urban spaces. Space also represents a crucial dimension in the construction of policies for preventing, managing, and contrasting the spread of the virus.

Urban studies have often faced the challenges raised by health emergencies, natural disasters, and traumatic events, seizing the opportunities and need for radical rethinking of spaces and the processes that govern them. The spread of Covid-19, with all its consequences, requires us to imagine new urban structures capable of dealing with pandemic and post-pandemic contexts, and also to overcome some structural contradictions and injustices that characterize the current urban neoliberal regime: in particular, the need to protect the health of both individuals and communities, the increase in socio-spatial inequalities and the importance of guaranteeing forms of participation in social life.

Human dignity is the key element in this debate. The redesign of spaces must take into account the changes triggered by the pandemic and must adjust its internal organization to the needs that arise from time to time, in line with the possibilities and risks associated with the so-called temporary urbanism. In order to achieve this goal, the active participation of the population in the co-construction of common spaces can allow to strengthen a relationship of trust (which is generally compromised in times of crisis) with the institutions, and represents an opportunity to reactivate those forms of participation in social and political life without which the city would be deprived of its true essence, and people would be deprived of their dignity.

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, and according to a debate promoted by Benjamin Davy, we decided to have a special issue of the Transactions of the Association of European Schools of Planning on the intersections of human dignity, planning, and urban spaces. The articles in this special issue were written before the pandemic emergency, but nevertheless make a significant contribution in reflecting on the mutual relationships between human dignity and control of spaces, in ordinary as well as extraordinary times.

In his contribution, Benjamin Davy explores connections between human dignity and planning, with the aim of highlighting the implications of plans and policies not just on social equity but also on the respectful treatment of human beings. A constant tension exists between notions of human dignity and social justice. Consequently, planners must not assume that equitable plans make everybody forget about human dignity. The question remains as to on which level planners should pursue human dignity.

The paper of Mee Kam Ng and Winnie W. S. Mak describes literature on spatial development for people’s multifaceted well-being and the rights to the city, and argues for people’s right to live a life with dignity in cities, in order to identify how we can build ‘dignified’ cities. Multifaceted well-being concerns not just the satisfaction of bodily needs but also the nurturing of good nature and human relationships in space and places. In order to achieve this goal, we need to examine ‘claim rights’ in spatial development for human flourishing, and to negotiate and review in a political arena whether the key governance regimes related to spatial development are contributing to human flourishing and ask pertinent power-related questions.
The paper of Balkiz Yapicioglu, Konstantinos Lalenis, and Charalampos Tsavdaroglou discusses how the complex issue of post-traumatic housing triggers spatial self-organization by the refugees, in contrast to the ‘official’ ones provided by the state, through the lens of the resilience theory. Through the analysis of the two cases of Athens and Thessaloniki, the authors highlight that the post trauma self-organization of mobile populations is a process that involves gaining dignity and self-respect in a new and often hostile environment.

The notion of public space as the space of democracy is the focus of the contribution of Sabine Knierbein, Jeffrey Hou and Angelika Gabauer. This paper examines the role of public space in reclaiming and reinstating democracy. By drawing on empirical findings from cities worldwide, the paper argues that the study of urban protest shows directions for new, dignified politics of public space and highlights how planners and designers may be able to contribute to the spatial emergence of human and civic dignity. The paper demonstrates that, in light of diminishing democratic institutions, spaces of resistance have a crucial role to play not only in holding state and governmental institutions accountable to people’s interests but also in renewing and reclaiming democracy and pursuits of civic dignity.

The paper of Alcestis Rodi explores signs of dignity as well as planning and designs for disability in history. It seeks to establish new urban forms and introduce transformations that not only meet minimum requirements for access but also maximise possibilities for disabled people beyond the dichotomy of private and public realms. In order to develop this theoretical framework, case-study typologies of apartment buildings and urban tissues in Athens are comparatively analysed and evaluated through dignity and access-related criteria. Through an intense description of the case studies, the paper acknowledges that designing for disability is fundamentally a dignity issue, and gives examples of best practice for planners, designers, developers and policy makers.

The paper of Elizabeth Wyckaert, Hans Leinfelder, and Pascal De Decker describes public policies for refugee housing in Belgium. Describing the different phases of these policies, the paper focuses particularly on the reception phase, and suggests that there is a need to invest further in integration, in the light of the theoretical concept of path dependency. Through qualitative research, the contribution highlights the impact of asylum policies and the spatial characteristics of reception centres on the flow towards more permanent housing. Through the description of the case study, the paper makes a connection between the right to housing and notions of human dignity.

All these papers reflect profoundly on the concept of human dignity, and its implications for more sensitive planning. Other questions and reflections are still to be discussed and analysed, also in the light of the recent pandemic phenomenon, but the collection of papers of this special issue represent a strong first contribution to the debate.

Francesco Lo Piccolo
Guest Editor of the Special Issue ‘Planning for Dignity’
The tragedy of Antigone revolves around the theme of conflict. Both the version written by Sophocles and the one by Jean Anouilh are mainly focused on conflicts. The conflict between Antigone and Creon is real and symbolic at the same time. It is the conflict between a woman’s body and the law, between women’s and men’s conditions, between two anthropologies. It is also a conflict between two opposite ethical perspectives, and two opposite political visions. It is the conflict between the rule of individuals and the rule of laws, between non-violence and violence, social responsibility and individual egoism, and self-identification and identity. The conflict between Antigone and Creon is the heterogeneous sum of many conflicts. If we try to fit all conflicts within a broader framework, we could say that Antigone’s choice of disobedience raises the high-level conflict between human dignity and the law. This conflict takes place within the positive law and cannot exist outside it. Human dignity cannot elude the law, since it is rooted within the legal system. It does not, however, originate from it, but its finalisation is actually in the law; where gaps and fallacies are revealed. Its strength lies in the lack of a definition. Human dignity helps the law to regenerate and not become locked in a formal stronghold.

Antigone disobey ‘the power’ openly. Civil disobedience has moral strength because it is on the same level as human dignity. Civil disobedience is rarely a zero-sum game. Its ethical justification lies in the fact that it is thought and used to expand the boundaries of protection of human dignity. Disobedience, non-violence, and human dignity are profoundly unrelated.

All real and symbolic conflicts between Antigone and Creon are intertwined. In every conflict, either one of the two parties stands up for human dignity. Or, looking at it from a different perspective, it is human dignity that qualifies one of the parties in the conflict, ethically.
All conflicts that arise from the tragedy can be put together in one single meta-conflict between human dignity and the reason of the State, which is normatively coded. Antigone has set the individual against the State: the dignity of Polynices on one side and the city of Thebes on the other. The dignity of one person is the dignity of everybody. The dignity of an individual cannot be sacrificed in the name and by reason of the State. Similarly, the dignity of the worst of criminals cannot be sacrificed in the name of collective security. When human dignity becomes a regulatory principle and is no longer a principle of moral guidance for individual action, it clashes with some rules; it solves the dichotomies otherwise embedded in legal systems and becomes the pillar of the system that legitimates power. The human dignity of Polynices, traitor to his country, is worth more than the reason of the state of Creon.

Antigone refuses the way of salvation offered by Creon, and by doing so she protects the founding and non-mediatable value of human dignity, even with respect to the needs of decent politics. As a result, the conflict becomes even harsher and more relevant. Human dignity in the constitutional state of *jus post bellum* eliminates the dichotomies that inevitably arise between security and liberty. Human dignity, as Kant understands it, is humanity, that is the non-degradation of the person to a thing. It is a threshold that cannot be crossed by the law or by the power of punishment.

2,500 years later, we still reflect on law as opposed to dignity, and on the relationship between dignity and rights.

References to human dignity are now frequently heard in public forums and debates, particularly in defence against violations of the conditions of freedom, and justice, and in protests against humiliation. The content of dignity, as well as of felicity, cannot however be defined.

The notion of dignity, despite general agreement on the value of the idea, is frequently criticized for its lack of conceptual clarity, and openness to misinterpretation. Often dignity is seen as serving merely as a rhetorical device in political debates, ‘something of a slogan in bioethics’ (Sulmasy, 2008), and as a camouflage for quite different values in legal documents.

In every attempt to define it, we lose something that undeniably belongs to it. If we refer to fundamental human rights, we run the risk of forgetting that human dignity may act against its own interests, identify with others, and take on responsibility for the good of others. If we refer to the capacity for moral action and focus on the values of independence and liberty, we inevitably overlook other important human goods such as knowledge or avoiding suffering, without which dignity is wounded. If we look for dignity in the excellence or fullness of human fulfilment, we no longer recognize the dignity of the poor, the sufferer, or the child. Unlike rights, dignity intended as fulfilment is not the same for all, because it depends on recognition by society and on how every person uses his/her own natural endowments and social roles.

One way or another, there is a striking temporal dislocation between the history of human rights dating back to the seventeenth century and the relatively recent currency of the concept of human dignity in codifications of national and international law, and in the administration of justice, over the past half century (Habermas, 2010).

Modern human rights law emerged at the end of the Second World War in response to the atrocities and massive violations of these rights witnessed during the conflict. It is an interesting fact that it was only after the Second World War that the philosophical concept of human dignity, which had already existed in antiquity and acquired its current canonical expression in Kant, found its way into texts of international law and recent national constitutions. Only during the past few decades has it also played a central role in international jurisdiction (Habermas, 2010).

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) signed in Paris on 10 December 1948, was promoted by the UN to be applied in all member states. It is a code of ethics of great historical significance. For the first time the Universal Declaration enshrined the rights of people universally – in time and space. The Declaration is the result of a century-old political and cultural debate, which stemmed from conventional European ethical principles and the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America. Most of all it took inspiration from the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen written in 1789 during the French Revolution, and incorporated its foundation principles – civil and political rights of individuals – to a great extent.
The four pillars of the UDHR are dignity, liberty, equality, and brotherhood. Dignity protects the values shared by all individuals, irrespective of religion, ethnicity, or gender differences. Liberty refers to the rights associated with individual freedom and security of the person. Equality is intended to guarantee the right to participate in politics and public life for all people. Brotherhood, lastly, refers to economic, social, and cultural rights.

Most international and national Charters of Fundamental Rights such as the Universal Declaration, European Charter, Italian Constitution, and other constitutions refer to the principle and theme that human dignity is inviolable and will be respected. This is the affirmation of the common belonging to humanity, while highlighting the need for protecting and respecting the person, all and every individual as such.

In addition, many international organizations promote respect for dignity. The major conventions of the United Nations on the Rights of Children (1989), the Rights of Migrant Workers (1990), and Protection against Forced Disappearance have all included references to dignity (McCrudden, 2008). The idea of dignity also provides the rationale for the 2007 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The concept of human dignity is also part of dialogues and policies of health care, especially ones addressing the needs of the seriously ill and end-of-life care. For instance, the WHO declares that ‘patients have the right to be treated with dignity’ (van der Graaf and van Delden, 2009, pp.152).

The increased usage of this notion has been mirrored by the publication of several works on dignity’s conceptual history and its numerous meanings (Iglesias, 2001; Dworkin, 2006; Waldron, 2007; McCrudden, 2008; Nussbaum, 2008; Habermas, 2010; Kateb, 2011; Sensen, 2011).

If we wish to define dignity and grasp its potentials, we should consider it as a bridge between past, present, and future. Dignity is a bridge to the past that we do not want to forget – memory is a right and duty for every and all individuals –, but that we want to reject explicitly. We assert the need for protecting dignity and recalling it since memory, unlike history, belongs to the heart and not only to the mind. By doing so, we establish as a key component of our identity that what Europe experienced with extermination and concentration camps shall happen never again (Misztal, 2012).

Dignity is not only a bridge to the errors and horrors of the past. It is also, and most of all, a bridge to the concerns, anxieties, and many fears of the future. A bridge to a situation that holds several risks, which may be different from the ones that led to the dangers and events of the past, but are equally and potentially harmful to the integrity and identity of the person, and thus to human dignity.

The notion of dignity has also come to play a central role in human rights regulations and laws because today we are faced with challenges to our expectations of equality brought about by the process of globalization. In other words, the notion of dignity in the context of globalization provides the basis for criticism of global inequalities.

Let us consider features of globalisation and the post-global age such as market size and the illusion that self-regulating markets reconciling all the interests at stake can protect dignity. We have nurtured this illusion but have already understood that it is a misconception. Suffice it to think of the difficult compatibility between the market logic and the goals and needs of sustainable development, or even of the alarming perspectives of the current economic and social crisis associated with the extreme and exacerbated financialization of the economy. Recent examples include the mortgage crisis, and the derivatives crisis which created the conditions for a global crisis. Notwithstanding the economic and financial profile, it is here that new attacks to dignity may be perpetrated through/in the deterioration of the logic of market and profit.

The theme of human dignity was addressed in different ways by the constitutions of the European countries, sometimes with a more general and abstract approach, and sometimes in a more tangible way. The first article of the German Constitution is about human dignity, which is recalled explicitly, in a general sense, as a value to be respected and protected, and from which all the other fundamental rights originate. This is pretty obvious and understandable, since the German people wrote the Constitution in the aftermath of Auschwitz; they had a duty to assert human dignity, emblemsically, as the precondition of all human rights.
The same idea underlies the ‘hope for a European Constitution’ which was translated into the Constitutional Treaty. The Treaty was signed by all EU Member States in 2004, but was not ratified by some of them and was even opposed by others and eventually replaced by the ‘simplified’ Treaty of Lisbon. The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union was part of the Constitutional Treaty and is explicitly recalled in the ‘simplified’ Treaty. Dignity is put in the very first article which states that human dignity must be respected and protected.

Other constitutions, including the Italian one, are more pragmatic and concrete. In these the concept of dignity is not identified and defined a priori, or used as a way of introduction to the given constitution. Rather, it is assimilated in a number of practical points, using a tangible, less abstract approach to dignity.

Used literally, the word dignity – ‘dignitas, dignus, decet’, ‘it befits’ – is an ambiguous concept. It can be either a value judgement on a person’s qualities, or a more general value judgement on the qualities of all and everybody.

In fact, the first meaning expresses the inequality between those who have more dignity and those with less dignity; between those having more nobility titles and those having fewer. Inequality is inherent in this concept. The second meaning, in contrast, refers to the dignity of everybody. It is the same for all, because it is inherent in human nature. It expresses a value of equality. This is obviously the basic concept we should start from, as well as the underlying concept of art. 3 of the Italian Constitution – equal social dignity –, art. 1 of the German Constitution, the preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and art. 1 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

From an individual perspective, equal dignity means that ‘all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights’, as the Universal Declaration reads. Dignity is, therefore, the foundation of all human rights and represents them all; it is inviolable and must be respected and protected in every human being. It is a part of cosmopolitan human rights discourse which recognizes a stranger as a member of the human family whose inherent dignity proceeds from the Kantian idea of the ‘common possession’ of the earth and is the essential part of democratic egalitarianism (Misztal, 2012).

From a relational perspective, dignity becomes tangible. Everyone of us has the right to be respected by others, irrespective of any differences. ‘Human dignity’ performs the function of a seismograph that registers what is constitutive for a democratic legal order, namely, just those rights that the citizens of a political community must grant themselves if they are to be able to respect one another as members of a voluntary association of free and equal persons (Habermas, 2010). Many scholars concerned with multiculturalism, such as Kymlicka (2009) and Raz (2001), point out that difference can be respected, and solidarity across differences can be achieved. They see multiculturalism as developing a sense of shared community and promoting mutual respect. While acknowledging that respect for human dignity is a central moral duty, this understanding of the potential of multiculturalism, or respect for difference, acquires a high status as the basis for a new kind of civil solidarity.

From this point of view, dignity is at the core of equality and non discrimination among people. It is the foundation of what is considered the duty for States and third parties to abstain from attacking people’s dignity. Nonetheless the negative element of abstention cannot be sufficient unless it is doubled by the positive element of effectiveness. Proclaiming dignity and fundamental rights is not enough. Constitutions and international charters proclaim dignity and rights, but they remain mere words on paper. Such solemn proclamations are too often ineffective against the violations of dignity and human rights that are perpetrated when human rights are not actually guaranteed in a positive manner.

In the public sphere, the principle of human dignity, understood as the universal value that belongs to every person by virtue of being human, is also frequently associated with the call for social justice. This association between dignity and justice is illustrated by a common justification for welfare policies to treat all citizens as part of a more inclusive national order that distributes rights and recognition. Studies of social movements document how protest and resistance activities ‘assert claims to dignity’ (Auyero, 2003, p.10), while descriptions of social marginalization show a ‘search for respect’ and ‘the struggle for dignity’ (Bourgois, 2003, p.2) to be the ultimate human need.
Last but not least, dignity is equality and liberty, as well as solidarity. Dignity cannot exist without solidarity and, in this case, unlike the relationship between dignity, equality and liberty, there is no ambiguity to be resolved. The theme of solidarity is today of great importance, especially in large urban areas where inequalities are growing due to social polarisation, and the emergence of new poverty.

It is the new infection of poverty, and in these days part of the Italian population is sinking below this threshold. Levels of inequality, along with income, are indicators of social impoverishment. The re-proletarianization which is today affecting part of the middle class along with the pandemic have an impact on social differences and transform them into inequalities. Existing disparities are exacerbated and all this results in general upheaval.

Let us think about the fear of the virus that spread in Italian jails, which are overcrowded with 121.75 inmates for every 100 places, and with 94 cases already, plus 204 police agents. Let us think about irregular migrants who are like phantom lab animals exposed to infection in illegal slums. We should also not forget the 50,000 homeless people who sleep in the entrances of banks of the volunteer doctors who look for them and check their body temperatures at night.

All this affects the relationship between us and space. Space, and public space in particular, is no longer accessible by everybody, but subjected to rules and restrictions. The said rules and restrictions prevent a free use of space and the freedom of interaction. In the most extreme cases, human dignity is undermined. ‘Distancing’ is not a friendly word. It recalls all or almost all expressions of surliness such as ‘stay in your place’, ‘give me some space’, ‘get your hands off me’ and many more used to prevent undesired promiscuity. ‘Distancing’ affects our right to the city, impeding a full recognition of citizenship rights (Lo Piccolo, 2010). Our research work needs more reflection on the relationships between rights, dignity, and space. For example, as far as distancing is concerned, there is also a macroscopic factor which has been almost disregarded in the last few years. This is the demographic issue, the big absence of the third millennium. The geometrical progression of births, major medical advances, improved life conditions in Asia and Africa, urbanisation and megacities have resulted in increasing problems associated with overcrowding. The world is swarming with people as the global population nears 8 billion. But the physical space we have has not changed: it is our planet, a volume and a surface. Only about one fourth of it can be inhabited, as the remaining surface is covered by oceans and glaciers.

Still, the policy-makers of no country are addressing the issue of overpopulation. I wonder if now that we are forced to maintain a distance from other people, according to the rules, somebody will pay attention to overpopulation, to quantity, which is first and foremost a physical rather than an ethical issue. It however anticipates and influences every thought about quality, which is nothing but the dignity of living in the world.

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HUMAN DIGNITY:
IS THERE A PLACE FOR IT IN PLANNING?

Benjamin Davy

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Abstract

Although human dignity has caught the attention of scholars in many different fields, planners remain unresponsive. Three reasons may be given for planners’ neglect of human dignity: (1) so far, nobody has inspired planners to cherish human dignity as a planning value or goal; (2) planners respect and protect human dignity, but do not use the term; (3) planners distrust values that are not too complex for laypersons. Two cases illustrate the possible consequences of ‘planning for dignity’ – the case of the knitting ladies of Blikkiesdorp (Cape Town), and the poor door controversy of 2014. The most important conclusions are that planners, in order to align their plans with human dignity (or ubuntu), must co-produce their selves within local communities affected by their plans. Moreover, planners must recognize the tension that exists between social justice and human dignity: A plan that is socially just can still be humiliating.

Keywords

Human dignity, housing, poor doors controversy, social justice, spatial injustice, planning theory, ubuntu

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Planners as Dignity Laggards

A Sad Observation

‘Spaces of Dialog for Places of Dignity’ – the motto of the 2017 AESOP (Association of European Schools of Planning) congress in Lisbon sounded very promising. The motto reflected Article 1 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2000/C 364/1) which declares that ‘[h]uman dignity is inviolable. It must be respected and protected.’ Would European planners be eager to share their ideas as to how they think that planning can fulfil this ideal? When I started with the preparation of my presentation, I already knew that planners are less interested in human dignity than, for example, scholars in the fields of political philosophy, human rights law, and health care. But then I learned an even gloomier truth: Planning literature is a dignity lacuna; planners hardly ‘do’ dignity.

Let me demonstrate by a simple word count what I mean. Admittedly, word counts are imprecise and of limited use. Results need to make an outstanding statement. Otherwise, the results cannot be accepted as based on evidence. In July 2017, I searched in two databases: Taylor & Francis Online (T&F) and SAGE journals. T&F publishes Planning Theory and Practice (PTP) and the Journal of the American Planning Association (JAPA), SAGE publishes Planning Theory (PT). I searched for articles mentioning ‘(human) dignity’ in the title, the abstract or anywhere in the text. My electronic search found 20 PTP articles, 20 JAPA articles, letters to the editor or book reviews, and 28 PT articles or book reviews which contained the word ‘dignity’ at least once. Typically, the texts mentioned ‘(human) dignity’ in passing. Removing the name of each journal from the electronic search of the publishers’ databases (i.e., searching all journals) yielded a different result. T&F has published more than 94,000 articles that contain the word ‘dignity’ and 426 articles with ‘dignity’ in the title. SAGE has published more than 51,000 articles that contain the word ‘dignity’ and 405 articles with ‘dignity’ in the title (see Table 1).

As I have been interested in human dignity, spatial planning, and land policy for some time (Davy, 2014; 2015; 2017; 2019a), the survey proved disappointing. Planners receive little inspiration from the treatises on humiliation and the decent society (Margalit, 1996), poverty and homelessness (Waldron, 1991; Finley, 2003; Nickel, 2005; Walker et al., 2013), or constitutional dignity clauses (Liebenberg, 2005; Ackermann, 2012; Barak, 2015). Why do planners fail to engage with human dignity, a topic that obviously has a significant impact on the substance and process of planning? The Lisbon book of abstracts for the 2017 AESOP congress (motto: ‘places of dignity’) emphasised the critical importance of the question. Of about 1,000 abstracts submitted and accepted, only four papers had ‘dignity’ in their title (Ferreira et al., 2017).

Three Possible Explanations

As can be expected with each value-laden concept, no undisputed definition of human dignity exists. The winner of the Philosophical Quarterly Essay Prize 2004 defined human dignity with a view to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR):

1 Planners and similar policymakers engage in urban design, regulatory planning, land policy, informal planning, place making, city marketing, real estate development, landscape preservation, environmental protection, economic development, transport planning, or any other activity with public purposes in mind that aim to protect and improve urban and rural spaces inhabited by human and non-human animals. Planning theory examines what planners and other policymakers are doing and if they could do it better.
Human dignity is subject to a variety of discourses which pursuit different purposes and apply different methods. Important discourses dealing with human dignity include human rights law, constitutional law, political philosophy, sociology, bioethics, and health care (Düwell et al., 2014; McCrudden, 2014). In each discourse, some formal elements of human dignity are accepted. Human dignity is frequently considered to be universal, inherent, inalienable, unconditional, and overriding. Human dignity is universal because it applies to all humans, not merely to citizens, a single sex, or high-ranking individuals. Human dignity is inherent to being human, not acquired by merit or chance. Human dignity is inalienable because nobody can lose their dignity either by the actions of others or by their own doings. Finally, human dignity is unconditional because nobody has an obligation to do or omit something in order to acquire or maintain their human dignity. Human dignity is overriding because no higher value exists (Riley and Bos, n.d., 3.b.ii).

Human dignity hardly became a topic of public policy before the UDHR was proclaimed by the General Assembly in Paris on 10 December 1948 (GA resolution 217 A). Yet, even after its 70th anniversary, the UDHR principle of human dignity is still of little interest to spatial planners. The preamble of the UDHR starts with the ‘recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family’ and continues with reaffirming the faith of the ‘peoples of the United Nations ... in the dignity and worth of the human person’. Moreover, Article 1 UDHR asserts that ‘all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights’. Although human dignity has been slower in diffusing itself into public policy than equality, security, or liberty, 70 years have been enough time in many other fields to establish dignity discourses firmly.

Planners seem to be dignity laggards for three main reasons. First, nobody has inspired planners to cherish human dignity as a planning value or goal. Patrick Geddes, Le Corbusier, and Jane Jacobs did not ‘do’ dignity. In various fields – such as political theory, ethics, or law – discourses on human dignity are promoted by inspiring authors and their texts. With respect to human dignity, planners lack such an inspiration. Patrick Abercrombie, in his superb textbook on town and country planning, uses the word ‘dignity’ five times, yet only in phrases such as ‘dignity of a large central square’ or ‘dignity of city life’ (Abercrombie, 1959, p.25 and p.104).

Another possible explanation of the result of the dignity survey (see Table 1) is that planners do not use the word ‘dignity’ when they promote human dignity. The language of planning is teeming with nebulous terms (e.g., sustainable development, resilience, climate action, smart city). Since nobody knows (and many often do not care) what these words really mean, sustainability or resilience may contain a morsel of dignity. One of the most eminent theories of human dignity, contained in Avishai Margalit’s The Decent Society, uses the word ‘dignity’ infrequently as he prefers to examine humiliation instead (Margalit, 1996). Although planners talk about neither human dignity nor humiliation often, perhaps they are interested (one could object) in respect, flourishing, self-efficacy, agency, autonomy, equality, honour, rank, or other concepts that could be used as a proxy. I dare to doubt the objection because planners do not bother with human dignity even if the law compels them to do so. German planning law, for example, specifically lists the municipal planner’s duty to ensure an ‘environment worthy of human dignity’ (menschenwürdige Umwelt; Section 1, para. 5, BauGB [= the German local planning law]). German planners are not inspired by this clause, however, and planning lawyers rarely guide them in its direction. Commentaries assert that pollution control would be important to ensure an environment worthy of human dignity (Battis et al., 2016, no.46; Söfker and Runkel, 2017, no.106). In a country with a federal constitution based on respect for, and protection of, human dignity (Article 1, para. 1, GG), the explicit goal of an environment worthy of human dignity has elicited amazingly little attention from lawyers, courts, and planners. The most popular commentary argues that Section 1, para. 5, BauGB demands that all cities be developed and maintained with a view to human needs (Söfker and Runkel, 2017, no.106). What a disappointment! Planners all over the world pay attention to human needs – whether they are prompted by a dignity clause or not. Human dignity must not be reduced to needs satisfaction, however, even if German planning commentators fail to see the point. Considering the meagre attention paid to human dignity and spatial planning in Germany (with a regulatory planning system explicitly promoting human dignity), it is plausible that planners hardly ‘do’ human dignity even if they are used to deal with a whole host of values and goals.

We respect a person’s dignity when we protect his life and agency and when we prevent others from imposing treatment that is severely degrading or unfair. (Nickel, 2005, p.394)
The third explanation relates to the fact that spatial planning is loaded with values. Although planners constantly deal with values, goals, and qualitative standards, there is no agreement on a canon of planning values (Thomas, 1994 and 2012; Campbell, 2002; Upton, 2002; Speak, 2012; Davoudi, 2016; Savini, 2018). Over almost 40 years casually observing planners, I have drawn some conclusions on planning and values that perhaps explain the result of the dignity survey (see Table 1):

- Planners seem to prefer ‘fresh’ standards (e.g., sustainability, resilience, responsiveness, liveability) to traditional standards (e.g., goodness, truth, honour). Social justice and economic efficiency are exceptions. The debate on the ‘just city’ (Fainstein, 2010; Soja, 2010) is vibrant as is interest in the efficient use of resources. Although fresh standards are added all the time, hardly anybody thinks human dignity is worth being concerned about.

- Planners prefer complex standards to simple ones. Balancing economic, social and environmental aspects to achieve sustainability requires a variety of skills that protecting human dignity does not. Laypersons often do not have these skills, and planners use their complex values as comparative advantage. Human dignity is not complex enough to be accepted by planners, whose interest would rely on the existence of a dignity matrix, dignity coefficient, or dignity algorithm. Though laypersons know when they are humiliated, they are intimidated by resilience, sustainability, and climate change. Surely, planners often deal with complex problems that defy simple solutions. Demanding that plans be non-humiliating (Davy, 2019a) sounds like a solution that is too simple and much less sophisticated than sustainable, resilient, carbon-friendly, and smart cities.

- Planners prefer standards they can control. Planners need numbers, geo-data, and colourful maps to explain their plans to stakeholders. Planners are reluctant to adopt any new standard which is difficult to quantify. Especially in the face of conflict, vague qualitative statements rarely help prepare or justify a contested planning decision. This is true for all normative standards, but human dignity is a particularly clumsy standard which tends to become rather personal (Davy, 2019a, pp.86-87). In many planning systems, humans exist as potential users of designated spaces, as households, as pedestrians, as commuters. Such existence is often reduced to numbers and almost always remains impersonal and anonymous. Considering real humans and their dignity can result in a planning standard that is too personal, too intimate, too tiny.

- International human rights law and constitutional law often regard human dignity as the supreme value. A supreme value is typical of religions or cults, but many planners are secular and reluctant to accept that a supreme value even exists. Planners seek to bring into balance conflicting values and prefer goals they can put to a proportionality test and balance with each other. A good plan often involves a multitude of welfare-enhancing trade-offs and compromises. A value that is absolute and resists trade-offs puts planners in a difficult position. Either they successfully repress that a case of human dignity occurs in the context of their plan or the mere fact that a case of human dignity exists already will dictate what their plan must say.

All three explanations of the result of the dignity survey (see Table 1) – planners lack the inspiration to cherish human dignity; planners promote and protect human dignity, but call it by another name; and planners dislike values which they find too vague and difficult to control – are plausible to some degree. Whether any of them, or all three, are correct, I shall not try to ascertain. None of my explanations would categorically clarify why planners are dignity laggards. Hopefully, the result of the dignity survey (see Table 1) does not prove planners’ hostility towards human dignity. I have not yet met a planner who claimed passionately that they would not rest until human dignity were entirely annihilated or, at least, severely reduced (and I have met many planners who claimed just that about environmental degradation, racism, climate change, or social injustice). I have discussed elsewhere why and how planners better avoid humiliating plans (Davy, 2019a). In the remainder of this paper, I shall discuss two cases of housing and spatial planning to find out whether there is a place for human dignity in spatial planning.

Two Cases of Housing, Spatial Planning, and Human Dignity

Planners as Villains: Blikkiesdorp

In order to prepare South Africa for the 2010 FIFA World Cup, the post-apartheid planners invented the
Symphony Way Temporary Relocation Area (TRA), a camp of about 1,600 units in the Delft area of Cape Town. The units are made of corrugated steel which is why the residents call the rows of bleak shacks ‘Blikkiesdorp’ (‘blikkie’ is Afrikaans for a small tin can). Initially, Blikkiesdorp was supposed to house a group of pavement dwellers in order to give visitors to the World Cup a good impression of the new South Africa. But as time went by and the temporary homes fell in disrepair, Blikkiesdorp became the permanent home of vulnerable and marginalised individuals.

An astute observer of South African society portrayed Blikkiesdorp in a book about a Somalian refugee:

Blikkiesdorp … has been described as Cape Town’s asshole, the muscle through which the city shits out the parts it does not want. That is about right. … It is the ultimate ghetto, its residents hemmed in by distance, by poverty and by their own personal histories. (Steinberg, 2015, p.xi)

Asad, the Somalian refugee in Steinberg’s biographical novel, operates a spaza shop (an informal convenience store) in Blikkiesdorp. Compared with the civil war in Somalia and the deprivation suffered during his flight, the xenophobia and violence perpetrated by Blikkiesdorp residents and gangs appear relatively harmless. Still, in the world after apartheid, a new scourge has emerged – xenophobia:

Perversely, xenophobia is a product of citizenship, the claiming of a new birthright. Finally, we belong here, and that means that you do not. (Steinberg, 2015, p.270)

Extreme poverty, the indignity of shared toilets, washing and cooking facilities, the remoteness of jobs and the unreliability of public transport, an extraordinarily high crime rate, and the prevalence of HIV threaten the everyday survival of Blikkiesdorp’s residents. After several attempts on his life, Asad ultimately relocates to the United States; most of Blikkiesdorp’s residents remain in a hell without hope.

In the Blikkiesdorp story, the planners are the villains. The spatial plan which created and located the Symphony Way TRA is based on exclusion by distance and invisibility. With regard to presenting the new South Africa in the best possible light to visitors of the 2010 FIFA World Cup, the plan was based upon utilitarian justice, the ‘greatest happiness of the greatest number’. Utilitarian planning often demands that in order to maximise public welfare some individuals or groups must suffer harm or inconvenience (Davy, 1997, pp.261-263). In the case of Blikkiesdorp, however, actions based upon utilitarian motives have flagrantly violated human dignity. The violation is not unlike the inhumane apartheid planning of segregated areas and townships. When I visited Blikkiesdorp in 2015, I was shocked by the carefully planned design of rows upon rows of boxes with wide open throughways between the rows (Figure 1) – an attempt to prevent the spreading of uncontrollable fire which so often occurs in informal settlements. But Blikkiesdorp is no informal settlement; its horror has been meticulously planned, including the ‘upgrade’ of public open space (Figure 2).

On the day of my visit to Blikkiesdorp, not only did I experience housing conditions in clear violation of human dignity, I also learned an important lesson about human dignity. I met with a group of women who called themselves the ‘knitting ladies of Blikkiesdorp’ (Figure 3). The knitting ladies defy spatial injustice by knitting blankets for distribution on Nelson Mandela Day. The group, I was told, had already been meeting regularly for several months. The blankets would be their contribution to the battle against the inclement weather on the Cape Flats during the winter season. The knitting ladies of Blikkiesdorp understood that human dignity is more important than allowing yourself to become a victim of spatial injustice.

2 See https://www.google.de/maps/@-33.9810184,18.6310054,831m/data=!3m1!1e3 (last accessed 1 June 2020).
Planners as Village Idiots: Poor Doors

In a 2015 article published in The Guardian, New York City councilwoman Helen Rosenthal praised legislation to end the poor doors’ tax break for developers as ‘a big win for dignity’ (Kasperkevic, 2015). ‘Poor doors’ is activist shorthand for the separate entrances that residents of affordable housing units must use in an apartment block which predominantly contains high-end apartments and a ‘posh door’ for wealthy tenants or flat owners. Depending on the housing system, various reasons for putting poor doors in an apartment building exist (Schindler, 2015; Arpey, 2017; Stahl, 2017). The basic rationale, however, relates to the pressure on developers and investors to provide a number of affordable or social housing units in a building where the tenants or condo owners of market-rated flats pay substantial fees for high-end opulence: 24/7 concierge and security services, rooftop swimming pools, fitness rooms, saunas, aroma management, and many other amenities not included in social housing projects. If the tenants of the affordable units had access to such amenities, they would also have to pay the service fees associated with the ‘posh apartments’.

Developers use poor door schemes to protect affordable unit tenants from excessive financial burden which would arrest the development of affordable housing in highly priced neighbourhoods. The poor door controversy involved, among others, real estate developments in Los Angeles (Branson-Potts, 2014), New York (Navarro, 2014 and 2015; Wirzbicki, 2014), Vancouver (Lee, 2015; Woo, 2015), and Washington, DC (Withnall, 2014). This ‘protection’ of residents in affordable apartments can be regarded as treating them as second class citizens, a practice which violates human dignity. Separate entrances to apartment blocks containing affordable
as well as market-rate apartments also instigated controversy in London’s East End. One Commercial Street was a prestigious project led by one of the largest real estate companies in the United Kingdom (Figure 4). It too had poor doors – something which stood in stark contrast with the following description of the project available on the developer’s website back in 2015:

One Commercial Street towers twenty-one storeys above Aldgate East like a blade of light, its glass fin protruding dramatically to add a sculptural quality to Redrow London’s first flagship development. (https://www.redrow.co.uk/london/developments/one-commercial-street#development-location; content has been removed from Redrow’s website; last accessed 30 April 2015)

In the poor doors story, planners are not villains, but village idiots. After all, planners had demanded from Redrow that a number of affordable housing units be included in the development. The tenants of affordable units pay much lower service fees than the tenants of high-end market-rate apartments. Separate entrances made separate fees possible (Figures 5 and 6), but resulted in a ‘poor door scandal’ (Aldridge, 2014). For some weeks, a group of anti-gentrification activists staged protests in front of One Commercial Street. One tenant described her experiences with the housing therein:

I am in need of some help so we accepted this flat but I have never felt so worthless. We aren’t allowed to use the main doors and there are always problems in our section, but we can’t go to the concierge. (Aldridge, 2014)
The affordable housing scheme applied to One Commercial Street and similar developments is supposed to serve social justice. To some, however, it is unacceptable that the families, who have secured an apartment in a highly competitive process, are not treated equally to their wealthy neighbours and made to feel ‘worthless’. From this perspective, poor door schemes violate human dignity.

Commercial Street is a rather rough, yet vibrant neighbourhood with lots of fruit and vegetable shops and small restaurants offering international cuisine. Its mostly two- or three-storey buildings are home to a culturally diverse (if not very wealthy) population. Historically, the area was famous for its markets, traders, industry, and Jack the Ripper’s murders. The street name has not been coined because of the real estate boom, but goes back centuries. It is ironic that a new development in a marginal neighbourhood raises questions of human dignity, but not the fact that London is marred by steep inequality between its residents and pockets of deep poverty. Still, the poor door controversy has hindered Redrow’s attempts to improve its image in London’s real estate market. The company has suffered a strong public backlash for following the terms and conditions of their planning permission without consideration of potential humiliation. Had the company and the city’s planners taken into account the possible conflict between social justice and human dignity, they could have avoided some of the bad publicity. Redrow has distanced itself from the controversy, renaming the market-rate part of the development ‘The Relay Building’, and the housing association part ‘Houblon Apartments’ with a separate entrance on Tyne Street (see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Relay_Building; last accessed 1 June 2020).

Planning for Dignity?

The two stories – Blikkiesdorp and the poor door controversy – are not ideal marketing material to explain the benefits of human dignity to planners. The two stories illustrate that human dignity does not need marketing, but understanding. Planning for dignity will be haphazard and marginal unless planners understand the many layers of human dignity. Discussing the two cases can be a beginning. Both stories illustrate that neglecting human dignity can make planners look really bad. Blikkiesdorp is a case of spatial injustice and the inability of Cape Town planners to support the FIFA World Cup without exposing vulnerable and marginalised populations to sustained indignity. The poor door apartments are about social justice, location, and the choices that planners (not the housing market) offer to low income households (not unlike the choice air travellers make when they book their seat either in economy or first class). A deconstruction of both cases will show, however, that neither the Blikkiesdorp nor the poor doors case must be reduced to a question of (in)justice.

Human Dignity as the Co-production of Selves

In a comment in The Guardian, the artist Ai Weiwei emphasised the continuous struggle for human dignity:

> When we abandon efforts to uphold human dignity, we forfeit the essential meaning of being human, and when we waver in our commitment to the idea of human rights, we abandon our moral principles. (Ai, 2019)

Throughout his comment, Mr. Ai highlighted threats to human dignity and human rights. In this sense, the Blikkiesdorp story is about a violation of human dignity because the residents of the Symphony Way TRA are denied an adequate standard of living and have little or no hope that their situation will ever change. But that is only one aspect of human dignity in this case. After all, the knitting ladies of Blikkiesdorp do not complain about violations of their rights. They meet for a good chat and a joint session of knitting, discussing local affairs as well as their knitting progress. The knitting ladies of Blikkiesdorp are using their dignity to overcome the despair and squalor associated with their housing conditions. In fact, they practice human dignity as a means of co-producing themselves. Their co-production fulfils an obligation towards the pitiful community of the least well-off.

In Western literature, human dignity is often associated with an individual right or, at the least, the legitimate expectation of every natural person that their human dignity will be protected and promoted. Article 1, para. 1, of the German Basic Law is an interesting example because this dignity clause has been used
In these cases, the German Federal Constitutional Court ruled on claims based on the right to the protection of human dignity: The claim of citizens to digital self-determination and digital autonomy, the claim of potential hostages not to be treated as objects, the claim of persons in need to receive social assistance. Similar claims are made when the right to human dignity is discussed from the perspective of Western liberalism.

But human dignity is not limited to raising claims based on individual rights. Human dignity is also an obligation. Many professions – such as emergency doctors, caregivers for Alzheimer patients, teachers of children with learning disabilities – require from their practitioners a profound dedication to the idea of human dignity as an obligation. Stevens, the butler from Kazuo Ishiguro’s novel The Remains of the Day, is a fictional example of this idea, because

‘dignity’ has to do crucially with a butler’s ability not to abandon the professional being he inhabits. ... The great butlers are great by virtue of their ability to inhabit their professional role and inhabit it to the utmost; they will not be shaken out by external events, however surprising, alarming or vexing. (Ishiguro, 1989, pp.43-44)

We have to admire Stevens for the strength he draws from his notion of human dignity which helps him overcome many of life’s obstacles. At the same time, we feel pity with Stevens, who loses his humanity whilst serving an abstract principle of human dignity (his ‘professional role’ keeps him from visiting his father’s deathbed and makes him entertain the follies of his master’s guests instead).

The contrast to the knitting ladies of Blikkiesdorp could hardly be greater. They do not serve an abstract principle, but instead they practice ubuntu. The word derives from the ‘Xhosa expression ‘Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu’, which means that each individual’s humanity is ideally expressed in relationship with others’ (Mabovula, 2011, p.40). The phrase sometimes is translated as meaning ‘I am because we are’ (Rider, 2016). Individual actions confer ubuntu on a person ‘insofar as they prize communal relationships, ones in which people identify with each other, or share a way of life, and exhibit solidarity toward one another, or care about each other’s quality of life’ (Metz, 2011, p.559). Ubuntu includes ‘greeting everyone, sharing, generosity, hospitality, good manners, respect and protecting one’s dignity and others’ human dignity’ (Mabovula, 2011, p.46). Human dignity is protected under Article 10 and several other provisions of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996). Due to this legal significance, the definition and delimitation of ubuntu and human dignity are a contested issue in South African jurisprudence (Cornell and Marle, 2005; Mokgoro and Woolman, 2010; Ackermann, 2012, pp.111-115). Justice Yvonne Mokgoro gave this widely accepted definition of ubuntu:

Generally, ubuntu translates as humaneness. In its most fundamental sense, it translates as personhood and morality. Metaphorically, it expresses itself in umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu, describing the significance of group solidarity on survival issues so central to the survival of communities. While it envelops the key values of group solidarity, compassion, respect, human dignity, conformity to basic norms and collective unity, in its fundamental sense it denotes humanity and morality. Its spirit emphasises respect for human dignity, making a shift from confrontation to conciliation. (Mokgoro J concurring with the majority of the South African Constitutional Court, The State v. Makwanyane, Case No. CCT/3/94, 6 June, 1995)

The concept of ubuntu has influenced constitutional case law and also permeates rulings on informal housing, land occupation, and eviction in South Africa:

The Constitution and [the Prevention of Illegal Eviction from and Unlawful Occupation of Land Act, 1998] confirm that we are not islands unto ourselves. The spirit of ubuntu, part of the deep cultural heritage of the majority of the population, suffuses the whole constitutional order. It
dignity, interpretations of human dignity emphasise the civil right of individuals to the protection of their human dignity, equality and freedom’ (Strauss and Liebenberg, 2014, p.435). But whereas many Western interpretations of human dignity emphasise the civil right of individuals to the protection of their human dignity, ubuntu seems to emphasise the fulfilling of community-based mutual obligations. Fulfilling these obligations creates the strength of the community not merely as the sum of each individual’s strength but as a source of energy in its own right. The contrasts between Figures 1, 2, and 3 reflect the strength of human dignity as engagement with the community and the co-production of selves (Speak, 2012). In this sense, the Blikkiesdorp story is mostly about the extraordinary power of human dignity. But what does it mean for planning?

Human dignity can give the strength to overcome, even if only for a moment, the humiliation caused by a spatial plan. This strength is surprising as well as impressive. Community planners are well aware of the problem-solving ability of close-knit communities. By participating in the co-production of selves, planners can become part of the problem-solving community. This, however, requires them to get involved with stakeholder groups that they, perhaps, do not consider very important. Are there other possibilities to tap into the strength accumulated by ubuntu? Once planners have realised that such strength exists, would it be acceptable for them to use it as a legitimation of their humiliating plans? Assume a planner or other policymaker who knows the strengths and weaknesses of the members of her community well (but prefers to attend to the needs of corporations and the government). She knows, for example, that the coalminers are proud of their tough labour even if it gives them lung cancer. She also knows that poor and extremely poor families can make do with smaller apartments because they huddle together during winter nights in their unheated homes. She also knows that children love French fries and Coca Cola much more than spinach and herbal tea. Being proud of one’s work, having close family ties, or enjoying your favourite dinner surely can be expressions of human dignity. But would it not be calculating if the planner withheld safe working places, adequate housing, or healthy food from the community because she is confident of the self-healing capabilities of its members? Asked like this, the question is easy to answer because calculating or predatory planning cannot be morally justified. The Cape Town planners and politicians cannot excuse themselves by pointing at the knitting ladies of Blikkiesdorp and their undaunted display of human dignity.

In many other cases of planning in the face of scarcity, the answer may not be so obvious. Needs must when the devil drives, and scarce resources compel planners to make tragic choices all the time. Why not base these choices on local knowledge and community experience? Spatial planning can – and must – account for the abilities, skills, needs, and aspirations of individuals affected by a given plan. Such considerations are calculating or predatory when the planners’ expectation of community action is used to justify an unjust and humiliating plan. Harmful plans do not become harmless because a planner expects the affected individuals to withstand the challenge, suffer the pain, and grow in the face of adversity. Expecting positive social skills must be a reason to help such skills expand. The strength flowing from human dignity may make a community resilient or creative, but it does not excuse unjust planning (Kaika, 2017, p.95; Davoudi, 2018, p.105).

One way to resolve the tension between local knowledge and predatory planning is to consider planners as members of the community who partake in the co-production of selves and of community. Still, the balance between predatory planning and making do with scarce resources is delicate. It is easy to imagine a conversation between the municipal officials and planners who were responsible for the World Cup in Cape Town. The conversation would have prioritised displaying South Africa’s achievements since the end of apartheid and the comfort of international visitors. The invented conversation would not have focused on the human dignity or ubuntu of homeless individuals, especially because the ‘mega-event syndrome’ makes cities or regions notoriously fail to align their grand aspirations with local needs (Müller, 2015). Even if Cape Town had engaged in a series of participatory events designed to improve decision-making (Kassens-Noor and Lauermann, 2017), several hundred pavement dwellers would not have swayed the minds of planners.
and other policymakers. The story of the knitting ladies cannot end happily because Cape Town planners and politicians still prefer to let the needy of Blikkiesdorp take care of themselves.

**Human Dignity versus Social Justice**

The housing projects involved in the poor door controversy have in common that the development of high-end real estate was connected to on-site affordable housing (Schindler, 2015; Arpey, 2017). The fact that poor doors are ‘reminiscent of Jim Crow segregation and symbolic of the increasing and perverse levels of economic inequality in our cities’ (Stahl, 2017, pp.530-531) also generates indignation. Planning literature has ignored the poor door controversy, but legal literature has not (Iglesias, 2015; Sheffield, 2015; Wittlin, 2015; Eagle, 2017; Stahl, 2017). Human dignity is a recurring topic in the poor door controversy, but it is neither central nor well-defined (Eagle, 2017, pp.131-132). And really, what is so humiliating about getting an affordable apartment in New York City or London? Affordable housing units in high-end apartment blocks in New York City or London surely cannot be compared to the pitiful containers of Blikkiesdorp. Kenneth Stahl asserts that the ‘challenge of inclusion’ demands that planners and other policymakers choose the right level of determining segregation and exclusion:

> [T]he likely alternative to the poor door was that the developer simply would not provide housing for low-income individuals in an affluent neighborhood at all, and then, instead of segregation at the scale of the development, there would be segregation at the scale of the neighborhood or the municipality. (Stahl, 2017, p.531)

The argument is hardly convincing. If human dignity is violated by excluding poor or minority residents from housing, scale does not matter. South African apartheid was not more acceptable because it was practised consistently throughout the country. The exclusion of poor and minority residents from the opportunities that housing markets have to offer would not be more or less acceptable if it was limited to certain buildings. Stahl’s argument is pragmatic, however, because he notices in the poor door controversy that exclusion is more problematic when it is imminent and visible than when it is hidden by segregating people into different places. It is discomfiting to face the reality of inequality and segregation on a daily basis. Moreover, it is possible that such visible segregation could stigmatize, and perhaps even traumatize, poor people in a way that neighborhood-level segregation does not. (Stahl, 2017, p.531)

The pragmatism echoes the approval that urban planning received from Thomas H. Marshall in *Citizenship and Social Class*, his famous work on legitimate inequality:

> When a planning authority decides that it needs a larger middle-class element in its town (as it very often does) and makes designs to meet its needs and fit its standards, it is not, like a speculative builder, merely responding to a commercial demand. It must re-interpret the demand in harmony with its total plan and then give it the sanction of its authority as the responsible organ of a community of citizens. … This is one example of the way in which citizenship is itself becoming the architect of social inequality. (Marshall, 1950, p.62)

Under the logic applied by Marshall, urban housing opportunities must be unequal unless poor households are to be excluded from living in the city altogether. Yet, if all households can find a home, under the same logic town planning can designate residential areas for wealthy households. Providing for unequal housing turns the planning authority into an ‘architect of social inequality’. From this perspective, the question planners have to ask themselves is whether sanctioning separate entrances for wealthy and rich residents in the same apartment block is a wise move for a successful ‘architect of social inequality’.

Richard Epstein, an eminent property scholar in the libertarian tradition, treats the poor door controversy as an example of the incorrect understanding that planners, policymakers and regulators have of market externalities:
The correct way to handle this situation is for the state to compensate (in cash) the developer for the losses attributable to these multiple impositions (i.e., inclusion of affordable units; BD), costs that are likely to prove so expensive that they will not be borne as the price is too high. A simpler scheme uses more efficient separation to provide low-income persons with payments that allow them to receive subsidized housing without disrupting the general practices, whose efficiency rationales regulators often fail to understand. (Epstein, 2018, p.1522)

Either by virtue of planning (Marshall) or de-regulated markets (Epstein), cities require a fair degree of inequality. If the poor can live in the same houses as the wealthy, they will either not be able to pay the rent or have to accept some humiliation. Whether this humiliation amounts to a violation of human dignity remains unclear. Some forms of humiliation are inevitable, but unless it violates human rights, an acceptable margin of humiliation exists (Davy, 2019a, pp.100-103). This is why air travellers can choose between economy or first class, and perhaps this is why somebody, who cannot afford to pay the market rent for their apartments, may be excluded from the rooftop swimming pool without violating their human dignity.

Using the case of air travellers helps explain what went wrong for the planners in the poor door controversy, and why the controversy teaches planners about the relevance of human dignity. Inequality to some degree is tolerable, even necessary, but it becomes dangerous if inequality is enjoyed by the privileged individuals in too obvious a way. Physical and situational inequality in air travel services can result in air rage (DeCelles and Norton, 2016, p.5590). Airlines create inequality by offering greater legroom and edible meals to passengers, who pay extra for the service. This inequality has to be designed carefully unless the airline is willing to risk repercussions from humiliated passengers. Inequality can increase an individual’s perception of being poor and excluded even if they are not (Payne, 2017, p.8). The humiliation created by a poor door arrangement is not reduced if the building is located in Central London or Manhattan. Planners in the poor door cases may be dedicated to social justice and affordable housing. Still, they allowed the developers to make them look like village idiots (what Epstein much more politely characterises as regulators who ‘often fail to understand’ market efficiency). It does not matter that the outcome is just if the process of delivering the outcome is humiliating. Planners must not assume that equitable plans make everybody forget about human dignity. In fact, a constant tension exists between notions of human dignity and social justice. Tenants of affordable housing units can feel as though they are treated as second-class citizens even if their homes satisfy the standards of adequate housing and social justice. Unnecessary bureaucracy, impolite caretakers, the haphazard disruption of services, or unequal treatment can affect human dignity. The perception of unequal treatment can instigate quite violent reactions. Such tensions in Germany and other European countries caused by actual or alleged differences in the treatment of the urban poor and refugees have shifted public opinion against helping others. The emergence and strengthening of right-wing political movements in Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Poland, and the United Kingdom can, to some extent, be explained as an unresolved tension between social justice and human dignity (Davy, 2019b). The same seems true of identity politics in the United States (Fukuyama, 2018, pp.22 and 37-49). The poor door controversy of 2014, in which planners and other policymakers neglected the difference between social justice and human dignity, foreshadowed what went wrong in the humanity crisis of 2015.

Conclusion

In the first part of my article, I discussed why spatial planners are dignity laggards. In the second part, and using unrelated examples, I demonstrated that there is a place for human dignity in planning. The question remains on which level planners should pursue human dignity. Legal debates in countries with constitutional dignity clauses prefer rather demanding concepts of human dignity (Ackermann, 2012; Düwell et al., 2014; McCrudden, 2014; Barak, 2015). A demanding concept sets a high threshold for recognizing a violation of human dignity. Constitutional dignity clauses are often demanding because their application is limited to, for example, the death penalty, torture, excessive use of tranquilizers by hospital staff, or indefinite solitary confinement. Demanding concepts of human dignity avoid conflicts over values, although they have (fortunately) little or no relevance in many everyday cases. But human dignity can also be conceptualised in ways that make it very relevant in everyday life. The ubuntu of the knitting ladies of Blikkiesdorp emphasises that human dignity is a
source of strength that planners, in a respectful manner, can use to garner support for plans made under the pressures of scarcity and austerity. The poor door controversy is interesting for planners not because separate entrances for wealthy and poor tenants inevitably violate human dignity, but because it occurred in a situation where planners thought they had been doing their very best to advance social justice. Planners must recognize the tension between social justice and human dignity: A plan that is socially just can still be humiliating.

Both cases provide lessons that cannot be learned as long as planners have no or only a demanding concept of human dignity in their minds. The planning of housing must not merely refrain from setting up conditions that are similar to a concentration camp. The planning of public space must not merely refrain from using arbitrary and violent police procedures. Private homes and public spaces are central to leading a full life worthy of human dignity, and planning must account for the wide variety of opportunities necessary to lead flourishing lives (Gilroy, 2008; Crawford, 2011; Alexander, 2018). A concept of human dignity with a low threshold can result in an increasing number of dignity conflicts. Think, for example, of the black junkie, the white guard, and the (First Nation) narrator in Sherman Alexie’s poem on open defecation in a shopping centre stairwell. All three feel that their dignity is compromised by what methadone, the job description of security staff, or the fear of being mugged forced them to do (Alexie, 2005). No constitutional court would consider the situation as a dignity case. Whose dignity anyway? But everyday life constantly makes us define our dignity as well as learn about the dignity of other humans in a negotiation process on paying respect and avoiding humiliation. In this sense, planning for dignity is a very human activity.

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THE RIGHT TO SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT FOR HUMAN FLOURISHING

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Abstract

This paper explores the literature on spatial development for people’s multifaceted well-being and the rights to the city, and argues for people’s right to live with dignity in cities. Nature and people-friendly spatial developments are fundamental to nourishing capabilities of human beings and realising their well-being. However, in reality, spatial developments are determined by legal planning and development regimes and socio-cultural discourses. These allocate different ‘claims, privileges and power rights’ to different stakeholders, and the results may not contribute to human flourishing. This paper attempts to synthesise an evaluation framework to achieve flourishing life with dignity in cities.

Keywords

Spatial development, human flourishing, right to the city

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1. Introduction

This paper attempts to synthesise two distinctive literatures relating to multi-faceted well-being and the rights to the city in order to identify how cities that allow people to live with dignity can be built. According to Kant, intrinsic dignity is ‘the absolute inner worth of a person’ (Horton, 2004, p.1084). Dignity is human beings’ rational ability to have ‘conceptual thoughts, deliberation and free choice’ and a natural capacity to shape our own lives (Lee and George, 2008, p.173). Dignity is the moral basis of our shared humanity (Sacks, 2002), the grounds for our autonomy and equity (Sulmasy, 2007, p.10), and full moral respect (Lee and George, 2008, p.191). Hence, when a rational person decides to treat people in a certain way, the very act pronounces his/her judgement on ‘the way people are to be treated’ (Rachels, 1986, p.123). Full moral respect for intrinsic dignity means taking concrete action – constrained by time, resources, and competing moral demands – to help others to flourish, ‘to become the best that they can become as human beings’ (Sulmasy, 2008, pp.28, 33). In other words, ‘we have an imperfect obligation’ to help the flourishing of others in order to realise our shared humanity (Sulmasy, 2008, p.28).

It has been argued that the way we plan, design, and build our communities has a profound impact on our physical, socio-economic, mental, and environmental well-being (Dannenberg et al., 2011; Barton et al., 2015). People’s right to the city, a right to change ourselves by changing the city (Lefebvre, 1991; Logan and Molotch, 1987; McCann, 2002; Purcell, 2002; Fainstein, 2010; Harvey, 2008), has also been explored. By investigating the relationships between the spatial environment and people’s multifaceted well-being, this paper argues that people’s right to the city is a right to shape spatial developments that enable human flourishing in recognition of shared human dignity. A synthesised framework is developed for people to audit their spatial environment, legal planning regime, and socio-cultural discourses to promote their rights. The following section reviews the literature on spatial development for human flourishing (multifaceted well-being) and the right to the city. Section three outlines and explains the synthesised framework, followed in section four with the conclusion.

2. The Right to the City is a Right to Live a Flourishing Life with Dignity

2.1. Spatial Development for Human Flourishing

In concluding a study on ‘healing places’, Sternberg (2009, p.291) argues that

we can create places that devour and destroy the environment and that in turn destroy us…
Or… we can… create places that help us to live in harmony with the environment and sustain our health.

Are we creating people and planet-friendly places, or are we continuing the construction of carbon-intensive spaces that bear huge environmental and social costs? The expanding literature on spatial experiences and people’s well-being seldom touches on issues of power. Those who lament the failure of existing cities to meet human needs and call for people’s rights to the city rarely invoke the rich literature on the importance of the spatial environment in multifaceted well-being (Lefebvre, 1991; Harvey, 2008; Sygranyes and Mathivet, 2010). In a world colonised by the ideology of neoliberalism, how can the construction of ecologically sound and people friendly cities be made mainstream? Purcell (2002, p.103) recommends a need to pay special attention to the use value aspect in the production of space. Similarly, Amin et al. (2000) demand spaces for the personal and social development of all citizens, allowing them to develop their capabilities, political judgement, and sociability. Nussbaum (1992) identifies two levels of capabilities. ‘Level one capabilities’ include the satisfaction of the basic survival needs of the body (such as food, water, shelter, mobility), mind (such as capacity for pleasure and pain, cognitive learning, practical reasoning) and social relationships (including affiliation with nature and others, to interact and play with respect and care) (Nussbaum, 1992, 1997). These are basic internal capabilities necessary for the development of more advanced ones (Nussbaum, 1992). ‘Level two capabilities’ include living a complete human life; having good health; avoiding unnecessary pain; using the five senses; loving, grieving, experiencing longing and gratitude; reflecting critically; living for and with others and nature; having fun; and living one’s own life in one’s very own context with rights to governance and material possession (Nussbaum, 1992, 1997). In other words, Nussbaum (1992) identifies two thresholds of human functioning: a threshold of
capability to function and a somewhat higher threshold that constitutes a good, sociable life which interacts with nature. Based on these, she appeals to individuals exercising their political judgement on ‘what social and political institutions are doing about them [nourishing people’s capabilities]’ (1992, p.214).

Although Nussbaum does not use the term ‘human flourishing’ and stresses that the capabilities listed are tentative and subject to ‘plural and local specifications’ (1992, p.224), she argues that human autonomy based on practical reasoning and affiliation with other human beings is key to what makes human beings human. According to Rasmussen (1989, p.94), a process of self-direction and self-perfection is indispensable to human flourishing; that is, we have to ‘use our own reasons and intelligence in creating, obtaining, employing, and using the needed goods of life’. This is indeed the essence of human dignity. To respect human dignity and to enable human flourishing, individual rights have to be protected, and the wider socio-economic and political context is the necessary moral territory or space (Rasmussen, 1989). Nussbaum (1997, p.293) argues that the provision of suitable external conditions for people’s development of internal capabilities and actualisation of potentialities should be ‘the goals of public planning’. However, unless we recognise dignity, the moral basis of our shared humanity, and treat humanity ‘as an end in itself’, we may not know how ‘to live together decently in the world’ (Nussbaum, 1992, p.205) taking morally required actions (Rasmussen, 1999, p.16).

Indeed, as early as 1946, the World Health Organization (2006, p.1) outlined, among others, the key basic principles for the happiness, harmonious relations, and security of all people:

Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity… The enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic and social condition.

This fundamental human right to well-being across a number of dimensions can be seen as another interpretation of people’s right to live a flourishing life with dignity. Positive psychologists argue that flourishing can be understood to be mental health and emotional vitality allowing a person to function positively in the private and social realms of their lives (Keyes and Haidt, 2003, p.6). Ghaye (2010) contends that positive emotions, positive engagement, meaning or purpose in life, and positive relationships enhance human flourishing. Keyes (2003, p.299) puts forward a schema to measure this multifaceted state of well-being (Table 1).

<table>
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<tr>
<td>Positive effect: regularly cheerful, in good spirits, happy, calm and peaceful, satisfied, and full of life.</td>
<td>Self-acceptance: positive attitude towards oneself and one’s past life, and conceives and accepts the various aspects of self.</td>
<td>Social acceptance: positive attitude toward others while acknowledging and accepting people’s complexity.</td>
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<td>Happiness: feels happiness towards the past or about present life overall, or in domains of life such as employment, marriage, and neighbourhood.</td>
<td>Personal growth: insight into one's potential, sense of development, and openness to new experiences.</td>
<td>Social actualisation: cares and believes that, collectively, people have potential and society can evolve positively.</td>
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<td>Life satisfaction: sense of contentment or satisfaction with past or present life, overall or in life domains (see above).</td>
<td>Purpose in life: has goals, beliefs that affirm sense of direction in life, and feels life has purpose and meaning.</td>
<td>Social contribution: feels that one's life is useful to society and that one's contributions are valued by others.</td>
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<td>Environmental mastery: has capability to manage a complex environment and can choose or create a suitable environ.</td>
<td>Social coherence: has interest in society, feels it is intelligible, somewhat logical, predictable, and meaningful.</td>
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<td>Autonomy: Comfortable with self-direction, has internal standards, resists unsavory social pressure.</td>
<td>Social integration: feels part of, and a sense of belonging to, a community, derives comfort and support from community.</td>
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| Positive relations with others: has warm, satisfying, trusting relationships, and is capable of empathy and intimacy. | | |

Source: Keyes, 2003, p.299.
The three types of well-being identified above are closely related to the organisation of one’s nested life domains – such as families, employment, and neighbourhoods – within the hard and soft institutions in a spatial setting (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). As argued by Barton (2015, p.13), there is no longer any doubt that spatial planning has a critical role to play in promoting health and well-being (Figure 1). Studies on the relationships between space and our multifaceted well-being are proliferating (Dannenberg et al., 2011; Barton et al., 2015). Green settings and natural environments have the capacity to alleviate mental fatigue and help restore concentration (Sullivan and Chang, 2011, p.106). Green design is beneficial not just to the health of people but also the earth (Sternberg, 2009). Families with steady jobs and good parental relationships, a stable community of friends and relatives, and supportive schools are crucial for nurturing children (Marris, 1998). Places designed to support physical activities and formal and informal social interactions help foster social networks and social capital accumulation (Eicher and Kawachi, 2011; Sullivan and Chang, 2011). The building of a community contributes not only to life satisfaction, but also to the psychological and social well-being of its members (Barton et al., 2015). As Friedmann (1998) argues, a good life is about the quality of human relationships. Moreover, Myers (1999) regards the association between relationships and well-being as a ‘deep truth’.

Safe communities with greenery, affordable housing, and good transport connections can be said to be more equitable and socially just places (Barton, 2015; Burton, 2015). Equitable places usually are more socially inclusive. Social inclusivity is important in helping people to work with one another, develop positive relationships, reflect on their purposes in life, and gain a sense of mastery over the environment. These are critical ingredients in
the maintenance of psychological well-being. Therefore, the social dimensions of people’s nested existence in space are extremely important in maintaining public health. Barton (2015) argues that strong social networks protect against both mental and physical illness. Walking in an aesthetically pleasing locale that enables social interaction will have significant impact on human flourishing (Barton, 2015).

2.2. The Right to Spatial Developments for a Flourishing Life with Dignity

This research works on the implications of spatial developments on people’s multifaceted well-being, and adds weight to the right to the city discourse (Gottdiener, 1985; Lefebvre, 1991; Harvey, 2008). There are many ways to define rights: natural or inalienable rights; general or specific rights; positive or negative rights; objective or subjective rights; liberal or communitarian rights; ethical, cultural, democratic, or human rights; and first, second, or third generation rights (Sandel, 1982; Waldron, 1993). Rights, like well-being, are conceptually multidimensional.

The right to the city can be conceived as a set of rights related to spatial development. This includes people’s right to nature; a socio-economic right to housing, transportation, and community facilities; and a right to use, design, and define public space (Attoh, 2011, p.675). It also includes the right to be accepted in an integrated community. David Harvey even argues for a right to reshape the process of urbanisation through the collective and democratic management of urban surpluses and resources (Harvey, 2008, p.27). This is similar to the advocacy for a process of ‘re-commoning’ (Gibson-Graham et al., 2013).

If so much research has been conducted concerning the importance of building people and planet-friendly places, then why are there not more spatial developments which promote flourishing and dignity? Part of the answer is that transformative actions are never easy. As argued by Giddens (1979, p.93), ‘social systems are constituted as regularised practices’ with ideologies serving the interests of the hegemonic groups. It is perhaps surprising that in a world with massive inequality, rapid degradation of natural resources, and a climate crisis, few consider ‘prosperity without growth’ to be a credible option (Jackson, 2017). Unless the right to live in a planet and people-friendly place which promotes flourishing life and dignity becomes ‘common sense’ and mainstream, legislation, policies, and planning regimes will continue to reproduce the status quo.

How can this right to a dignified life in cities be examined? Hohfeld was probably the most widely acknowledged expert in diagnosing the concept of rights (Hohfeld, 1913; Wenar, 2005). Wenar (2005, p.252) even argues that ‘all rights are Hohfeldian incidents’. To Hohfeld, there are four types of rights, namely ‘a claim, a privilege, a power or an immunity right’ (1913, p.552). He argues that ‘claim rights’ are a question of justice and policy, and that they inevitably impose a correlative ‘duty’ on somebody to provide the rights. ‘Claim rights’ are only one kind of ‘rights’. For instance, the opposite of a ‘duty’, in a legal sense, can be a ‘privilege’; that is, a ‘right’ to do things without interference (Cullison, 1967, p.568). The third and fourth kinds of ‘rights’ in the Hohfeldian framework are related to ‘power’ understood as power to change legal relations. If someone’s actions change their legal relationships with others, they can be said to have the ‘power’ to create ‘liability’ on other parties (Cullison, 1967, p.569). However, if an action has no impact on the legal relations, it is a case of ‘disability’. This means the other parties have ‘immunity’ as a kind of legal right in the Hohfeldian schema.

Hohfeld’s various ‘rights’ can be borrowed to better appreciate the complicated power relationships in the planning and production of the built environment. Existing soft and hard institutions, including the legal framework within planning and development regimes, distribute different types of ‘rights’ to different stakeholders. The distribution of rights may lead to ‘spatial violence’ (Lefebvre, 1991, p.282), often to the detriment of people’s health and well-being. A classic case is the forced relocation of incumbent residents in a redevelopment project. People may not have the ‘claim right’ to in-situ rehousing or a platform to negotiate their ‘privilege’ rights, neither may they have any legal power to reverse the decision. Yet, displacement disrupts people’s spatial and group identity, affecting their human functioning (Fried, 1963). Indeed, domination is often exercised through unquestioned decision-making practices within established institutional processes. As Lefebvre (1991, p.51) questions: why is protest left to enlightened, and hence elite, groups and why do the users of space usually remain relatively silent? When a community faces antagonistic ideological or cultural hegemony, two responses can be seen. For less combative communities, collaborative discourses may be invoked to plan and design spaces for people to use and enjoy. For those communities with no faith in the legal framework, protest movements and insurgent citizenship may
emerge (Lefebvre, 1996; Healey, 1997; Friedmann, 1998; McCann, 2002). Educating people via social movements or collaborative action about their right to a city that nurtures flourishing lives is the first step in exploring the legal and administrative means to reshape urban spaces.

3. A Framework to Evaluate the Right to Live a Flourishing Life with Dignity in Cities

The review of the required spatial qualities for people’s multifaceted well-being in light of Hohfeld’s four concepts raises a number of questions related to legal entitlements (‘claim rights’), platforms for negotiating ‘privilege rights’, and ‘power’ issues (distribution of ‘power-liability’ and ‘immunity-disability’ rights among stakeholders) – outlined in Table 2. As argued above, research has suggested a strong relationship between the different physical and social aspects of spatial developments and people’s multifaceted well-being. If this is the case, the extent to which people’s rights to human flourishing, guaranteed by existing policy and legal frameworks, are ‘claim rights’ needs clarification. As some of the rights are ‘privilege rights’ in the Hohfeldian sense (such as the right to reshape local space), other options – such as a negotiation platform – are required to resolve potential conflicts and reach consensus. The Hohfeldian schema also shows how a legal framework can allocate ‘power’ differently to (re)distribute liabilities, immunities, and disabilities among societal actors; creating institutional and legal obstructions to the production of a spatial development for or against human flourishing. An example would be granting power (legal rights) to private or public redevelopment agents to bulldoze a neighbourhood without providing in-situ rehousing for affected residents. The spectrum of community responses to such a situation can range from ‘silence’ (accepting the hegemonic discourse or ideologies) to transformation via existing structures (including communicative negotiation and collaborative practices) to antagonistic and rebellious action designed to reframe the skewed power relations embedded in the legal and redevelopment framework.

Table 2: Nested Spatial Rights to Multifaceted Well-being: An Evaluation Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Corey Keyes’ ‘Well-being’ Framework</th>
<th>Spatial Development for Human Flourishing</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Physical &amp; Emotional Well-being</strong></td>
<td>• Privacy within a household and a community (Burton, 2015) and affordable housing (Fainstein, 2010)</td>
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<td>• Biophilic design such as ‘blue-green infrastructure’ (a network of green spaces and water-related bodies) (Frumkin and Fox, 2011; Corkery, 2015)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Complete neighbourhood and streets (accessible, walkable, inclusive with ample public space) (Lynch, 1960; Feldstein, 2011; Sullivan and Chang, 2011; Barton, 2015)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Psychological &amp; Social Well-being</strong></td>
<td>• Family-friendly, inclusive, safe communities with different types of diversities (Warner and Rukus, 2013)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Using and shaping local spaces collaboratively (Gottdiener, 1985; Amin et al., 2000; Attoh, 2011)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Community building and staying (Douglass and Friedmann, 1998; Fainstein, 2010)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Inclusive and affordable mobility and accessibility (Fainstein, 2010; Ewing et al., 2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• An active local economy (Gibson-Graham et al., 2013)</td>
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**Rights-related Questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Claim Rights/Duty</th>
<th>Privilege Rights/No Right</th>
<th>Power Rights/Liability</th>
<th>Immunity Rights/Disability</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adequate ‘claim rights’?</strong></td>
<td><strong>Negotiation platform?</strong></td>
<td><strong>Who has what power?</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• What are the current policies and regulations regarding spatial developments for human flourishing?</td>
<td>What mechanisms are in place to encourage the evaluation of existing 'claim rights', to facilitate collaborative efforts (and to resolve potential conflicts) arising from the exercising of privilege rights by different parties in characterising and defining places for family-friendliness, the shaping of local spaces, and community building?</td>
<td>• Who has been endowed with power and liability or immunities and disability in the current legal and institutional framework in the provision/ non-provision of the above spaces?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Which kind of hard and soft institutional frameworks exist to provide the above spaces for multifaceted human functioning and well-being?</td>
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</table>

Source: Reflections and synthesis from the reference list.
The right to the city is a right to be in an environment that enables people to achieve ‘complete physical, mental and social well-being’ (WHO, 2006). In other words, it calls for a kind of city building for human dignity which places ‘the person as a source of moral values in the centre of any action’ (Friedmann, 1973, p.112). For physical and emotional well-being, privacy and protection from noise and unwanted intrusion are important. This helps to avoid stressful situations that may lead to social withdrawal, tension, and conflicts with family members or neighbours (Burton, 2015, p.151). It is, therefore, important for cities to provide affordable and well-maintained housing (Fainstein, 2010; Sullivan and Chang, 2011). The concept of biophilia – people’s affinity for nature such as water, sunlight, plants, and natural materials (Wilson, 1986; Frumkin and Fox, 2011) – is indispensable to people’s multifaceted well-being. Green settings help alleviate mental fatigue and restore a person’s capacity to pay attention (Sullivan and Chang, 2011). Walkable and safe neighbourhoods with shared public spaces such as parks, squares, and tree-lined streets can promote and enhance health-promoting social interactions. Frumkin and Fox (2011) even suggest that nature friendly communities yield co-benefits, such as more energy-efficient buildings, improved access to healthy food, and the conservation of natural resources. Lynch (1960) argues that a legible city with distinct landmarks and well-defined edges and pathways eases navigation in the built environment and enhances emotional security.

Psychological and social well-being demands not only biophilic design but also a sociopolitical environment that encourages sociability and nurtures political judgements. Lefebvre (1991, xxiii) argues that separation and the impoverishment of our everyday life has led to the loss of ‘human plenitude’ and a sense of alienation in cities. It is, therefore, necessary for people to reclaim space and to reassert the need for design according to the multiple purposes of social space in different cultural contexts. For Fainstein (2010), a just city is composed of affordable housing and no involuntary relocation; economic development providing public space and independent and cooperatively owned businesses; low intra-city transit fares; diversity; and ample varied and accessible public spaces. Amin et al. (2000) encourage active everyday citizenship. Through place-making and community building, people can accumulate experience in negotiating diversity and adversity, promoting personal growth, developing positive relationships with others, and learning mastery over the environment (Keyes, 2003). For Ewing et al. (2011), development density, diversity, design, destination accessibility, and distance to transit affect the physical, social, and mental health of residents. It is important to provide housing near jobs and prioritise compact urban developments that privilege non-motorised transportation. Gibson-Graham et al. (2013) reiterate the importance of an ethical economy that allows people to interact in person when making economic transactions, live together equitably, distribute surpluses to enrich people and the planet, and invest in future generations. More importantly, these purposeful actions for the larger social good promote multi-faceted well-being and help people flourish through self-acceptance, self-actualisation, and contribution – allowing them to have a strong sense of social coherence and integration (Keyes, 2003).

These spatial development principles are, of course, subject to ‘plural and local specifications’ (Nussbaum, 1992, p.224). How can we evaluate a planning regime’s ability to produce an enabling environment that allows people to flourish and live with dignity? The Hohfedian schema guides us to ask a number of questions. At their core lies Giddens’ (1979) conviction that social structures are historical in character and, in theory, mutable in form. However, everyday practices tend to naturalise (reify) the present and deny or obscure the existence of contractions in order to sustain the interests of the hegemonic groups. Hence, Giddens insists that ‘the chief usefulness of the concept of ideology concerns the critique of domination’ (1979, p.186). These questions are related to Lefebvre’s triadic spatial conception: geographical sites for action, a mental expression, and a social possibility of engagement in action (Gotttdiener, 1985).

The first set of questions is related to people’s ‘claim rights’. What are the planning rights of the people in the current planning regime? How do they compare to the spatial development principles conducive to people’s multifaceted well-being? What kinds of planning laws, rules, regulations, and institutional frameworks exist to produce these spatial settings? Of relevance are the soft institutional frameworks (including social norms, ideology, culture, and civic discourses). In theory, a claim right can entitle someone to protection against harm (Wenar, 2005). However, different planning regimes secure differential claim rights to their residents. Thus, questions concerning privilege and power rights are warranted.

Not every planning regime provides a negotiation platform to discuss privilege rights. As Alexander (2007) argues, political conflict and distrust for (and criticism of) authoritative action are omnipresent in stronger civil societies. In addition, McCann (2002) argues that people should have the right to invoke arguments and visions
that challenge ‘business as usual’. Indeed, rights are areas of struggle (Attoh, 2011) in which people learn to respect equality and one another’s dignity. People should be given opportunities to reflect on the adequacy of claim rights. They should also be able to demand privilege rights – such as right to make public spaces and healthy communities for the enhancement of human flourishing and dignity.

Power rights often determine whether a city builds places for people to live a life in dignity. For Lefebvre (1991, 1996), people’s spatial competence, that is, the ability to flourish, achieve, or live life fully is conditioned by one’s position within various power relations and decision-making structures. However, Giddens (1979, p.256) argues that power is ‘a resource drawn upon by agents in the production and reproduction of interaction to the structural characteristics of society’. As argued by Foucault (1979, p.26), ‘power is exercised rather than possessed’. These questions examine if the public realises the importance of the life enhancing qualities of biophilic and sociopetal designs in cities and whether they possess economic relationships governed by principles of justice and humanity (Marris, 1998).

4. Conclusion: Reshaping Spatial Development for Multifaceted Well-being?

Multifaceted well-being concerns not just the satisfaction of bodily needs but also the nurturing of nature and human relationships. Space is always a field of action (Lefebvre, 1991, p.191). Spatial development for human flourishing requires space to be used by individuals to enhance their functioning, develop their capabilities, and actualise their potentialities to produce ‘real wealth’ – the absolute worth of our shared humanity.

The Hohfeldian ‘rights’ framework offers three pathways to evaluate the state of spatial production in an urban context. The first is to examine ‘claim rights’ in spatial development for human flourishing – especially in terms of internal private space and affordable housing, local access to blue-green infrastructure, and complete streets and neighbourhoods. The relevant question is whether places are designed and managed to build sustainable communities, attracting people to mingle and interact in a natural public realm that is walkable and accessible, inclusive, safe, and fair with a vibrant local economy. It is about building communities to stay and last, not to be bulldozed for growth and profit making.

The second is a need to establish a multi-stakeholder platform for deliberation about the various ‘privilege rights’ issues in spatial development, an arena for us to exercise our obligation to help flourish one another as dignified beings. As argued by Sandel (2009, p.259), justice is ‘about the right way to value things’ in ‘a public culture hospitable to the disagreements that will inevitably arise’.

Third, an effective political arena is required to negotiate and review whether its key governance regimes related to spatial development contribute to human flourishing and ask pertinent power-related questions. These include ‘what are the current entitlements (‘claim rights’) for citizens in spatial development?’ and ‘are they contributing to people’s multifaceted well-being?’; ‘should there be plans to change such entitlements?’; ‘are the existing legal and regulatory frameworks allocating ‘power-liability’ and ‘immunity-disability’ rights in ways that allow people to develop their capabilities so that they can live a life of dignity?’. If not, the questions ‘what kind of roadmap should be in place to rectify the situation?’; ‘is there awareness of these power issues?’; and ‘are there plans to raise the awareness of such issues?’ become pertinent.

This multi-dimensional understanding of rights implies a need for a co-existence between two approaches to urban planning: result-oriented planning to distribute things in a right way (Rawls, 1999; Fainstein, 2010) and process-driven communicative planning practices which allow consensus to be built and compromises to be made in re-distributing ‘power rights’ in co-shared spaces (Healey, 1997; Sandel, 2009). As argued by Lefebvre (2003, p.59), ‘knowledge is theoretical, provisional, changeable and disputable’. Marris (1998, p.10) concludes that:
Planning, as an ideal of rational social intervention... is constantly seeking to translate the past experience of struggles, achievements and betrayal into social learning and hopefully greater justice!

Acknowledgement

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POST-TRAUMATIC SPATIAL SELF-ORGANIZATION OF MOBILE POPULATIONS

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Abstract

Since 2012, and particularly since 2014, instability and wars in North African countries and the Middle East have brought a wave of refugees, trying to flee from violence in their countries, to Europe. They usually go north, crossing the Mediterranean towards Italy, or the Aegean, going west to the Greek islands. In their quest for a safe refuge, a significant number drown or disappear. The rest reach in Europe carrying their traumatic experiences with them, and face immediate humanitarian needs. A major task for host cities is to provide shelter for the refugees, taking into consideration the influence of their psychological trauma on local societies. This complex task, which combines technical, economic, social, psychological, and political dimensions – simultaneously targeted on two social groups – constitutes the ‘post-traumatic urbanism’ which intervenes in the recreating of the refugees’ spatial and social networks in the host city. This paper discusses how the complex issue of post-traumatic housing triggers spatial self-organization by the refugees, in contrast to the ‘official’ provisions from host states, through the lens of complex adaptive theory (resilience). This article examines the features of refugee housing in Athens and Thessaloniki through qualitative research, quantitative methods and participatory observation. Through this study, it is highlighted that the post-trauma self-organization of mobile populations is a process of gaining dignity and self-respect in a new and often hostile environment, and a tool for spatial and social resilience.

Keywords

Refugee, post trauma, self-organization, host city

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1. Introduction: Overview of the Recent Refugee Problem in the EU

Housing refugees is a global concern, especially recently, with the increased refugee flows finding their way to Europe via ‘irregular’ and highly dangerous routes. According to the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), it is estimated that over a million people have risked such journeys between 2015 and 2017 alone. Consequently, the challenge for the EU is learning to cope with the crisis firstly from a humanitarian perspective, but also in terms of finances and organisation/management. Unfortunately, to date, the refugee situation remains an issue with tragic features, and as stated by United Nations (UN) even back at 1951:

…until an appropriate durable solution is found for them and refugees cease to be refugees either through voluntary repatriation or legal integration (naturalization) in their new home country, it is necessary for them to be treated in accordance with internationally recognised basic minimum standards (UN, 1951).

Under the regulation of EU directives, in particular Directive 2013/33/EU and Dublin III, refugees are initially detained in ‘Reception Centres’ in the receiving country and resettlement procedures begin – a process which can last for years. According to the EU’s legislative framework, member states can use detention to host, filter, and reject migrants. Detention is presented as a central tool in managing immigrants.

However, the growing number of refugees is straining local reception capacities and causing arbitrary detention in difficult conditions. The CMSI (Central Mediterranean Sea Initiative) action plan drafted in May 2015 also warns that the housing of refugees is one of the most important issues that needs to be resolved. A UNHCR (2018a) survey also indicates the seriousness of the matter – showing that the majority of refugees do not plan to return to their original country. Thus, they will require permanent accommodation. Managing this crisis is not an easy task for the host city, and it influences the spatial resiliency of both the city and the refugees, creating conflicts between the two.

Even though the detention of refugees entering a Member State (or anywhere else) should only be a measure of last resort under international laws and regulations, ‘the Camp’ is a reality that will likely persist owing to increased irregular refugee movements. The EU has been working to alter its laws to protect and provide for refugees, but the conditions in camps and their long-term effects on both refugees and their host cities are profound. As Simich and Andermann (2014) argue, these challenges ‘form a formidable barrier for resilience’ and constitute a challenge to human dignity.

This paper focuses on how refugees self-organise and create resilience within the urban fabric of the host city, and the importance of resilience in self-reliance (i.e. living with dignity). As was mentioned in the report of UNHCR March 2017 to the EU High Commissioner:

Both self-reliance and resilience build upon the resources and capacities of individuals, communities and States, with the objective of ensuring safe and productive futures for all those impacted by a crisis. Self-reliance can lead to resilience, while resilience is necessary to ensure that progress towards self-reliance is not eroded or reversed in the face of sudden-onset shocks and longer-term trends. (UNHCR, 2017)

Greece is the primary focus of this article. The country has been at the forefront of the refugee crisis, and only in 2015, 856,723 refugees and migrants crossed into the country (UNHCR, 2016), and particularly into its two biggest cities (Athens and Thessaloniki), which host the highest numbers of refugees. In March 2016, after passage through the so-called Balkan Corridor was completely blocked, followed by the agreement between the EU and Turkey (European Commission, 2016), over 60,000 people became trapped in Greece. Most of them were settled in 13 hospitality centres, run by the state, around Athens (about 15,000 people) and 17 equivalent ones in Thessaloniki (approximately 20,000 people). Although a small number of refugees are now being housed in rented appartments in the Athens and Thessaloniki agglomerations through the UNHCR’s ‘Temporary Housing of Refugees’ programme, more and more people abandon the camps and join in self-organised housing occupations at the centre of the urban fabric of the two cities.
The data relating to the existing refugee camps, the refugee self-organised housing, and the interviews with the refugees shown in the following sections of this paper and used as inputs in the analysis were collected and conducted during the period 2016-2018 – in the course of a post-doctoral research – and are recorded in Tsavdaroglou and Lalenis (2020).

2. Complex and Dissipative Systems

This study is inspired by the complex systems theory of Gunderson and Holling (2002) and the dissipative structures of Prigogine (1997). In their research, the self-organisation behaviour of the refugees is discussed within the concept of post-trauma urbanism. It looks at the refugees’ on the move spatiality as a social life surrounded by countless crises, contradictions, dualities, and uncertainties.

Complexity and systems theory is a concept explaining non-linear emergent behaviour and change. It offers a valuable perspective and understanding of how to respond and adapt to uncertainties, and demands change (Gemmil and Smith, 1985; Dooley and Van de Ven, 1999; Amagoh, 2008; Limnios et al., 2014). There are several factors that influence how a system can manage and survive change, especially in the context of intensified global uncertainties (be they economic, political, or climate related).

Gunderson and Holling (2002) suggest that the complexity of a system emerges from a number of smaller controlling processes and not from the random association of a large number of interacting factors. Holling further states that these systems are self-organised: ‘self-organization is a term that characterises the development of complex adaptive systems, in which multiple outcomes typically are possible depending on accidents of history’ (2001, p.391).

Moreover, complex systems are open systems and dissipative structures, which do not respond to external pressures in a linear manner and are subject to instability (Prigogine, 1997). These systems are open and self-organising, maintaining their order and internal far-from-equilibrium state through interactions with their environment. As the literature on ecological resilience suggests, the stability of a system is maintained as long as disturbances are absorbed by the system (Holling, 1973). However, there exists a threshold in terms of how much of disturbance a system can absorb. This threshold in dissipative structures is called the ‘bifurcation point’, where the system is at the edge of ‘chaos’ and can take on a new order by self-organising. At this point, there is unpredictability and an un-managed change process. Adaptability is achieved by a constant change of state (McKelvey, 1999). Figure 1, adapted from De Toni and Camello (2010) and Leifer (1989), provides examples of dissipative structures, where ‘x’ represents transformation and λ represents disturbance.

Figure 1 - Dissipative Structures and Bifurcation Point
Source: Adapted from De Toni and Camello (2010) and Leifer (1989)
According to Gemmill and Smith (1985), change in the dissipative process from one state to another occurs as a coherent, simultaneous leap. The system is reversible and persistent until the threshold of $\lambda_c$ is reached. Eventually, a variety of possible forms can emerge from such a process; estimating which forms would be resilient in which environment is very difficult. The agents in these systems interact in such a way that they adapt to the behaviour of other agents, who in turn adapt and stimulate further adaptations. As MacIntosh and MacLean emphasise, ‘the systems are not only complex and adaptive, but their complexity and adaptiveness can itself change’ (1999, p.14).

The world in dissipative structures is viewed as dynamic and are characterised by systems where change and transformations are associated with non-equilibrium conditions. In these systems, the interactions of non-linear relationships with random disturbances create new system configurations that are far from equilibrium and where a small fluctuation in one part of a system can escalate in unexpected ways. This can bring unanticipated and substantive changes to other parts of the system (Holland, 1992). Systems under the dissipative model describe change or transformation when internal and external elements in the system are turbulent enough to create a new order – or simply create something that was not there before – and are thus described as ‘far from equilibrium’ (Prigogine and Stengers, 1984). This paper is situated within this theoretical tradition, and analyses the self-organisation of refugees in the urban fabric of Athens and Thessaloniki – in contrast to the imposed organization within the camps – and how this dissipative behaviour creates resilience in the face of the uncertainties which the mobile populations face.

3. Housing of Refugees in a Host City: Cases of Athens and Thessaloniki, Greece

3.1. State Policies for the Accommodation of Refugees

The right of refugees to housing has been recognised as an integral part of the ‘right to an adequate standard of living’ in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1948). According to the United Nations (UN, 2009), the right to housing should be perceived as the right to live in safety, peace, and dignity. In addition, the European Council (ECRE, 2007) recognises that the living environment, access to housing, and housing conditions are a key factor in integrating refugees and migrants. Since 2007, Greece has adopted the provisions of the European Council on minimum standards for the reception of asylum seekers, including the right to housing (Presidential Decree, 2007). The characteristics of the right of refugees to housing, as defined by the UN Commission on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (UN, 1991), refer to the following criteria: security, availability of services, facilities and infrastructure, accessibility, habitability, and cultural suitability. Finally, it is stressed that housing structures should be directly linked to employment opportunities, health services, education, and child care; as well as not being in environmentally degraded or dangerous areas (Tsavdaroglou and Lalenis, 2019).

Contrary to international, European, and national standards, state hospitality centres in Athens and Thessaloniki are mostly abandoned camps and former industrial sites with a dire lack of infrastructure. Altogether, the 30 hospitality centres are located at the borders or at a considerable distance from the urban fabric of the two cities (see Figure 2 and Table 1). Even though the refugees’ living conditions in Greece have been improved (thanks to the valuable contribution of transnational actors and private initiatives and donations) reports from a number of NGOs (Amnesty International, 2016; International Rescue Committee, 2016; Médecins Sans Frontières, 2016), the European Commission (2016) and KEELPNO (Hellenic Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, 2016), state hospitality/reception centres in Athens and Thessaloniki do not follow international standards – mainly with regard to capacity (space/person), sanitation infrastructure, and safety. According to the UNHCR (2007, p.210) specifications for refugee accommodation centres, the minimum capacity for decent living conditions is 45 sq.m./person in a mixed/brutto form (including public spaces, roads, and all shared use areas and public amenities). However, in most of the hospitality centres in Athens and Thessaloniki, the equivalent capacity is significantly smaller, reaching 25 sq.m./person in the hospitality centre of Skaramangas in Athens, and only 15 sq.m./person at the Softex hosting centre in Thessaloniki (Tsavdaroglou and Lalenis, 2019). Furthermore, the above figures deviate significantly from national urban planning standards (Ministerial Decision, 2004), which provide for a capacity of 28-45 sq.m./person in a netto form (without the area of roads, public spaces and shared uses and public amenities).
Figure 2 - Locations of State Run Refugee Camps in Athens (left) and Thessaloniki (right)
Source: Tsavdaroglou and Lalenis (2019)

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Table 1: State Structures for Hosting Refugees in Athens and Thessaloniki
### 3.2. Living Conditions of the Refugees in the Hospitality Centres

The refugees’ living conditions in the state run reception centres in Athens and Thessaloniki, and the refugees’ impressions about the function of the centres were described in a series of interviews which were conducted in the course of a post-doctoral programme in the Department of Planning and Regional Development of the University of Thessaly, Greece and documented in Tsavdaroglou and Lalenis (2019). Extracts of these interviews are shown below.

According to the refugee Ahmet who lived in the hospitality centre of Schisto (former military camp in Athens):

> The situation in the camps is extremely difficult, the rights of the refugees have been completely violated. Camps are full of germs and diseases, very cold in the winter and with unbearable heat in the summer. All camps are out of town, no camp is located in the city. Public transportation to the city is very poor, the drivers are constantly intimidating us on the buses, and taxi drivers are asking for double rates (February 10, 2018).

Kava, a Kurdish refugee who lost his legs in bombardments in Syria, and uses a wheelchair, spent a year at the Oreokastro camp in Thessaloniki.

> For me, the situation is extremely difficult, I have never taken a bath for nine months in the camp, because there is no infrastructure in the showers for a person with mobility difficulties. In the evening there is no lighting in the camp, how will I go to the toilet? Actually I sit 24 hours in the tent (January 11, 2018).

Ibrahim from Iraq who lived for six months at the Basilica camp refers to similar experiences in the hospitality centres and explains the hostility which the refugees faced:

> The camp is in the middle of nowhere, when we arrived was like leaving us in the middle of hell. We were very much afraid, because there were villages around, who were against the refugees, and people from there were organised and were marching against us. We were 1500 people and we were treated like animals, in fact the camp was a former poultry house and we were stacked as if we were chickens, so many people in a very small place (March 19, 2018).

According to the interviewees and NGO staff working in these camps, waste collection and sewerage facilities were non-functional, there were poor hygiene conditions, an insufficient supply of drinking water, food of fluctuating quality and quantity, and serious dangers from infectious disease. Moreover, state reception camps are located at a considerable distance from urban areas, in extremely dangerous and environmentally degraded areas. According to the General Development Plans of local municipalities, Law 4277/31-7-2014 (FEK 156/A/1-8-2014), and the Regulatory Plans of Athens and Thessaloniki, the majority of reception camps are located in areas where officially permitted land uses are up to the level of ‘medium and high disturbance/pollution’ and residential uses are not allowed (Figure 3, Figures 4a and 4b).
In Figure 3 it can be seen that the Reception/Hospitality Centres are located alongside wholesale businesses and transportation installations associated with industrial zones (Ionia Industrial Complex and Thessaloniki Industrial Zone). The reception camps Softex and Diavata are located within places with a high risk of industrial accidents. The Camp at Skaramagas Pier (Figure 4a) accommodates 2,500 to 4,500 people and has operated continuously since the summer of 2016. The camp in the former Softex factory (Figure 4b) hosted up to 2,000 people from the spring of 2016 until the autumn of 2017. Both are located adjacent to refinery facilities and are at a great distance from residential areas.

In particular, the lives of women, gay people, and children, in reception camps are extremely difficult. There are no safe spaces and a number of incidents of gender violence, domestic violence, sexual abuse, trafficking, and survival sex have been recorded (Liapi et al., 2016; Al Jazeera, 2017; The Observer, 2016; TRT World, 2017). Some reports claim that ‘children and women are afraid to leave their tents when dark’ (The Guardian, 2016). Even though there is a programme for transferring children to schools, a very small number have taken part because their parents are afraid to let them move long distances away from them (Tsavdaroglou and Lalenis, 2019). A study on the sexual abuse of children at refugee centres from the Centre for Health and Human Rights at Harvard University revealed that specialised child facilities in camps are inadequate; and that there are particularly dangerous living conditions in the camps, poor supervision, and a potentially dangerous coexistence of children and the adult population, weak child protection systems, and a lack of co-ordination and cooperation between competent authorities (Digidiki and Bhabha, 2017).
In addition, in February 2018, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) collected 622 testimonies from victims of sexual violence among refugees, according to which one-third of the refugees claimed to have been abused in state hospitality centres (UNHCR, 2018b).

Therefore, based on the above testimonies and reports, it is obvious that the hospitality centres are located in areas where social infrastructure (schools, health services, sport and cultural facilities) is lacking, and the transport links to the neighbouring urban areas are not sufficient. Consequently, refugees in state hospitality centres are forced to live in extremely difficult and precarious conditions.

3.3. Self-Organization of the Refugees

As was shown in section 3.2, refugees’ living conditions in hospitality centres are far from humane. Athens and Thessaloniki have also been at the centre of the current economic crisis, which is also expressed in spatial terms (Hadjimichalis, 2011; Athanasiou, 2013; Kapsali and Tsavdaroglou, 2016; Arampatzi, 2017). One of the main consequences of the socio-spatial crisis is that several public and private buildings have been abandoned in and around the city centres (Vatavali and Siatitsa, 2011; Ministerial Decision, 2011). During the period 2015-2018, solidarity groups, along with refugees and immigrants, occupied some of these empty buildings and turned them into self-managed housing projects (see Figures 5a and 5b). According to Moving Europe (2016) over 2,000 refugees live in these squats.
In these projects, settlements are not planned in advance, but rather adaptations to new spatial circumstances are spontaneously made. According to the Housing Squat for Refugees and Immigrants of 26 Notara Street:

...we found an empty public building in Athens, at 26 Notara Street, in order to implement in spatial terms our solidarity to refugees and immigrants in order to meet their immediate needs. This venture is not based on charity, state or private, but it is a self-organised joint venture, in which locals and immigrants and refugees decide together (Housing Squat for Refugees and Immigrants Notara 26, 2016, p.2).

Similarly, in a proclamation, the Refugee Accommodation Centre City Plaza Hotel, states:

This initiative is an experiment of self-organization of refugees and locals, based on the weekly general assembly and on thematic working groups. The goal is to materialize a perception of everyday life, which through a bottom-up approach will finally lead to the creation of an ‘area of freedom’ that will be the proof of our vision for the society (Refugee Accommodation Centre City Plaza Hotel, 2016).

The above interviews indicate that there is an adaptation process evolving from this spontaneous self-organization, where the dignity of the participants is also considered. Hassan and Gamal – two Syrians living in the occupied School 2 in Athens – were interviewed and stated: ‘Here we are free. We decide on common issues together. It is much better than living in the former camps outside the city’. Also, according to Murad, another refugee ‘squats, without the influence of the state or NGOs, depend on offers, and daily work by independent volunteers. Responsibility is shared among the residents’.

4. Synopsis

The housing of the refugees in host cities can be considered to be an urban conflict of high uncertainty and a post-traumatic event for the refugees themselves. As Burke (2010) states, ‘the post-traumatic condition is that potent environment in which fundamental reorganisation is possible...and no controlling mechanism operates’. This is exactly what provides an opportunity for predatory systems to dominate and where a system’s resilience is exposed.
The system setup, referred to as ‘Panarchy’ by Holling et al. (2002), explains ‘resilience’ through ecological concepts and is very suitable for defining the behavioural patterns of refugees in their spatial self-organisation arrangements (Figure 6) in host cities.

In panarchic systems, hierarchical structures bring accumulation, re-organization, and regeneration processes into existence through a long-lasting and developing adaptation recirculation. These transformational periods appear and aggregate on varying scales (from families to socio-political regions) and during different time intervals (from seconds to centuries) (Holling et al., 2002). During aggregation progressions, fast-moving and small-sized masses increase their effect on bigger ones in periods with limited reactions/revolts – termed a low-resilience period – but bigger and slower cycling masses cause small clusters to re-shape by increasing pressure on those masses through ‘remember’ methods. What happens with the self-organisation of the refugees in Greece is a panarchic order where resilience is exposed under the dominating predatory systems, whether they be the state, the camp, or the host city.

The system which moves slower and is bigger in scale – in this case the ingrained migration regulations and the state – holds aggregations back where opportunity for change and experimentation is limited – which could be the reason of the recent crisis of refugee housing in Greece. In any low resilience running process, the moment of activeness (change/adaptation) occurs in highly resistant small-sized systems. Post-traumatic recall is confronted and those structures are adapted to the system. Here, the question ‘why small-sized masses do not resist against such adaptation motivation?’ may be asked. The answer is that remembered-remembered matter appeals to a tragic and dark area for people. For all of us, worrying about if what happened in the past happens again? That is the trauma (Volkan, 1999).

According to the resilience theory, a system that is not able to absorb incoming shocks self-organises in a very different arrangement. This is a condition that is generated by the externally originating pressure (‘others’), which also establishes a distinctive structure. A refugee’s life is the summation of independent and spontaneously
acting dissipative social cores swimming as discontinuity islets without taking roots in time. Žižek (2009) defines post-traumatic conditions as tabula rasa: ‘When the normal run of things is traumatically interrupted, the field is then opened up for a “discursive” ideological competition’. Therefore, the self-organisation of the refugees’ everyday survival activities led to a transmutation of their relations towards space and resilience.

5. Conclusion

The post-traumatic condition is an environment in which fundamental reorganisation is possible. Remembrances upon the past in post-traumatic disorders emerge as worries regarding the future. Since refugees are in motion, the boundaries of collective memoirs affect identity formation and, at the same time, keep moving. What keeps the past fresh is the strength of remembrance, reasons for remembering, and the quality of the memoirs assembled; but not those originating close to the present. The future being ‘premature’ relies on refugees absorbing the possible effects of external conditions’ fluctuations, and hence protect themselves, reflecting their memories towards the future. Refugees, we might say, live in a place stuck in between, waking up by fresh past –memories– and bedding down with a premature future, i.e., a kind of being in a spatial in-between state. Here, dissipative structures mentioned in ‘chaos’ theories of physics provided an understanding of the social attributes of the self-organisation of refugees in the host city. Like dissipative structures, self-organisations are unpredictable, and develop resistance to the order they are shaped within. Dissipative and acting at the edge of chaos is unstable, or discontinuous. Here, instability is very high, and the refugees self-organise, which is a spontaneous and unpredictable strategy. This loss of stability leads to adaptation, defined as the system’s resilience to increased environmental uncertainty.

The long-lasting, inadequate and inefficient conditions in the camps have presented itself as the threshold for the refugees to revolt and create a new system under chaotic conditions.

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PUBLIC SPACE, CIVIC DIGNITY AND URBAN RESISTANCE IN THE AGE OF SHRINKING DEMOCRACY

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Abstract

Neoliberal urban restructuring constitutes an underlying challenge facing cities and communities around the world. Public space, as a medium of political engagement and social interactions, may represent a vehicle for resistance against patterns of shrinking democracy. In its capacity as a place for active democracy, public spaces – the lived spaces of contemporary societies – deserve greater care, attention, and critical reflection. As movements evolve to confront new challenges, explore new opportunities, negotiate with new actors and circumstances, and utilise new technologies and platforms, our understanding of the agency of democracy – supported through an understanding of civic dignity – must also advance. This paper aims at examining the role of public space in reclaiming and reinstating democracy. By drawing on empirical findings from cities worldwide, explored through the lens of multiple disciplines, it argues that the study of urban protest might show directions for a new, dignified politics of public space. It asks how this study may enable planners and designers to contribute to the spatial emergence of human and civic dignity.

Keywords

Post-political condition, global restructuring, urban resistance, civic dignity, democratic agency

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1. Spaces of Resistance

Around the world, the shrinking capacity of democratic processes has left citizens and communities with no other resort than to take to the streets. The erosion of democracy, accompanied by economic restructuring, austerity policies, and the weakening of the public sphere fundamentally challenges cities and communities around the world. Current developments of de-democratisation, rising dissatisfaction, and decreasing identification with representative-democratic institutions have given rise to new movements and resistance to the shrinking capacity of (formal) democratic processes. Public space has served as a vehicle for such resistance and expressions of civic dignity. Following Ober (2014), civic dignity is defined as ‘a set of historic practices that were regularized as custom and law at certain times and places in history’ (p.55). It is predicated on a shared status of political equality among a body of citizens – a defined set of people who are jointly committed to the preservation of a public domain (Greek: politeia; Latin: res publica), but who are not social peers and who may have no personal ties with one another (ibid.).

In this sense, civic dignity promotes the mobilisation of civic agency in public spaces through a focus on the potential for urban publics to self-organise and debate the roles for common goods in contemporary democracies. Public space provides channels for realising and performing active democracy, and thus deserves greater attention. This paper argues that current urban movements, including their practices, claims and utilisation of new technologies, encourages us to reflect and re-think the role and agency of public space. Therefore, acknowledging public space as a vehicle through which democracy can be reclaimed also means public space ought to be viewed as lived and political space. Stressing the role of public space in contexts of planning, development, and urban design in these unsettled times clearly touches upon Margalit’s (1996) question – if planning for dignity is indeed about avoiding humiliation and establishing a more decent society. In this vein, this paper analyses and challenges the relations and interconnections between civic dignity, urban resistance, and public space in the context of current developments of de-democratisation.

2. Exploring Urban Resistance Tactics in Relation to Civic Dignity

2.1. Shrinking Democracy and the Post-Political Condition

In many parts of the world, democracy has been institutionalized, and ‘is now firmly and consensually established as the uncontested and rarely examined ideal of institutionalized political life’ (Wilson and Swyngedouw, 2015, p.2). At the same time, however, democracy ‘has never been more conceptually footloose or substantively hollow’ (Brown, 2011, p.44). Democracy has rather become an empty signifier, that, as Brown states, has been reduced by capitalism ‘to a “brand,” a late modern twist on commodity fetishism that wholly serves a product’s salable image from its content’ (ibid.).

The idea of democracy as ‘governing by the people for the people’ has vanished due to the growing influence of technocratic governance regimes, as well as multi- and transnational companies. Governing is now conducted by ‘a proliferating maze of opaque networks, fuzzy institutional arrangements, with ill-defined responsibilities and ambiguous political objectives and priorities’ (Swyngedouw, 2010, p.5). This ‘post-democratic state’, which Rancière (1999) describes as ‘democracy after the demos’ (ibid., p.102), is characterised by ‘the disappearance of the mechanisms of appearance, of the dispute opened up by the name “people” and the vacuum of their freedom’ (ibid). Hence, as he continues, it is ‘the disappearance of politics’ (ibid.).

Drawing on Rancière’s concept of ‘post-democracy’, Mouffe (2000) argues that the current ‘post-political’ condition encompasses substantial repression of antagonistic struggles. However, since ‘the political’ cannot be easily extinguished, political disagreement is increasingly expressed through identity politics and violent fundamentalism (ibid.). In this current political climate, authoritarian regimes, ultra-right parties and neo-fascist tendencies are contributing to the growing erosion of human rights standards around the world, sustained ironically by a climate of technocratic de-politicisation. As the common denominator for a respectful, decent and peaceful politics is at stake, scholars focusing on the study of dignity have pointed to the need to delve
beyond human rights alone and focus on dignity (Brownsword, 2014). From this general debate, lessons considering the role of urban resistance in (re)establishing civic dignity via place-based approaches to planning need to be drawn.

2.2. Armament of Public Space

Developments in de-politicisation have a direct influence on public life and significantly shape urban spaces. Mayer (2013), for example, introduces four dimensions to neoliberal urban restructuring: (1) processes of ‘investor-driven upgrading’ of cities; (2) ‘gentrification-led restructuring’ of inner-city areas; (3) urban marketisation through privatisation and festivalisation; and (4) outsourcing of manufacturing to the Global South (ibid., p.9).

In the context of increasing competition between cities, (political) regulations are scaled back with the intent of attracting investment and capital. Cities pay subsidies to global corporations, investors, and developers in order to attract their investment. Instead of responsibly representing citizens’ concerns, politicians are ‘buttressed by self-interested officials and lobby groups, distanced from people’s everyday lives’ (Healey, 2010, p.11). On a conceptual level, the growing alienation of people from their everyday life through processes of totalisation has been criticised, as totalisation imposes doubt, collapse, and disintegration. Every trial must be carried out, every hypothesis must be hazarded, every attempt at totalization must be put to the test before the irreducible residual deposit – the everyday – can claim its demands, its status and its dignity (Lefebvre, 2014, p.931).

We conceive everyday places as sites where acts of urban resistance may eventually take place – both to reclaim dignified living conditions in the ideal sense of egalitarian politics, and as a study field where antagonistic action and intersecting forms of discrimination are taken to undermine human rights (and thus threaten dignity). In this sense, and following intersectional approaches, this also means considering and reflecting on several inter-related and overlapping forms of discrimination in order to adequately understand different forms of exclusion, oppression, domination, and vulnerability. Scholarly inquiry needs to consider key findings from feminist approaches that have identified public spaces as places where (human, political) vulnerability is shown, as it is here where the ‘(dis)enchantments of public encounter’ (Watson, 2006) evolve, and the expression of political will is still bound to face-to-face interaction. On this face-to-face level, human vulnerability can be linked directly to considerations of dignity. With the rise of new authoritarianisms, the civil right to use public spaces and express one’s opinion has come under pressure, particularly for vulnerable groups and subjects in their common struggles over representation.

Especially since the events of 9/11, hyper-security measures have shaped cityscapes around the world. As a result, the daily life of urban dwellers is increasingly affected by the politics of surveillance and techniques of control in both physical urban spaces and cyberspaces (Low and Smith, 2006). Under the cover of allegedly omnipresent terrorist threats and following the rationale of zero-tolerance politics, police forces increasingly deploy means of violence and harassment; more frequently against political dissidents in order to prevent or disperse forms of protest and occupation in the first place. Such security measures and so-called ‘prevent strategies’ are often highly racialised and discriminatory in character, and have thus been widely criticised for their ethno-racist bias (cf. Smith, 2003; Cahill et al., 2017).

For many ordinary citizens, their bodies have become the only available resource to disrupt the flows of neoliberal governance. Protestors around the globe have loudly and passionately occupied squares, streets, and plazas in the name of reinstating democracy. In this respect, Moore (2013) has offered reflections about embodied space, protest, and dissent as essential features in reinstating the political. Such a conception of embodied space can be related to different conceptions of dignity: Ober (2014) has introduced a three part distinction between meritocratic dignity, civic dignity, and human dignity. Civic dignity ‘is held in common by an extensive yet bounded body of citizens’ (ibid., p.54) that ‘stands between the personality and exclusivity of meritocratic dignity and the impersonality and universality of human dignity’ (ibid., p.55). Once established, civic dignity ‘may provide a bridge from meritocratic to human dignity, by facilitating the recognition that
everyone has an interest in living with dignity’ (ibid.). It is not by coincidence that civic dignity and the public domain are strongly linked, as the former is available to and protected by citizens who all ideally have an equal chance to participate in the public domain. Human dignity ‘generalizes to all humanity the high standing formerly reserved for a privileged few’ (Waldron, 2012). On a more practical level, ‘[r]especting human dignity entails treating humans as persons capable of planning and plotting their future. Thus, respecting people’s dignity includes respecting their autonomy, their right to control their future’ (Raz, 1979, p.221, cited in Brownsword, 2014, p.3). For the planning discourse, strong parallels to the debate on the Right to the City – in which inhabitants are granted the right to design and thus control their own urban future (Purcell, 2013) – can be identified. Civic dignity, however, is a political praxis and an ethical principle upon which every democratic action needs to reflect, as democracy is not only about securing one’s own rights and demands but also about granting these rights and demands to others so that they can live decent lives: ‘individuals are secure in their dignity only when others are willing and able to defend it’ (Ober, 2014, p.53). This is a key ethical principle to the democratic foundation of (planning for) public space.

2.3. Urban Resistance and Public Space

Urban inhabitants have been facing severe structural changes affecting their everyday lives, among them: rising living costs, job losses, community displacement, citizens’ harassments, pension cuts, and police violence. At the same time, a lack of regard for democratic instruments to ameliorate or prevent these shortcomings has been identified (Wilson and Swyngedouw, 2015). As a consequence, it is not surprising that protests occur at increasing frequency and intensity in many cities worldwide. Ordinary citizens are taking to the streets, raising their voices, claiming for their rights, and demanding specific local policy changes. Often, their calls for dignity are not complex. Such demands include adequate access to water resources, decent housing conditions, freedom of speech, and fair wages. Passionate protests show that urban spaces have again become a catalyst in struggles for a democratic society based on civic dignity. Mass assemblies in Brazilian cities, the occupation of Queen’s Pier in Hong Kong and the state capitol buildings in Madison, Wisconsin, and protests in cities including Vienna, Paris, and Budapest illustrate how in urban spaces abstract political claims and ideals become materially manifested.

The crucial role and relevance of public space in urban resistance could be explored further, as analyses in this area are often confined to disciplinary boundaries. For example, in political theory, social movement research sees space primarily as a backdrop when analysing movement strategies and tactics, and for contextualising protest phenomena in structuralist accounts with a socio-political focus (cf. Ajanovic et al., 2015, Vienna). For planning and design professionals, although they are essentially involved in and responsible for the making of the material arrangements of public space, issues of protest, social movements, and forms of urban resistance are rarely emphasised (as an example, see Janson and Bürklin, 2002, Venice). This underestimation of public space with respect to democratic agency underlines the crucial need for (analytical) work in this area. Planning and design scholars dealing with public space issues are asked to unpack the role of public space and to develop planning for dignity by supporting and generating active democracy (Knierbein and Viderman, 2018). This means, for instance, focusing on the relationships between urban protest, civic dignity, and planning in order to better understand the connections between forms of resistance and public space.

Frank and Fuentes (1990) state that even though ‘social movements are more defensive than offensive and tend to be temporary, they are perhaps the most important agents of social transformation’ (ibid., p.142). Following their insight, this paper focuses on activists’ capacity for social transformation. It is argued that the exploration of urban protest might show directions for a new, dignified politics of public space, and might offer ideas of how planners and designers could contribute to the emergence of better spatial human and civic dignity. This paper is based on a research collaboration (Hou and Knierbein, 2017), that involved a diverse group of scholars and activists from different disciplinary backgrounds – encompassing a broad range of cases of urban resistance and public space agency in Asia, Europe, North and South America. This collaborative work was guided by the following research questions: What do recent forms of urban protest have in common? What are the roles, functions, and meanings of public space in these urban resistance movements? What are the implications of urban protest for the (re-)making of public space in the context of current developments of de-democratisation?
Methods used originate in various disciplines including ethnography, human geography, urban sociology, planning theory, and political science. Single or comparative case study approaches have been presented as part of the research and many drew on empirical observations, participatory action research, structured and semi-structured interviews, and qualitative content analysis of parliamentary documents and daily and weekly media. Moreover, an emphasis has been placed on empirical research that includes activist research strategies and approaches inspired by feminist ethics and resistance-by-research. The paper draws on empirical findings from sixteen cities, analysed through the prisms of diverse disciplines. As part of a second round of analysis of the cases and the results, we now focus on interpreting earlier findings regarding urban resistance movements by introducing dignity as an additional interpretative concept.

3. Spatial Grounds of Re-Democratisation

The worldwide rise in urban resistance in 2011 served as a starting point for academic and public debates about shrinking democracy and urban contestation against modes of neoliberal restructuring. However, as various empirical examples show, protests against neoliberal policies were happening long before then. In Athens, for instance, processes of neoliberal urban upgrading, commercialisation and privatisation ahead of the Olympic Games in 2004 led to acts of resistance during the 1990s. In Bolivia’s third-largest city Cochabamba, people successfully protested against the privatisation of water between December 1999 and April 2000 (Santos, 2007). In Argentina, the economic crisis in 2001 provoked mass demonstrations against a neoliberal regime installed under the military junta decades before (Rosa and Vidosa, 2017). A further example is the Western-Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign in South Africa. Initiated in 2001, it served as an umbrella body for a number of community organisations, crisis committees, and resident groups that emerge in Cape Town’s poor townships to resist […] evictions and service cut-offs and demand their rights to shelter and basic services (Miraftab, 2009, p.36).

These examples illustrate that 2011 represents a peak in resistance when sparks of protest against neoliberal urbanisation and inequality in cities of the Global South spilled over into those in the North. It was exacerbated by the global economic crisis of 2008 which had further precipitated a significant rise in unemployment, the dismantling of welfare state systems, and had seriously challenged speculative housing investments. Yet, the shaping and effects of neoliberal governmentality cannot be understood only in terms of economic or material parameters. They also need to be assessed in respect of their political, social, and cultural dimensions. To adequately grasp and comprehend the impact, means, and rationale of contemporary neoliberalisation, economic processes need to be conceived of in relation to their influence on democratic political systems. Neoliberalism has actively provoked a political crisis. This can be seen in the reduced impact of voting in altering political approaches, as well as the acceptance and internalisation of neoliberal ideology across the political spectrum, leading to the disappearance of viable alternatives (cf. Monbiot, 2016). This has further reinforced voter disenfranchisement and political apathy (ibid.).

As a consequence of these political, economic, and social changes, urban life has become fundamentally unsettled. In the context of these recent struggles, public space has come into focus, as it is one essential place where the restructuring of multiple relations between the state, markets, and civil society can gain momentum. Due to the undergoing crisis of modern nation-states, cities and their role within these processes of restructuring are receiving increased attention (Appadurai, 1996). Considering current developments of de-democratisation, the ideal of Western liberal democracy has been exposed to more criticism. Mouffe’s (2000) concept of the ‘democratic paradox’ provides an analytical framework to understand crisis shaken democratic states. As Mouffe (2000) argues, the idea of liberal democracy has always been based on a contradiction. This democratic paradox points to the intrinsic tension of two traditions of political thought, the liberal and the democratic strand:

On one side we have the liberal tradition constituted by the rule of law, the defense of human rights, and the respect of individual liberty; on the other, the democratic tradition whose main ideas are those of equality, the identity between governing and governed, and popular sovereignty. There is no necessary relation between those two distinct traditions but only a contingent historical articulation (ibid., p.2-3).
Yet with the rise of neoliberalism, the imbalance between liberty and equality has become stronger, and this has led to the superiority of the liberal tradition (Mouffe, 2000). This means that the democratic principles of equality, popular sovereignty, and identity between the governing and the governed have been increasingly neglected. In this context, it might prove interesting to connect Mouffe’s (ibid.) argument to Ober’s (2014) distinction between debates about human rights and debates about human dignity. Whereas the human rights debate clearly links to the first field of individual liberty, civic dignity would allow us to more strongly focus on the democratic tradition insofar as civic dignity ‘is predicated on a shared status of political equality among a body of citizens’ (ibid., p.55). Civic dignity emphasises the idea of democracy as government by the people, for the people, which in turn presupposes an equal right and capacity to do so. Therefore, civic dignity enforces the democratic tradition of liberal democracies without neglecting the liberal principle of individual liberty: ‘civic dignity is available to and protected by free citizens who have an equal opportunity to participate in a public domain of decision and action’ (ibid.). For the field of planning and designing, this suggests that a concept of civic dignity – based upon a balance of dissent and consent, out of which a shared vision that starts with decent living conditions for all and includes wider conceptions of dignity, and is continuously reinvigorated by active public engagement – is required.

Based on these considerations, in the following section we examine four aspects in which public spaces serve as nodes of critical actions and reflections: (3.1) public spaces as sites for mobilisation and negotiation, (3.2) public spaces as zones of contestation and learning, (3.3) public spaces as space for rescaling and re-politicising, and (3.4) public space as grounds for alter-politics.

### 3.1. Public Spaces as Sites for Mobilisation and Negotiation

Studies on acts of urban resistance show that recent protests have produced a new generation of protestors. Furthermore, spatial analyses of political protest emphasise the importance of physical urban places for various social groups to participate in political protest, (verbally) articulate their demands, and also to (bodily) stand in for a different social order. Many people who have never been politically active before have been protesting in streets, on plazas and other public spaces. Also, different groups have engaged with each other, among them groups who might possess opposing political and/or moral views. For instance, in the Occupy Gezi Park movement in Istanbul, LGBT activists protested together with conservative Muslims (Yiğit Turan, 2017). In the course of the protests at Syntagma Square in Athens, right- and left-wing activists came together and formed political coalitions (Kaika and Karaliotas, 2017). These political communities work to defend their own political interests, but they increasingly work to protect decent living conditions for others. This can be directly related to a remaining or revived sense of civic dignity.

In the Latin American movements of 2001, horizontality as a mode of mobilisation became an important and powerful strategy for self-organisation and for developing new and different forms of resistance (Lorey, 2014). Following Lorey, horizontality is ‘an instrument for actualizing the equality of all those present’ (ibid., p.45) that involves new forms of organising, new modes of subjectivation, and reflexive social regulations (ibid., p.53). However, horizontality is not a programme that immediately removes hierarchies but rather needs to be conceived as a possible ‘instrument for creating a social space in which everyone feels empowered to speak and take part in common challenges as a different and similar singularity’ (ibid., p.54). Ideally, this space offers opportunities to consciously deal with forms of inequalities and privileges, and to reflect on different manners of speaking and expressing opinions (ibid.). This directly relates to civic dignity as it relates to who is respected and who is being heard (Ober, 2014). However, these forms of horizontal mobilisation might still be entangled in (post)structural discrepancies. Hence, it is important to acknowledge that not all urban movements are progressive by nature or interested in radical democratisation. Cases illustrate that anti-democratic acts of protest can instrumentalise forms of urban resistance by deploying strategies of mimicry (Knierbein and Gabauer, 2017), or by pursuing a politics of fear in order to reinforce boundaries between groups of different ethnicities, religions, cultures, classes, or genders (Chen and Szeto, 2017; Owens and Antiporda, 2017).

### 3.2. Public Spaces as Zones of Learning and Contestation

Crises are ‘the heartbeat of neoliberal governance’ (Knierbein and Hou, 2017, p.235), which are constantly produced through processes of austerity and mechanisms of de- and re-institutionalisation. Neoliberalism
permanently (re)produces political, social, economic, and cultural divides and, consequently, recurrently provokes outbursts of resistance against these ruptures. At the same time, through this politically engineered state of perpetual crisis, neoliberal measures and austerity policies become legitimised. Hence, neoliberalism renders itself a self-fulfilling prophecy. Cities in particular are sites where the effects of neoliberal governance gain momentum, and, conversely, where the cracks and fractions of the neoliberal project become visible.

Different case studies illustrate the relevance of public space research in carefully analysing processes of urban transformation. The focus on public space enables research to examine changing patterns of urban life at a local level within the scope of neoliberal governmentality. Investigations of this kind also demonstrate the (inter)relations between informal action and formal policies. For instance, in Tokyo, homeless citizens, youth activists, artists, public intellectuals, and trade unionists demonstrated against the privatisation of Miyashita Park, an elevated park in the city’s iconic Shibuya shopping district (Dimmer, 2017, p.199). The protestors not only occupied the physical space of the park but also promoted debate on social media among planning professionals and scholars of social movements about public spaces in Japan’s cities (ibid.). The case of Tokyo, and also Berlin (Lebuhn, 2017), Warsaw, and Poznań (Domaradzka, 2017) illustrate how activists use formal means of participation and/or formal rights and legal resources to address political claims. In these cases, protestors have called for city-wide or neighbourhood referenda, or have sought information about legal procedures. Their mobilisation strategies have enabled them to connect with a wider audience. This has helped them receive additional support for their demands. Furthermore, establishing referendum campaigns has encouraged them to sharpen their discursive claims and messages.

Unlike in these cases, activists behind the protests at Syntagma Square in Athens (Kaika and Karaliotas, 2017), the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong (Chen and Szeto, 2017), and activists behind the Occupy Gezi Park movement (Yiğit Turan, 2017) and the Sunflower Movement in Taipei (Chen, 2017) have prevented parties and formal authorities from (entirely) hijacking their mobilisations. The study of the self-organisation of different groups within the Sunflower Movement illustrates how such arrangements enable new forms of collective learning in areas relating to solidarity, tolerance, and transparency within decision-making processes. The cases of Taipei (Chen, 2017), Hong Kong (Chen and Szeto, 2017) and Madrid (Kränzle, 2017) demonstrate how protestors can become part of the political system. Their electoral traction has enabled them to challenge established political identities and renew governing bodies. These findings facilitate reflections on dignity as the right to autonomously define one’s own (political) positions and to (collectively) reorganise common goods and public affairs.

3.3. Public Space as Space for Rescaling and Re-Politicising

The success of protest strategies ‘is related to the ways in which geographical scale is actively considered and mobilised in struggles for social, political, or economic resistance or change’ (Swyngedouw, 2004, p.26-27). That is why protest movements organise their tactics, aims, and demands in order to connect the fragmented geographies of crisis. This means, for instance, that they need to combine struggles for local needs, urban equity, regional justice, national political contestations, criticism against supranational governance, and struggles against the local impact of market forces, thus overcoming the ‘jumping of scales’ of capital (Swyngedouw, 2004, referring to Smith, 1984). Therefore, as Swyngedouw (2004) points out, the resistance to ‘the totalising and globalising forces of money and capital accumulation demands forging “scalar” alliances that are sensitive to geographical difference and uniqueness’ (ibid., p.43).

Urban public spaces are sites where spatial crises collide, where social densities and political identities meet, and where fragmented scales of protest can be (re)united. This entails forms of solidarity that extend from a small-scale with local peers, to issues of civic dignity in a city’s wider political community, towards a much more global solidarity for egalitarian democracy. Social movements have emphasised that certain spaces in cities are politically symbolic, and are locations where claims for political reform or revolutions have been repeatedly articulated. This is no less the case in contemporary protests against neoliberal restructuring, and here, protestors have articulated more fundamental political demands instead of issuing local, interest-based inquiries or narrow claims. Hence, these spaces are the material manifestations of the earlier contexts behind struggles for civic dignity, as they are about the inherent links between contingent city publics, public life, and the formation of public opinion in the public sphere. Nevertheless, feminist and postcolonial planning
scholars have pointed to the limits of such Euro-centric notions (Miraftab, 2009; Bayat, 2010). We would thus need to revisit civic dignity to respond to these more recent criticisms and to carve out an analytical tool in urban studies and planning theory relevant to research on urban societies characterised by increasing levels of social, cultural and political difference.

A politics of dignity in difference would also be needed for those case studies that focus on the vulnerability of younger generations. Young people have been affected by evictions and displacement either through the commodification of public spaces (Maharawal, 2017) or as a result of racialised broken-windows policing (Cahill et al., 2017; Owens and Antiporda, 2017). These empirical findings on urban resistance speak directly to the intersection between debates on human rights and human dignity. This is because the operational neglect of principles of human rights in real politics has been contested in forms of resistance in which an ethical consideration of dignity is expressed. Public space mobilisation and resistance are thus ideal fields to empirically track down disjuncture between human rights and human dignity, and help to include individual, collective, public, and political forms of social (self)organisation that all address dignity in different ways.

3.4. Public Space as Grounds for Alter-Politics

Historically, cities have been perceived as places where different publics within urban society have used public space as an urban commons. However, within neoliberal governmentality, the city has changed from being conceived as possessing a collective urban history to being defined by a narrative of competition. Competition has become a key concept in urban democratic societies, which in turn means that those who are not able or do not want to become part of this competitive rationale are excluded (Tyler, 2015). This is an affront to civic dignity as an ethical-political approach. Embarking from a deeper understanding of democracy would promote the equal treatment of all parts of a political community (and those beyond it).

The conducted research on various protest movements shows that public space serves as an important site where resistance groups with different motivations articulate their demands and criticisms and radically reinvent the democratic project. In this vein, the study on which this paper is based draws upon earlier work which understands the collective production of space as a democratic act. Through it, those who previously had no part become central agents for re-establishing democracy (Rancière, 2010). The broad range of studied cases from different cities around the globe offers results that enable us to both further differentiate between disenfranchised groups and to elaborate on how those differently disempowered and disenfranchised groups relate to public space – as well as how they use public space to connect to other urban realms. For instance, groups of unemployed have re-appropriated offices, vacant factories, or container terminals, and thus have linked public space with labour markets and workplaces (e.g. in Buenos Aires). The unsheltered have connected public space with housing and homes. Protestors in Barcelona, for example, have occupied empty buildings, de-privatised, rehoused, and de-commodified private property. These indigents have reclaimed bank assets into collective property. The un(der)represented have connected their struggles in public space with sites where democracy ideally should be made (e.g. in Athens’ Syntagma Square). In Taipei, protestors have blocked symbolically important public squares and streets, and even the parliamentary building. The unattended have brought public space together with transport infrastructure by occupying and using train stations in Vienna and Budapest to stand together in global solidarity and to organise humanitarian support, e.g. for refugees. The colonised have occupied sites emblematic of colonial history, of oppression, inferiority, terror, and imprisonment (as cases of Oakland and San Francisco indicate). They have linked public space with such places in order to symbolically free themselves from a history of colonisation. In Ghent and Berlin, the non-consumers have protested in and for non- and de-commodified spaces, thus connecting public space with places of non-consumption and commoning. They have shared common resources through using both private and public properties.

Public spaces are not only essential sites for claiming rights and stating dissent, they also offer possibilities to expand political identifications to others. This is how protestors use lived space as a vehicle to incite wider political resistance and the creation of an alternative democratic society. Hence, public space, in the sense of lived and political space, is precisely where the multiple fragmentations and failures of neoliberal hegemony become visible, and where those potential spaces that escape neoliberalism’s spatial conquista can be analysed. In this vein, public space is the arena where different types of (counter-)publics meet, where they
try to achieve decent living conditions, and where they intermingle, collaborate, and build solidarity across different(ly) affected groups. This means that public space needs to be conceived as both an opportunity and a threat. On the one hand, public space offers the possibility for citizens to make their claims visible, not least to receive support for their struggles. On the other hand, as shown in the case of Mexico City, it also risks people becoming further marginalised, stigmatised, dispossessed, threatened, or criminalised (de la Llata Gonzales, 2017). Hence, public space cannot only become a site of one’s empowerment but also where one’s vulnerability is exposed, which includes the risk of losing one’s dignity and of losing one’s life.

Finally, empirical research on urban publics can help to identify a shift from anti-politics towards alter-politics (Hage, 2012). ‘Anti-politics’ refers to forms of protest against certain issues whereas ‘alter-politics’ denominates the desire for a politics of radical change. Thus, alter-politics aims at practicing and establishing an alternative democratic project, one that is opposed to the post-democratic model and that offers a different idea of a democratic society.

4. Conclusion: Silent and Unsilenced Forms of Resistance and Solidarity

As outlined in the previous sections, our research on diverse empirical cases in various cities and continents illustrates the crucial role of public space in reclaiming and reinstating democracy. Differently motivated resistance groups have used a broad range of strategies and tactics to connect public space protests with direct action in private, public, or hybrid territories of capital accumulation. Their acts of resistance have linked the public and private realms in order to address and confront the pervasive and overlapping means, strategies, and impacts of current neoliberal governmentality.

Reflecting on these empirical findings might enable us to directly address issues of dignity and link them with the role of public space. If dignity can be defined as non-humiliation, we suffer indignity, as Ober (2014) states, when our public presence goes unacknowledged, when we cringe before the powerful, when we are unduly subject to the paternalistic will of others and when we are denied the opportunity to employ our reason and voice in making choices that affect us […] Dignity is […] a matter of the respect we accord to one another. It is because we live in communities, structured by rules, that the ethical question about lives going well became a question for political theory. From this perspective, the best political regime is the one that provides the best conditions for lives to go well (ibid., p.53f).

The question, then, would be whether public space agency ‘enables a ready response to dignitary threats’ (ibid., p.56). This question cannot be fully answered, yet a critical reflection on the evidence is that ‘the concern for defense of dignity among a body of citizens need not dull the concern felt by citizens for the dignity of those outside the citizen body’ (ibid., p.58). This concern is of key relevance here, as it helps to rethink the roles of those included and excluded in the political publics. Such an inclusive and open conception of civic dignity helps to reconnect to Rancière’s focus on those who had no part and who are considered as having the prime agency in the renewal of the democratic project. In his considerations about the Community of Equals, Rancière (1991) argues that

We can thus dream of a society of the emancipated […] Such a society would repudiate the division between those who know and those who don’t, between those who possess or don’t possess […] It would only know minds in action: people who do, who speak about what they are doing, and who thus transform all their works into ways of demonstrating the humanity that is in them as in everyone. Such people would know that no one is born with more intelligence than […] [their] neighbour […] They would know that [human]’s dignity is independent of […] [their] position, that “[…] [humans are] not born to a particular position, but […] [are] meant to be happy in […] [themselves], independently of what fate brings” (ibid., p.71, quoting Jacotot, 1836, p.243, insertions by paper authors).

Following Bayat (2010), in Western democracies public space is part of the institutions of the modern nation-
state. However, as he indicates, many of the subaltern in cities of the Global South have no access to public spaces. Hence, he argues that

> Because modernity is a costly existence, not everyone can afford to be modern. It requires the capacity to conform to the types of behaviour and mode of life [...] that most vulnerable people simply cannot afford (ibid., p. 59).

Urban public space, as a highly-institutionalised realm, is one of these components of the modern world. Many subaltern groups try to avoid public expression wherever possible in order to escape modern legal structures. They do so because these legal structures mostly restrict their daily life instead of offering them opportunities or resources (ibid.). However, to adequately understand urban resistance, it is of great importance to also consider the type of silent, individual protest to which Bayat refers. As we take a worlded, critical perspective in examining different forms of resistance, we suggest that such ‘social non-movements’ (Bayat, 2010) are an essential aspect that can contribute to an understanding of the city as self-organised political project.

This research, however, has been concerned with acts through which such silences have been overcome. Hence, urban public space has been analysed as a site of loud and passionate resistance, as a catalyst for radical democratic change, and where people disrupt political silence in order to renew the democratic project – in which ‘the spaces of democracy (spaces for the practice of democracy) and the democracy of space (democratic relations in the production of space)’ (García-Lamarca, 2017, p. 52, referring to Hoskyns, 2014, p. 4) are inherently interwoven. Following Ober (2008), the original meaning of democracy refers to power as the capacity to do things

Demokratia is not just ‘the power of the demos’ in the sense ‘the superior or monopolistic power of the demos relative to other potential power-holders in the state.’ Rather it means [...] ‘the empowered demos’ – it is the regime in which the demos gains a collective capacity to effect change in the public realm. And so it is not just a matter of control of a public realm but the collective strength and ability to act within that realm and, indeed, to reconstitute the public realm through action (ibid., p. 7).

As Ober (2014) has identified elsewhere, ‘the practice of civic dignity developed [...] in close association with democracy’ (ibid., p. 58). Research and action considering the qualities, pitfalls, and potential of public space agency might help to establish and/or maintain legal constraints and a political culture that values both human and civic dignity, the latter as the ‘responsibility of a group of civic peers to maintain the dignity of each and all’ (ibid., p. 57).

In order to better understand recent urban resistance, this paper aimed to shift attention onto public space, understood as lived space, in regard to its role, meaning, and relevance, to the practice of civic dignity and lived democracy. Our research aspires to demonstrate that in light of diminishing democratic institutions, spaces of resistance play a crucial role not only in holding the state and governmental institutions to account, but also in renewing and reclaiming democracy and pursue civic dignity. We have argued that the continued presence, contestation, and discourse of lived public space is essential in a radical democratic project. This means a worlded understanding of democracy is fundamental to protecting and enhancing the dignity of citizens, non-citizens, and communities against the encroachment of neoliberal interests, new authoritarianisms, and all other sources of increasing spatial patterns of social inequality.

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(DE)SIGNS FOR DIGNITY:
TOWARDS AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT IN ATHENS, GREECE
Alcestis P. Rodi

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Abstract
In spite of regulations aimed at ensuring that all people can enter and move through spaces, the need to create physical solutions that do not separate or segregate disabled populations has been overlooked. Further, the response of architects and designers is often to meet these regulations without considering the emotional impact of their designs, or the need for all users to be able to retain a sense of dignity as they enter and move through buildings and open spaces.

This gap calls for a (re)generation of the urban form with a totally new agenda. My research argues that designing spaces for disability should focus on designing places for dignity. Aimed at upcycling everyday environments as enabling environments, this research identifies and comparatively analyses typologies of apartment buildings and neighbourhoods in Athens, Greece, where the experience of dignity is ubiquitously threatened due to a planning pathogenesis. Here, typologies are evaluated using dignity-based criteria, and new design guidelines and actions are proposed.

This research and its findings will enrich access-knowledge through their innovative urban design paradigms with the potential to transform spatial environments into dignified spaces for all.

Keywords
Dignity, disability, accessibility, universal design, inclusive environments

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1. Introduction

‘I admit there is a dignity and beauty in a long flight of steps. Let them be used, then, around statues and monuments, where we don’t have to mount them. But they become a highly unwelcome form of beauty when they add, each day, to the exertions of everyone, and shut out some of the public completely.’


Designing spaces for disabled people should be designing places for dignity. The design of buildings and their adjacent sidewalks and streets primarily reflects the needs of healthy-bodied individuals, considered capable of climbing stairs, opening doors, traversing narrow hallways, and crossing streets. This is in spite of the fact that one in seven people worldwide has physical difficulties performing these tasks.

This paper not only promotes design for disabled people but also argues for design that promotes human dignity. More specifically, it demonstrates a critical need for architects and urban designers to respond to dignity-based criteria such as accessibility, safety, privacy, social interaction, and flexibility in a way that transforms physical forms into meaningful places serving all-inclusive communities. As the literature shows, spatial issues related to disability are often not discussed by actors and institutions involved in the development of the built environment, and thus disability remains stuck in a non-historical, a-theoretical, and seriously underexplored category in relation to building design practices (Imrie and Hall, 2001; J. Boys, 2017). Moreover, as this paper argues, designing both private and public spaces (such as homes and neighbourhoods) without addressing accessibility concerns is an attitude and practice that promotes exclusionary spatial design.

1.1. Exclusionary Space: The Role of Experts and the Impact on Users

Creating spaces that accommodate people with diverse abilities supports social integration and inclusion. Yet practitioners – architects, urban designers, engineers, developers, builders – are often reluctant to apply accessibility regulations in design solutions. Interviews conducted when the American Standards for Accessible Design went into effect in 1992 revealed that practitioners greeted this regulation with everything from ‘irritation to outright hostility’. They found the guidelines a ‘headache’ and an ‘epidemic’ difficult to understand. They ignored them, hoping ‘they would go away’ (Busch, 1994, p.45; Leibrock, 1994, p.56; Guffey 2018, p.156-158).

Historically, practitioners’ willingness to apply regulations and adapt to accessibility guidelines depends on whether the project is new construction or re-design of an existing building. In the case of the latter, the entrance of MIT’s main monumental entrance, with its long ascending flight of stairs, is an example of how wheelchair users have to bypass the ‘beauty’ and ‘dignity’ of the space, and instead enter through a small side door below leading to the basement. There, they move through windowless and utilitarian underground corridors leading to lifts. Back in the 1970s, MIT was a frontrunner in finding new ways to solve the ‘specialised problems’ of ‘physically handicapped students’, turning the entire campus into an enormous accessibility laboratory (MIT Planning Office, 1978). However, today, the ideology that dictated the elevated, neoclassical façade and the reluctance to adapt it have prevented fully equitable accessibility. Similarly, the award-winning, iconic new library at TUDelft, despite its sloped green roof that transforms the building into a walkable landscape, fails to provide access at the front entrance to those with disabilities. Instead, they have to ring the bell at the staff entrance in the back of the building and be escorted to a lift. As Imrie and Hall (2001, p.103) note, defending their decision to bypass accessibility design regulations, architects often claim that ‘it looks better.’ Beyond what is seen as architects’ ‘myopic preoccupation with aesthetics’, academic journals and schools further discourage ‘diluting’ architects’ visions. Yet this attitude can be transcended, as was the case in Robson Square, Vancouver, where stairs and ramps are intertwined, in compliance with Universal Design principles – thus demonstrating it is possible to merge aesthetics and accessibility. However, this project is often criticised as dangerous for both disabled and non-disabled users.
Beyond conventional aesthetic priorities, barrier-free design is widely believed to increase cost but not profit. Among the costs related to accessibility features which are considered a burden are sloped surfaces, wide corridors, and appropriate furnishings and materials. Time spent attempting to meet highly innovative aesthetic expectations also increases cost—such projects are often time-consuming during both the design and construction process, which a competitive construction market may not support. Even when time and cost are not an issue, disability remains a widely avoided topic compared to other disadvantaged identities. As Boys (2016) observes, unlike gender, race, or sexuality, we assume disability is unable to bring any criticality or creativity to the discipline of architecture.

When lacking appropriate training, spatial designers rely mostly on basic accessibility standards and rarely go beyond minimum legislated practices. Furthermore, surveys show that architects often stereotype individuals with disabilities as only those who are wheelchair-dependent, failing to provide design solutions and adaptive environments for a multiplicity of physical and cognitive impairments (Imrie and Hall, 2001, p.96-97, 143). Despite initial moves in the 1960s in the US, UK, and Sweden to redesign architecture education to include more inclusive design solutions, today’s academic and design communities remain unmotivated to provide dignified solutions for the disabled population. When they do, they turn to pedagogical disability tools whereby non-disabled students use wheelchairs or blindfolds to inform their designs. These tools are criticized as inaccurate, dangerous, reductive, ineffective, and depoliticising—serving only ‘to impart pity’ (Imrie and Hall, 2001, p.101; Hamraie, 2017, pp.133, 209).

Access-knowledge actually involves communities from multiple scientific disciplines, including social scientists, ergonomists, human engineers, medical specialists, rehabilitation experts, product designers, and disability theorists, as well as activists and policy makers. Despite the World Health Organization adopting a biopsychosocial model of disability that views disability as arising from physical, emotional, and environmental factors in 2011 (World Health Organization & World Bank, 2011), modern practitioners rarely understand that design with dignity as a fundamental criterion is necessary to achieve user equity.

Clearly, there is statutory inertia and awkwardness about the meaning or application of dignity in design. Dignity has a privileged position in the first article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: ‘All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.’ However, in the rest of the document, dignity is mentioned only twice and then but briefly (Mann, 1998, p.31). It was only in 1990 that the United States, where modern discussions about disability began as early as the 1950s, adopted the pioneering Americans with Disability Act, which prohibited discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all public and private places open to the public. As far back as 1945, in the United Nations Charter and the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the need for dignity for all human beings was recognised. Yet, it was not until 2006 that this prohibition of discriminatory practices was adopted by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), with ‘respect for their inherent dignity’.

Although approaches within different cultures vary widely, societies tend to create space only for a majority user. Historic exceptions include the city of Bath, where the mobility of the infirm and elderly were considered before 1821, and the Crystal Palace, the vast glass-and-iron hall of the Great Exhibition of 1851, where wheelchair users and the elderly could easily move indoors. However, entering the building from outdoors was only via stairs—making access the product of accident rather than ambition (Guffey, 2018, pp.27-28). Recently, Stephen Hawking, prefacing the World Report on Disability, recognised how ‘lucky’ he was that, contrary to the majority of people who struggle with everyday survival, he lived and worked with ‘comfort and dignity’ in a purposefully designed and built environment.

Research has underscored a strong relationship between living arrangements and the quality of a person’s life especially when they are disabled (Henning-Smith, 2015). The design of everyday surroundings, such as a person’s house, workplace, and neighbourhood, has a tremendous impact on their emotional, physical, and psychological well-being. Physical environments either disable or enable: stairs and revolving doors disable; ramps and automated evolving doors enable. Rectangular rooms enable people with impaired vision, but at the same time disable sound for those with hearing impairments. I argue that design decisions based on precise accessibility criteria contribute to the creation of inclusive and just societies.
1.2. Research Rationale

Little is known about how the physical characteristics of spatial arrangements affect disability, resulting in under-theorised and under-analysed approaches across both mainstream and innovative practices in architecture. Clearly, producing spaces for dignity requires a totally new agenda.

This paper proposes public and private urban forms that are dignifying and accessible for all users. The goal is to (re)generate urban spaces so that everyone, regardless of physical or other limitations, may move through the built environment with dignity. Within this framework, I introduce an approach that integrates innovative design principles with the theory and practices of architecture and urban design. As Rosen (2012, p.4) points out, no significant area of human life – from sports to architecture, from war to sexuality – is without its attendant philosophical specialists, conferences, and journals. Yet, the lack of philosophical interest in the concept of dignity is striking. Respecting dignity requires treating people 'with dignity' and never degrading, insulting, or expressing contempt or indifference towards anyone. I advocate spaces that in no way increase physical effort or create hazards, or violate disabled individuals’ dignity – all of which results in a sense of being excluded, segregated, or stigmatised.

I further argue that it is our task as designers to align our design priorities with the desires, emotions and needs of individuals both disabled and non-disabled, following Davis and Lifchez’s (1987, p.49) recommendation that ‘access for disabled people should be viewed not as a constraint on architectural design but as a major perceptual orientation to humanity instead’. Architecture and urban design theory and practice, viewed as ‘Universal’ and ‘All-inclusive’, have not yet been fully evaluated in terms of the way they meet, or fail to meet, the basic need for barrier-free routes from dwelling to community centre or work space. Spaces that attempt to conceive of spatial design in a way that has a positive impact on all people who enter or move through them are rare. This becomes evident in reading the 2017 Proceedings of the Association of the European Schools of Planning (AESOP) Congress, entitled ‘Spaces of Dialog for Places of Dignity,’ in which the words ‘disability’ and ‘dignity’ only appear on pages 7 and 27 (respectively) in a 3,328 page document. Rather than an academic endeavour, I propose meeting this challenge by asking how can we (re)design private and public spaces so that these environments assume, as a starting point, that people with disabilities are entitled to conduct their lives with dignity?

To this end, it is assumed that access-knowledge should go beyond the dichotomy of private and public urban environments to include houses, workplaces, and neighbourhoods – all of which are primary settings for people with temporary and permanent disabilities. Yet the majority of regulations control access to public buildings only, with no access controls applied to private dwellings, housing complexes, or city blocks. In the European Union, where the case study of this research is located, the existence of specific accessibility requirements and general obligations are far from universal for private housing compared to public buildings and work places. Practitioners and developers’ concerns about incorporating accessibility provisions into the design of private spaces widens statutory gaps. Beyond prescriptive access solutions as a condition of funding, creative design should find new solutions for individual needs and desires that are attractive and competitive within the real estate market. This approach transcends the dilemma of aesthetics versus function, as in Rem Koolhaas’s ‘Maison à Bordeaux’, where a 3m x 3.5m platform constitutes an open transposable room that carries the owner, who is in a wheelchair, to all levels of the house.

In this vein, I support ‘out-of-the-box’ design that promotes dignity. This paper investigates methods for upgrading the urban fabric to enable access to environments through regeneration or new development. With the goal of creating or regenerating the urban fabric so it can become an enabling environment, this paper identifies strengths and weaknesses of accessible private and public space used by both the permanently and temporarily disabled and the ageing population living in mass-produced built environments. Having argued that all urban spaces are primary environments in which dignity is exercised, the paper analyses urban forms at different scales – from apartment to building, city block and neighbourhood – and assigns access-based criteria. Through a case study approach in the city of Athens, where the dignity of disabled people has ubiquitously been ignored or threatened, design guidelines are presented in the hope of dignifying spaces in the manner of urban upcycling rather than mere recycling.
2. From Kaiadas to Universal Design

2.1. Disability and Dignity in a Historic Perspective

Definitions, terminology, meaning, and perceptions relating to both disability and dignity constitute an ongoing discourse, with distinct strands that have supported and contradicted each other in different historical contexts.

In ancient Greece there was no word directly translating to ‘dignity’, but evidence of it can be found, according to Rankine (2017, p.44), in terms of cultural standards for how ‘others’ (such as enemies, strangers, slaves, and beggars) were treated. Unlike today, there was no classification for ‘disabled’ and ‘non-disabled’ (Edwards, 1995, p.166). In Athens, the disabled population could provide for themselves and perform a variety of roles, and they received maintenance and pension allowances from the community (Sneed, 2018, pp.128-164). On the other hand, children with disabilities in Sparta were thrown into the abyss of Kaiadas – perhaps the reluctance to adapt a cruel metaphor for social exclusion and rejection. Being fearful was even interpreted by Spartans as a mark of disability. It is worth noticing that, according to Thucydides’ discourse about the plague and civil strife, human dignity in Classical Greece was seen as a value that could easily lapse and therefore should be ‘jealously guarded’ (Rankine, 2017, p.45).

In Roman terms, dignitas initially denoted an elevated social status. Cicero’s texts, in which half of the total appearances of the term dignitas in classical Latin are found, follow Greek Stoic teachings that human beings should see themselves as ‘citizens of the world’ (Rosen, 2012, p.12). Similarly, in the Renaissance, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola drew from Cicero’s concept of dignity to describe human beings as free to become whatever they choose, influencing the modern concept of human rights. Thus, the ideas of dignity and self-determination evolved from an exclusive right of the few into an inclusive right of all people (Rosen, 2012, p.14-15). In contrast, on the streets of Rome, people with physical impediments did not meet the ‘ideal’ Roman standard for ‘perfect beauty’, and were therefore excluded from public space.

Human dignity was little discussed in Western Medieval literature. This is often attributed to the Christian belief that God gave greater dignity to angels than to humans after the latter’s Fall from Paradise (Kent, 2017, p.95). At the beginning of the Middle Ages, the disabled were indistinguishable from the economically weak. On one hand, the fact that hunchbacks, dwarfs or others with disabilities were allowed to speak openly to rulers of European courts gave them a sort of prestige (Stiker, 1999, pp.67-70). On the other, it became commonplace to use ‘idiot cages’ to keep people with disabilities out of trouble, which turned them into entertainment for pedestrians in medieval towns. As if this were not enough, in the 16th century, disabled people were viewed as deformed.

In the 17th century, by contrast, the disabled were understood to be deserving of assistance. England’s Poor Law of 1601, a model also used in the American colonies established ‘structures’ for the disabled. Nonetheless, this ended in social stigma and alienation. Begging on the streets of Paris became outlawed in 1657 and further marginalised people with disabilities as it deprived them of an important source of income. (Albrecht et al., p.23)

One of the Enlightenment’s most enduring legacies is the conviction that all people have a distinct value or dignity (Darwall, 2017, p.181). The 18th century shifted dignity from the realm of merit to that of morality. Kant described dignity in 1785 as an unconditional, incomparable, non-interchangeable value that all humans should respect. He argued that it was one’s duty to treat people as ‘ends in themselves’, not as ‘mere means’, and identified autonomy as the grounds for dignity (Egonsson, 1998, p.100). Furthermore, Samuel Johnson defined equality as offering ‘the same degree of dignity’ to everyone (Debes, 2017, pp.6-7). Yet before the end of the 18th century, the Industrial Revolution had begun – turning cities and workplaces into hostile environments for people with impairments, leading to renewed marginalisation or institutionalised segregation. In the view of Vic Finkelstein (1981), disability was essentially a creation of industrial capitalism. On the other hand, the industrial era also prompted policy innovations and momentous changes relating to modern welfare services. These include workplace health, safety regulations, medical institutions for specific populations, trade union accident funds, and life insurance (Turner and Blackie, 2018, pp.4-5,93-128). This, in turn, led to the 20th century’s de-institutionalisation, normalisation, and extended lifespans for the disabled. However, this shift did not significantly alter the attitude and practices of architects and designers.
Throughout history, then, important shifts in attitude greatly affected the conceptual basis for dignity, as well as the treatment of, and attitudes towards, the disabled. The notable shifts were from a ranking of people by status to acknowledging the intrinsic value of all human beings and that all people should be treated with respect (Rosen, 2012). Likewise, percentual models of disability have evolved from ethical (stigma) and medical (functional loss) to social (a product of a disabling environment) and geographical-geospatial (spatial exclusion) and then to bio-psycho-social (synthesis of medical and social perspectives) (Zajadacz, 2015) viewpoints. Frameworks such as the UDHR and CRPD created the grounds for the 2011 World Report on Disability, which advocated measures to improve accessibility and equal opportunity; promoted participation and inclusion; and increased respect for the autonomy and dignity of the disabled. Most countries today include the word ‘dignity’ in their constitutions and legislation, shifting from nomenclature such as ‘handicapped’ to ‘a person who uses a wheelchair’ – emphasising the person rather than the disability. Yet with all this, we have not changed how we design for people with disabilities. To address this lag, this research pursues a more inclusive physical form that will allow people with disabilities to live with dignity.

2.2. Accessibility Thinking: A Brief Overview of Designing for Disability

In Europe, discourse on design that accommodates disability began to emerge in the 1960s. It was at this time that disability shifted from being understood as either a physical pathology requiring a cure or a functional limitation demanding rehabilitation to a function of impairment and interactions with the environment (a construct of built and social environments) (Hamraie, 2017, pp.12, 268). Recall that a decade earlier, barrier-free advocacy was already widespread in the USA.

Two ideological approaches to disablement arose: self-help in the United States and social welfare in Europe. Tim Nugent, the ‘Father of Accessibility’, argued for helping disabled people help themselves, while Selwyn Goldsmith, an architect suffering from polio and a principal theorist of disability design in the United Kingdom, insisted that society should help and protect its weaker members. In Nugent’s scheme, the integration between disabled persons and the world around them should be seamless, as he advocated not drawing attention to disability. In Goldsmiths’ conception, special features for disabled people should not be hidden or denied. On the contrary, attention should be drawn to them. He argued for separate but equal facilities for disabled people and advocated ‘positive discrimination’. (Guffey, pp.67-86, 95-108)

Subsequently, the need to increase accessibility and equal opportunities gained wider recognition. Ronald Mace coined the term ‘Universal Design’ to describe the design of products and environments usable by all people without the need for adaptative or specialised design. Although based on the concept of Barrier-free Design, he argued that what can be barrier-free for one person can be a barrier for someone else. Initially concerned with defining users and disseminating new access-knowledge, Universal Design has emphasised project/product evaluation at all scales (Mace, 1985, pp.147-52; Hamraie, 2017, p.226-250). Further shifts include ‘Accessible Design’ broadening the notion of standard design so as to include people with some types of performance limitations; ‘Design for All’, a holistic approach that aims to enable all people to have equal opportunities to participate in every aspect of society; ‘Inclusive Design’, an evolving philosophy emphasising a heightened understanding of individuals-with- disabilities’ requirements, desires, and expectations (Persson et al., 2014).

Since no single theory explains all the complexities of human-environment relationships, a synthesis of multiple theories is required (Webb et al., 2011). Within this framework, this research recognises that some disabilities can be accommodated through permanent spatial devices and modifications, while others can be better accommodated through portable technologies and gadgets (e.g. hearing aids, prosthetic devices). The research will focus on permanent spatial devices at architectural and urban levels.

3. Research Method

The present research conducts a case study analysis and evaluation in order to acquire access-knowledge towards rehabilitative interventions in private and public urban space.
Dignity is usually violated due to an asymmetrical prevalence of interest or benefit (Jacobsen et al., 2009). I selected contemporary Athens as a setting in which dignity is neglected due to land speculation precedents, petty interests, non-implementation of rules, and faulty design accentuated by the recent economic and social crises. As a result, common good and disability rights have been ignored, creating an exclusive and disabling urban environment.

To reverse this trend, I adopt a knowledge-based framework, ‘Morphology-Operation-Performance’ (MOP), based on values of inclusion and dignity. Evaluating physical artefacts, including built objects, this framework analyses and represents knowledge about how they are made (Morphology), how they work (Operation), and what benefits or impacts these buildings create for people (Performance). Initially developed within the domain of architectural design at Harvard (Tzonis, 1992), MOP later expanded to urban design and planning due to its generic knowledge representation (Rodi, 2008). Within this framework, this research identifies, describes, and explains conditions of Athenian spaces (Morphology) that constrain conditions of access (Operation), and in turn constrain the possibility for an inclusive environment that promotes dignity (Performance). Knowledge is gained through a targeted typo-morphological analysis of Athens’ urban fabric. Based on inclusion and dignity values, and following the backward chaining of ‘Performance-Operation-Morphology’ (POM) (prescription), design guidelines leading to regenerated urban spaces are developed (Table 1).

My research focuses on the private and public built environments of homes and neighbourhoods, where I establish the essential basis on which a person with disabilities is able to manage everyday activities independently, safely, and with contentment. Through the subsequent scales of apartment, building, city-block, and neighbourhood, it explores the typo-morphological features connecting spaces – ranging from intimate (e.g. bathrooms), private (e.g. bedrooms) semi-private (e.g. living rooms), shared and common areas of buildings (e.g. staircase landings), semi-public ones (e.g. building entrance) and, finally, to public spaces (e.g. street, neighbourhood).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Forward and Backward Chaining of ‘Morphology-Operation-Performance’ Framework for Regenerating Space</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>POM: Knowledge-based chaining (description/explanation)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Performance</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wheelchair-user cannot enter the building (user is excluded: non-dignifying space)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**MOP: Prescriptive chaining (prescription for the ideal)**

| **New Performance (desired)** | **New Operation (desired)** | **New Morphology (desired)** |
| Wheelchair-user enter the building (user is included: dignifying space) | Wheelchairs can enter through ramp (access) | Building entrance with ramp (no-barrier) |

In order to identify the conditions that enable urban forms, I select types of urban fabric and apartment buildings in Athens as case studies. The following selection procedure is applied:

- Sixteen particular neighbourhoods (eight in central Athens and eight on the periphery) were identified as complying with the following criteria: (i) street pattern typologies; (ii) predominantly residential use; (iii) diverse population densities; and (iv) diverse socio-economic characteristics. The selection process included the ‘scanning’ of maps, evaluation of statistical data, site visits, and surveys. The study areas are in the form of either a 750m x 750m square or a 400m-diameter circle.
• Apartment building typologies in a typical city block were identified as complying with the following criteria: (i) construction from 1917 to date, and of the predominant architectural style; (ii) in relation to Building Codes of the years 1929, 1955, 1973, 1985, and 2000; (iii) diverse sizes; and (iv) diverse socio-economic characteristics. The process included archival and source research, site visits and evaluations, and surveys of twenty apartment buildings and one office building constituting a city block (CB).

The typo-morphological features of the selected cases (Morphology) permitting, establishing or eliminating accessibility (Operation) were identified and analysed in order to evaluate inclusion or exclusion (Performance). However, this alone may not capture disabled people’s overall perception and experience of apartment buildings and public open spaces that impact their dignity. Therefore, I introduce ten access-based criteria either drawn from the context of contemporary urban theory and literature on inclusion and dignity (Egonsson, 1998; Herwig, 2008; Preiser and Smith, 2011), or developed within the framework of this research in order to evaluate private and urban spaces in the case studies. The criteria are as follows: adaptability, aesthetics, autonomy, efficiency, equitability, flexibility, perception, privacy, safety and social interaction.

4. Athens, a Case to Apply Dignity

In 348 BC, in his judicial oration Against Meidias (21.221-225), Demosthenes described a public realm where the individual citizen could walk with his head held high, without worrying about threats to his dignity. In his endeavour to actively defend and establish civic dignity in Athens, he intuitively established walking in public space as the action of and locus for practising dignity. Much earlier, according to Panetsos (1997, pp.64-65), Theseus, the legendary hero of Athens, united various townships into an administrative entity (the Greek word Athênai was plural because the city had several distinct parts). Panetsos asked, ‘should we perhaps again create many Athênai, respect particularity, recognise individuality, accept diversity, ensure the possibility of choice, permit a comparison between equally valuable but different pieces of the city?’

Walking in today’s Athens contrasts sharply with the conditions of the polis envisioned by Demosthenes. Because the public realm can be physically and emotionally challenging, disabled citizens in Athens are all but excluded. Narrow pavements with obstacles, faulty construction, and poor maintenance of paving and ramps, open gutters, an absence of a system at crossings for the hearing impaired, and dysfunctional parking make the outdoors hostile and dangerous (Figure 1). Indoor spaces are also unwelcoming and oppressive. They feature stairs to the entrance of apartment buildings, substandard corridors, lifts, and clearances with restricted access. Austerity measures and the ongoing social crisis have added to this deterioration due to both inadequate maintenance and vandalism.

Beyond the disabled, the percentage of seniors within the Athenian population is currently increasing faster than before due to longer life expectancy, low birth rates, and emigration. It is predicted that one in every three residents will be over 65 by 2050. Because strong family ties in Greek society keep the elderly within the family home, rather than care homes, the existing built environment will become increasingly unable to accommodate users with temporary or permanent disabilities.

4.1. The Formation of a Disabling Urban Fabric

Within a period of almost two centuries, modern Athens has developed from a small town to a diffused metropolis. The city has taken shape without the long processes of evolution that other European cities have experienced (Panetsos, 1996), with the administration failing to enforce regulation or prioritise common good over individual or speculative interests. The very concept of planning was undermined as soon as the first city plan was created by private speculation and petty interests (Tzonis and Rodi, 2013). This shaped a sub-standard and discriminatory urban environment with narrow streets, small city blocks, and a lack of public open spaces.
Today, central Athens is an aggregation of repetitive apartment buildings, the Polykatoikias, introduced in the early 20th century. They grew thanks to a quid pro quo system (antiparochi) based on private initiative and interpersonal relations, a process that affronts participatory design. A version of the Corbusian Domino (1914), Polykatoikias were adopted on a mass scale due to their ease of construction, low cost, density on small building plots, long life expectancy, and design/use flexibility. It provided fast-track solutions to housing problems and minimised the need for social welfare programmes – thus eliminating protests advocating for working-class housing.

As a mass-marketed residential product, the polykatoikias reflected a desire for better living standards paired with economic potential. Although intended for the average user and based on the Modernist concept of Existenzminimum – another word for a subsistence dwelling with minimally-acceptable floor space and considerable density – it proved flexible to mixed use; accommodating the diverse activities of different users independent of professional and economic situation, lifestyle, individual challenges, origin, or status.

Overall, this housing solution has been resilient because the apartments themselves are flexible enough to serve this relatively diverse population with different needs (Rodi, 2018). However, the very concepts of Existenzminimum and ‘average user’ largely exclude people with disabilities. Furthermore, the polykatoikias have become run-down due to physical aging, a lack of maintenance, outdated amenities, and abandonment by their original tenants. Furthermore, the dominant presence of cars in neighbourhoods, unstructured parking on pavements and pedestrian streets, and a lack of (or vandalised) signage – including that related to disability – have produced a discriminatory urban environment. Quite clearly, this degraded and degrading situation calls for ideological revision and physical transformation.
Figure 2 - City Block #3911, Kolonaki, Athens, Greece
Since massive demolition and rebuilding are not realistic options (Rodi, 2008), redesign at all scales, from the apartment to the neighbourhood, targeted to the needs of people with diverse bodies and abilities, constitutes the focus of this research.

4.2. From Private to Public: A Territorial Continuum

The existing territorial depth of the Athenian built fabric provides a continuous and gradual transition from public to private, allowing for various levels of privacy and intimacy for disabled residents as well as multiple opportunities for interaction with family and community (Tables 2-3).

Apartment buildings and streets, and private and public spaces, are closely interwoven, with building façades forming the street edge. In contrast, social interaction decreases in suburban environments where street walls are ‘dissolved’ and front gardens lie between streets and houses. Anomalies to the continuous territorial depth are the polykatoikias’ backyards – common spaces totally separated from the street – and front balconies, private spaces hovering over the public realm. In back yards, disabled residents may enjoy privacy, safety and social interactions with neighbours. On balconies, residents acquire a better visual perception of street and neighbourhood life, without even exiting their apartments.

Table 2: Territorial Structure of the Athenian Fabric Based on Accessibility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neighbourhood street network</th>
<th>Street</th>
<th>Sidewalk</th>
<th>Building entrance</th>
<th>Lobby</th>
<th>Staircase/Elevator</th>
<th>Back yard*</th>
<th>Stair landing</th>
<th>Roof*</th>
<th>Hall</th>
<th>Living room</th>
<th>Balcony*</th>
<th>Dining room</th>
<th>Kitchen</th>
<th>Bedroom</th>
<th>Bathroom</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>public</td>
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* Asterisks denote anomalies in ranking

This spatial/territorial ‘advantage’ is, however, invalidated by various obstacles, grade differences, inadequate dimensioning and interior layouts, and the presence of steps at the threshold between the pavement and polykatoikia entrances. The buildings’ back yards within city blocks are rarely unified into an integrated outdoor space for social interactions and recreation, despite various incentives. Furthermore, Athenians today prefer to stay in their private, air-conditioned apartments rather than relax on balconies – a practice which was common in the past and afforded verbal and visual communication between neighbours.
4.2.1. On Private Space (Apartments, Buildings, City Blocks)

The greatest part of Athens’ private space is confined within city blocks, consisting of small lots, where 6- to 7-storey polykatoikias are arranged contiguously along the edges of streets (Figure 3). Backyards aggregate into an irregularly shaped open space in the centre of blocks. My research on the polykatoikia’s typomorphological elements captures differentiations and similarities across the building type’s evolution (Rodi, 2008). A comparative analysis of building and apartment plans, room shapes and sizes, access and circulation graphs, and space syntaxes have informed my quantitative and qualitative diagrams. Polykatoikias dating from before and after World War II can be distinguished.

City Block 391 1 (Figure 2) is composed of eight apartment buildings from the 1930-1938 period, and twelve apartment buildings and one office building from the 1955-1989 period.

Precedents of the polykatoikia can be found in the European, primarily French, apartment building type. Following Julien Guadet’s codification (1902), apartment layouts, irrespective of the period and building code, are separated into three zones: day-zone (living rooms, dining rooms); night-zone (bedrooms); and service-zone (kitchen, bathrooms, halls, corridors, service rooms). The same zoning is found at the city block scale. Regardless of sunlight considerations, daytime rooms are oriented towards the street, night-time rooms towards the centre of city blocks, and service areas in-between (Figure 2. Day/Service/Night). The socio-economic status of polykatoikia residents broadened from the bourgeoisie in the pre-WWII period to lower classes post-WWII. Improved contemporary amenities, such as lifts and centralised services were provided. However, apartments and individual spaces shrank, ceiling heights were lowered, and corridors narrowed in compliance with modernist standards. Following WWII, live-in personnel were replaced by weekly service cleaners, and new social habits and forms of families, households, and living arrangements emerged. These social changes minimised service areas and brought day and night zones closer together, facilitating in-house mobility.

Evaluating residential space in Athenian city blocks on the basis of inclusion and dignity-related criteria, I find that the polykatoikias, and typical city blocks, constitute either enabling or disabling environments. Front daytime rooms, as well as balconies, afford views of public space and adjacent buildings, interaction with neighbours, and street life perspective. Windows, doors and balconies increase residents’ visual connection to public activities, and opportunities to see and be seen. Night zones in the back of buildings create privacy and quietude (Figure 3 isovists and ratios). Although in-between service and circulation areas allow for efficient navigation between serving and served apartment spaces, the width of corridors and doors do not always permit disabled access (Figure 3 accessible apartment area). The same applies to bathrooms and kitchens, where swinging doors and inadequate space restricts wheelchair movement and manouevring.

Entry areas from the street to apartments can create opportunities for face-to-face contact between passers-by and residents. Lobbies, landings, and other common areas can foster encounters and encourage social interaction. While the polykatoikias address access issues with lifts, landings do not always comply with dimension specifications for wheelchair manouevring. Furthermore, flights of steps between entrances and lifts, and stepped thresholds to the pavement, restrict disabled residents’ passage (Figure 4). Duplex and split-level apartments do not exist in CB391 1; they generally constitute exceptions.

The Domino-like system allows flexibility and adaptability in the polykatoikias. However, not all layouts are sensitive to the concerns of the disabled. This research finds that the pre-WWII apartments are easier to adapt for persons with disabilities due to the number and size of the rooms, while 1970s apartments require more changes. Minimum dimensions for rooms suggest a reconfiguration of layouts through demolition. Newly built apartments need few adjustments due to open-plan layouts, round-like circulation paths, and shallow space syntaxes (for space syntax theory see Hiller and Hanson, 1984). Short corridors increase mobility efficiency and improve autonomy. The dominance of linear-type space syntaxes dictates disabled individuals’ move along the same route (Figure 3 accessible areas and ratios in apartments).
Figure 3 - Comparative Floor Plans, Space Syntaxes and Depths, Isovists and Ratios, and Wheelchair Accessible Areas and Ratios in CB#3911 Apartment Buildings
4.2.2. On Public Space (Streets, Neighbourhoods)

In eight central neighbourhoods in Athens (Figure 5, rows one to eight) and eight peripheral neighbourhoods (Figure 5, rows nine to sixteen), I have assessed street patterns and street lengths, including dead-ends. Pedestrian experiences differ substantially across street patterns (Rodi, 2013). Areas developed on highly sloping sites, and new developments, possess shorter street lengths. Hilly areas and short total street lengths require more physical effort and reduce autonomy (Figure 5b).

The increased number of intersections (Figure 5d) provides many alternative routes for disabled people, but also increased danger of traffic accidents. Organically developed areas with irregular street patterns, as well as rectangular street patterns and short city blocks, have numerous intersections, where the repetitive nature of the grid improves perception and may facilitate orientation albeit involving frequent manoeuvring.

Numerous entry points into areas (Figure 5e) increase connectivity to the surroundings. Most dead-end streets are to be found in urban developments along arterials (Figure 5d, third column, ninth row). Designed neighbourhoods do not have dead-ends. Dead-end streets (Figure 5c) hamper circulation through the area and, therefore, reduce through traffic. This contributes to disabled people’s safety and privacy, by decreasing chances for spontaneous social interaction.

Historic urban and peripheral areas have the highest number of city blocks, which prevent the disabled from moving efficiently from place to place along a choice of alternative routes. On the other hand, numerous small city blocks, as in historic peripheral settlements and central urban areas of Athens, shorten walks, allowing people to zig zag through. Contrary to the rectangular designs, irregularly shaped blocks may confuse people with learning problems, especially non-residents.

Alternative routes connecting two diametrically opposed points on a notional circle of a 200m-radius are also compared (Figure 6). A neighbourhood with alternative routes may provide different options for the disabled population. The large number of intersections in organic street patterns result in almost twice as many
alternative routes as in gridded patterns, even though they are similar in total length. Short city blocks create more alternative routes, thus increasing flexibility and autonomy for the disabled.

Figure 5 - Comparison of Central (rows one to eight) and Peripheral (rows nine to sixteen) Neighbourhood Cases (750m X 750m). From left to right: (a) Street pattern, (b) main streets, (c) dead-end streets, (d) street intersections, (e) entrances to areas, (f) bus stops, (g) green areas
Figure 6 - Alternative Routes Connecting Two Diametrically Opposed Points on a Notional Circle of a 200m-radius in Peripheral (Eight) and Central (One) Neighbourhoods

(As shown, the number of alternative routes may range from one to 174 in peripheral areas, while in only one central area is 775.)
Accidents are more frequent at crossings, which may lead to reduced mobility and decisions to stay at home. I show the number and frequency of crossings, the size and shape of blocks and the area travelled for destinations to be reached safely (Figure 7). A high Safe Access Ratio is achieved when large areas can be traversed with minimum street crossings. High on the list are neighbourhoods with large city blocks.

Archaeological areas, natural enclaves, and busy arteries generally create circulation barriers and hamper accessibility. Peri-urban developments are poorly connected to other locations, thus diminishing accessibility. This, in turn, can affect disabled people’s sociability and willingness to go out. In contrast, neighbourhood parks and squares may increase social interaction, particularly for people with diverse mobility alternatives (Figure 5g).

4.3. Proposals: Towards an ‘Enabling’ Environment

Using a prescriptive chain of performance-operation-morphology, I develop a new set of design guidelines and actions beyond accessibility regulations and the public-private dichotomy. These include:

**Neighbourhood level:**
- Expanded pedestrian networks.
- Improved neighbourhood connectivity and accessibility through additional pathways.
- Restored or improved continuity of private-public spaces.
- Specialised infrastructure for the disabled e.g. rehabilitation centres, activity hubs.

**City block level:**
- Unified courtyards within each block.
- Interconnected and programmed flat roofs.
- Shared circulation networks and services rather than individual ones in each building.
- Specialised spaces for fitness and interaction, such as pools and gyms.

**Apartment building level:**
- Interconnected spaces within one or adjacent buildings so as to achieve enabling spaces.
- Lift installation as additions or within existing shafts.
- Disabled parking on accessible ground floors and basements in buildings.
- Fully accessible entrances through modifications of apartment buildings.
• Landings accommodating wheelchairs and elderly seating.
• New social spaces in lobbies, on roofs, and in added rooms.
• Enhanced stairs through high-contrast materials and markings.
• Changing the floor plan to install a lift because the majority of the elevators in the city blocks' buildings do not have enough space to comply with the required dimensions for wheelchair users.

Apartment level:

• Redesigned layouts for proximity, accessibility, adaptability, and easy care for the disabled and the elderly – including divisions or merging of apartment units.
• Redesigned circulation through the transformation of existing space syntaxes from fan- to ring-like.
• Replacement of dysfunctional building elements such as swinging doors and bathtubs.
• Removal of potential hazards – such as overhangs (for the visually impaired) and slippery surfaces.
• Provision of private spaces for helping personnel.

All of the above invite creative design responses and call for improved aesthetics.

5. Conclusions

The exclusion of disabled individuals from many facets of the built environment is an urgent problem in Athens. Spatial components are major determinants of whether the mobility of people with temporary or permanent disabilities is enabled or restricted; and, as demonstrated by this research, these spatial components are not yet recognised as also enhancing or threatening their dignity.

In terms of urban components at the scales of apartment, building, city block, and neighbourhood, this research has examined factors in Athens that promote dignity and access for all people: adaptability, aesthetics, autonomy, efficiency, equitability, flexibility, perception, privacy, safety and social interaction. Still, it is evident that a large-scale transformation of public space is not yet taking place. A product of architectural modernism that addressed only the needs of the ‘average user’, the polykatoikia model is flexible enough to have evolved according to these users’ needs – regardless of social status or economic and political fluctuations – so it is now time to serve the city’s disabled population.

The methods and findings of this research can be used by planners, designers, developers, and policy makers – in cooperation with disability medical experts and activists – to analyse, evaluate, design, and regenerate new and existing disability concepts, strategies, and projects. In this way, the urban form of Athens can develop into an enabling environment where people with diverse bodies and abilities can live in dignity. It is time for urban planning, and design theory and practice, to creatively ascribe to considerations of dignity and access in all urban forms regardless of scale and status. In the pursuit of access-knowledge, finer scales (furniture and appliances), and coarser ones (city, region, state) should also be explored, with a consideration of the cultural, legal, political, societal, and economic dimensions of cities.

Deterministic architectural assumptions about how spatial transformations relate to the behaviour of the disabled population are hereby challenged. Architecture and changes to the built environment cannot fully transcend or override conditions or mental or emotional states; but it is imperative that research and access-knowledge re-aligns spatial design and technological innovations in response to the needs of this under-considered community. Indeed, smart technologies have attempted to provide comfort and ensure community participation. Smart glasses, for example, help blind people navigate through space in real-time, smart bracelets help the visually impaired to keep track of personal objects. However, wheelchairs still cannot fully deploy their potential in most environments due to a lack of physical capacity. Beyond accessibility standards, it is urgent that spatial designers incorporate or build into the built environment a compatibility with assistive technologies and home automation.

This paper frames design for disability as fundamentally a dignity issue. Just as alphabet systems for the blind were based on raised Roman letters – an alphabet for the sighted – design for accessibility is presently
configured as merely adapting the spaces of the ‘universal user’ for the disabled. Instead, design for dignity requires a new paradigm which is not about accommodating but actually designing spaces for disabled people. In future, our biggest challenge is to design solutions that are user-centred (for those physically and otherwise challenged), instead of using the non-disabled population as a baseline for what is acceptable or normal, and adapting it. The current discourse, knowledge, and practice of architecture and urban design should be re-directed towards a just and noble mission: the transformation of Athens, and the world at large, into a dignified place for all.

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References


STUCK IN THE MIDDLE:
THE TRANSITION FROM SHELTER TO HOUSING
FOR REFUGEES IN BELGIUM

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Abstract

Given the increasing number of people seeking refuge in Belgium and across Europe more broadly, it is essential that governments assume responsibility for the integration of refugees into society. An essential aspect of this process is the provision of a durable path from shelter to housing. Choosing a place of residence, and the success in obtaining suitable housing conditions, are factors that significantly shape the integration process. In the context of refugee settlement in Belgium, however, asylum and migration policies to date have been predominantly focused on tackling temporary crises with little consideration paid to long-term integration and housing strategies. Due to separated policy competences (reception at the federal policy level, and housing at the regional level), and the absence of a sense of responsibility from both Flemish (regional) and federal government, voluntary organisations have developed significant roles at the local level in the transition from shelter to housing, and in further housing needs of recognised refugees. Achieving this transition is impeded by capacity problems, discrimination, lack of local social networks, and limited timeframes. Using the concept of path dependency as a theoretical starting point, this article employs qualitative methods to highlight the impact of both asylum policies and the spatial characteristics of reception centres on transitions towards more permanent housing. Recommendations for refugee accommodation are made to enhance the transition from shelter to housing. Finally, it addresses alternative housing projects that are conducive to social integration as well as to the transition of refugees to the regular housing market.

Keywords
Refugee, integration, shelter/reception, housing, path dependency, transition, policy, spatial characteristics

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1. Introduction

1.1. From an Asylum to a Housing Crisis for Refugees

Following the sharp increase in refugee flows in 2015, the issue of refugees and migrants has taken a prominent place on the political agenda. In 2015 and 2016, almost 60 percent of the people in shelters in Belgium were formally recognised as refugees or subsidiary protected people (CGVS, 2017). Most of them were young single men or families with children. The so-called asylum crisis was proclaimed to be over at the end of 2016. In practice, however, it soon became clear that the most significant challenges still lay ahead as the asylum crisis gradually evolved into a more long-term housing crisis for refugees. To date, refugees have been stranded in a transition from shelter to regular housing. In other words, refugees are ‘stuck in the middle’. The lack of access to long-term housing acts as a hindrance towards refugee integration. Indeed, the home and living environment is an essential indicator and the first step towards the integration of newcomers (Murdie, 2002; Francis and Hiebert, 2014; Firang, 2018; Teixeira and Drolet, 2018; Balampanidis, 2020). In addition, spatial characteristics of housing and reception centres (including available meeting spaces, mobility infrastructure, etc.) generate opportunities and resources that potentially promote upward mobility. These opportunities and resources include social systems; markets; institutions; human, social and ethnic networks, etc. (Balampanidis, 2020). Taken together these characteristics can form part of what Balampanidis (2020) terms a dynamic ‘opportunity framework’.

The basis of this evolution from an asylum crisis towards a housing crisis for refugees has various causes. First, in Belgium, there is hardly any relationship between the strictly defined policy domains of asylum and reception which are organised at the federal level, and domains such as integration and housing which are implemented at the regional level (Wyckaert, 2017). Due to this policy gap, no state institution is responsible for administering the transition of recognised refugees into the housing market (Vandevoordt, 2019). Unlike neighbouring countries such as Germany and the Netherlands, Belgium does not provide initial housing and newcomers must, therefore, find accommodation by themselves. For many, this quest is extremely challenging due to numerous societal barriers. Specifically, they have limited social networks, no steady income, often face ethnical discrimination by landlords, and a common language between landlord and refugee is absent. Moreover, the Belgian housing market is characterised by both a shortage of affordable private rental housing and a scarcity of social housing (Saeys et al., 2018).

While the causes of the refugee housing crisis in Belgium can in part be attributed to the above mentioned policy gap and to shortfalls in the housing market, a less-apparent explanation can further be found in the recent reforms to Belgium’s integration policies (Debruyne, 2019). Via a state-led transition, several competences were shifted towards the regional (Flemish) level and then gradually restructured. As did the task of ensuring integration which was, as a consequence of vote-oriented reasons and political convictions, gradually reformed into a policy grounded by individual responsibility, language acquisition, and citizenship (Debruyne, 2019). A substantial body of integration support, including securing access to housing as part of the nexus between reception and housing, was dropped from the regional political agenda. Numerous responsibilities ended up with local authorities, causing a lot of pressure within the local contexts of individual cities and smaller municipalities that was not at all compensated for by the regional level. It is at this local level that informal players such as voluntary and citizens’ organisations arose as important actors developing strategies to fill these gaps (Mayblin and Poppy, 2019; Schrooten et al., 2019). This contribution identifies transit-housing projects as part of these strategies and proves that these projects not only represent a crucial extension of the transition period to regular housing but can also form an essential spatial and social environment for (further) integration.

Secondly, this contribution assumes the presence of path dependency in the housing trajectory of newcomers. In this context, reception situations, as well as potential transit accommodation, followed by primary (regular) housing in the host country, constitute a housing trajectory. ‘Path-dependency’ is an aspect that is actively present in economic and social sciences, but is also valuable within housing research (De Decker et al., 2011). It states that ‘housing history matters’ in terms of the existing built-up environment and the neighbourhood as well as with regards to institutional arrangements and policy (De Decker et al., 2011). ‘Path-dependency’ also exists, as Heringa et al. (2018) describe, because future behaviour, in this case in relation to both residential
choices and increased opportunities in obtaining primary (regular) housing, is embedded in past actions and current situations whilst also depending on the ‘knowledgeability’ (language, spatial environment, social systems) of individuals and the information and values that they have obtained through interactions with others. Institutional arrangements in terms of, for example, organising reception, and the implementation of policy by means of whether or not to activate or mobilise asylum seekers, have a direct effect on how such interactions take place and what social possibilities are available to asylum seekers. In addition, the built environment serves as an opportunity framework (Balampanidis, 2020) for interaction, as well as maintaining and expanding social ties and networks in the context of reception structures and transit-housing projects.

1.2. Domopolitics and its Implications

Political and institutional arrangements concerning asylum and organising reception are grounded in what Walters (2004) describes as a ‘domopolitical’ logic – a logic as to how to govern the state as a home. Domopolitics is a governmental approach in which the security and management of the mobility of people seeking protection are central points of attention. Specifically, it produces a series of modes (and moments) of governance concerning the lives of, in this case, asylum seekers (Darling, 2011). Modes of governance appear to have a significant impact on the future housing trajectories of newcomers in their host countries. Darling (2011) discusses three ways, from the national to the more local level, in which domopolitics are reflected in asylum policy in the UK which is very similar to the Belgian approach: the filtering of refugees and the management of their mobility; the regulation of dispersal; and the disciplining effect of accommodation.

Within the dispersal system, and especially within the disciplining through refugee accommodation, it is not only the local implementation of asylum policy, such as whether or not to authorise and support local activity and mobility, which is considered necessary. There is also the influence of the spatial context (the built environment) of the areas in which refugees are dispersed, and particularly the spatial characteristics of both the refugee accommodation and its immediate surroundings. Starting from reception locations as the first residential environments in the housing trajectory of refugees, both aspects (local implementation of asylum policy and spatial context) are significant for the development or non-development of social networks. In a highly competitive situation on the housing market, social capital, in terms of social networks and the social recourses they comprise, has proven to be crucial for newcomers’ ability to access housing in the transition from shelter to housing (Murdie, 2002; Firang, 2018; Adam et al., 2019).

Belgium’s domopolitics consider large-scale and isolated collective reception initiatives as the standard. These are unfavourable conditions in accordance with the nexus between reception and housing from a path dependency point of view. This topic is discussed later on, theoretically and by assessing some collective centres as case studies.
The contextualisation and problem definition above formed the basis for a one-year master dissertation research in urbanism and planning. This research tried to answer the question ‘how important the (social, spatial and political) nexus is between the stages of reception and housing for recognised refugees’ access to the regular housing market?’

2. Methods and Overview

The paper is based on two types of data. First, the research draws on a study of secondary literature on refugee integration and an analysis of recent policy documents on reception, housing and integration. Second, several case studies are used comprising in-depth interviews with residents, neighbours, staff members of reception and housing initiatives, voluntary networks’ leading volunteers and policy makers, as well as spatial analyses through 3D views, schemes and mappings. Case studies include both large-scale collective centres, which serve as a standard for the Belgian reception structure, and transit housing projects which may operate as critical social and spatial environments. The latter are aimed at assisting the transition into the regular housing market. Cases are situated in both the Netherlands and Belgium. Although in the Netherlands a similar domopolitical logic equally leads to large-scale collective centres as the norm, the government ensures a nexus with regular housing by organising first (transit) housing. In Belgium, this transit housing is mostly organised by informal actors.

The first part explores, through specific research on the transition from shelter to housing, how governance in the reception stage is, or is not, in line with housing policy. It shows how NGOs and civil society organisations are an essential link in this transition process. This Belgian context is mirrored with the approach in the Netherlands.

The second part elaborates on the determinants of path dependency between reception and primary (regular) housing as part of the housing trajectory of newcomers. A first section gives insight into the present ‘domopolitical’ logic and its effect on the governance of refugees’ mobility in Belgian asylum policy. The framework employed by Darling (2011) for his assessment of UK’s asylum policy was used, as well as a comparison to the Dutch asylum policy. Social networks prove to have, in addition to supporting NGOs and civil society, an important role in providing access to housing. Therefore, as an introduction to the case studies, a second section elaborates on the interrelationship between social networks, spatial contexts, local institutional arrangements, and policy implementations (domopolitics) within reception and transit housing projects that shape the conditions for the development of these social networks. This is followed by an analysis of four cases, including two large-scale collective reception centres, and two transit housing projects. These case studies are used to assess the role of local spatial contexts and local policy implementations in determining residents’ engagement with the local community and neighbourhood. It is argued that this engagement is necessary for developing and maintaining social ties and laying down roots in the community – essential for achieving path dependency between reception and regular housing.

3. The Absent Nexus Between Reception and Regular Housing from a Governance Perspective

Belgium has a complex state structure characterised by strictly defined federal and regional policy areas regarding asylum and migration, integration, and housing (Martiniello, 2013). As a consequence of the gap between federal shelter and regional housing policies in the Belgian federal state context, the responsibility to assist refugees in their search for housing is continuously passed from one authority to another. Therefore, unlike other European countries, such as the Netherlands, Germany, Sweden, and Denmark, Belgium’s governments take little or no responsibility for providing accommodation for refugees (D’Eer et al., 2019). After recognition, a transition period of two to four months starts in which refugees are expected to find housing. As refugees are mainly self-reliant in this search, they can search anywhere in the country. For many newcomers, however, this term of two months appears to be unfeasible (VVSG, 2017) as, on average, the search for housing takes five to six months (Vluchtelingenwerk, 2017).
Refugees face many barriers in their highly pressured search for housing. First, accessing social housing is challenging due to the criteria of local anchoring and language, as well as long waiting lists. As a result, refugees mainly depend on the regular housing market, but similar deficiencies exist in the low-cost housing segment of the market. In addition, many landlords refuse to rent to ethnic-cultural minorities or people with migrant backgrounds. ‘Taste-based discrimination’ (Loopmans et al., 2014) or ‘static discrimination’ – the distrusting of ethnic minorities to fulfil tenant obligations, is mainly caused by anxiety, language barriers, and an insufficient guarantee of adequate income (Vanderslycke, 2016). The stigmatisation of refugees hampers their access to the regular housing market. In the end, this leads to the segregation of refugees in specific city neighbourhoods and abominable living conditions that prevent refugees from participating fully in society.

Housing is considered to be an integral part of the integration of refugees into society: accommodation, as well as living environments, are the contexts in which integration in other domains takes form (Ager and Strang, 2008). This insight does not appear to be reflected in Belgian policies. On the contrary, as a result of the evolution of integration policies, securing access to housing for refugees has disappeared completely from the regional policy agenda. The remainder of this section briefly sets out how the nexus between reception and housing was organised within regional integration policy, and the effects of this organisation on refugee housing today.

It has been more than 50 years since, in the absence of a coherent political vision on integration, civil society organisations set up primary integration practices. Between 1980 and 1990, after shifting integration to the regional (Flemish) level, both civil and state-actors collaborated closely with one another to establish an integration policy (Vandevoordt, 2019). However, since then, a politically-driven evolution, based on a control and instrumentalise approach, has reformed the integration sector (Debruyne, 2019). In addition, financial cutbacks in recent years have ensured a decrease in support for newcomers. These cutbacks have made support more conditional (based on language acquisition and citizenship) and, as a result, integration initiatives, including support in the search for work or housing, have been particularly affected (Debruyne, 2019). Because of this downsizing, a lot of responsibilities for integration, including support to access housing, shifted to the local level (CPASs, CAWs, SVKs, VDAB). Due to a lack of volunteers and resources, or lack of political will, local authorities are not always able to take up these housing responsibilities (Vandevoordt, 2019). Sublimating the support to access housing as a part of regional integration policy, there is now no public authority responsible for the organisation of individual’s transition from reception to housing. The gap that exists between these different policies remains uncovered.

History has repeated itself. Initiatives and projects by non-profit NGOs and civil society organisations have arisen (Schrooten et al., 2019). These initiatives involve both support in the search for housing, as well as transit-home projects and living-together types that can help support integration (Wyckaert, 2017). These residential initiatives often provide temporary housing, as an extension (in months or years) of the intermediate stage between shelter and regular housing. As of 2015, a substantial body of integration support is once again the focus of various citizens’ initiatives and associations in Flanders. Today, there are about 60 organisations, initiatives and associations (D’Eer et al., 2019).

In the Netherlands, asylum seekers also stay in centralised (but often remote) reception centres, with all the typical inconveniences and consequences that such accommodation envelops. However, there is a connection between reception and settlement as there is one state-led response to overcome barriers. It is a model that starts from the hypothesis that ‘one of the basic prerequisites for social inclusion is having adequate housing from which to live one’s life in the community’ (Quilgars and Pleace, 2016, p.5 in Allsopp et al., 2018). Part of the dispersal plan is that municipalities in the surroundings of reception centres are obliged to provide housing for refugees after recognition (Vluchtelingenwerk Nederland, 2017). Nonetheless, there are some negative implications to this dispersal system because the mobility of newcomers is again limited or determined by linking the individual refugee to housing in a specific municipality. In addition, due to shortages in housing supply, these dwellings are often temporary housing or units, and refugees are assigned to houses scattered all over the country (Van der Horst, 2004). As a result, the (limited) ties and preferences that people had or have developed remain unaccounted. Spatial and social links, demanded further in this article in relation to path dependency, are absent because of this often-arbitrary distribution system and how reception is organised.
4. Path Dependency and the Nexus Between Reception and Housing

4.1. Domopolitics in Belgium’s Asylum Policy

Drawing on Darling’s (2011) analysis of asylum governance in the UK, the analysis of the domopolitical logic in relation to asylum seekers in Belgium is divided into three parts: (i) the filtering and management of mobility, (ii) the regulation of dispersal and (iii) the disciplining effect of accommodation. This analysis is conducted from a national to a local level.

4.1.1. Assuring Security Through the Filtering and Management of Mobility

Darling (2011) characterises domopolitics in the UK as being primarily based on the guarantee of safety and the limitation of mobility. The Belgian situation is not different. Security comes in the form of economic security allowing refugees who can boost and secure the local economy on the one hand, and in the form of the protection of internal security and personal safety of citizens on the other. In short, both the UK and Belgium are looking for highly educated migrants and ‘real’ refugees (Darling, 2011). That is why the system of domopolitics is not based on completely closed borders, but on the filtering of refugees through categorisation and selection as well as restrictions of mobility (Darling, 2011; Fisher et al. 2019). The categorisation is also reflected in the assignment of a particular integration path or route to be followed by the asylum seeker in which his/her mobility is controlled to varying degrees.

4.1.2. Regulating and Ordering Mobility Through Asylum Dispersal

In Belgium, as in the Netherlands and the UK, accommodation for asylum seekers is dispersed across the country. An asylum seeker is, depending on their individual characteristics (e.g. nationality, risk degree, or family situation), assigned to a specific location. This limitation of mobility has grown and been strengthened over the years. Asylum policies have evolved from laissez-faire self-governance (Darling, 2011), which allowed refugees to settle anywhere and to benefit from financial support, to an increasingly regulated system. Since 2000, this has resulted in a compulsory connection of material support (bed/bath/bread) to an appointed location (Pleysier, 2011). This dispersal system is a product of a domopolitical logic that states that the mobility of refugees should be limited and managed to avoid new migrants being attracted to the state because of its possession of an overly free social migration policy (Vanderbruggen et al., 2014). This logic and its related outcomes appear to be based on an incorrect hypothesis of pull factors (Lafleur and Marfouk, 2019).

4.1.3. Regulation Through Accommodation

It has to be noted, however, that the dispersal of asylum seekers all over Belgium is not really managed in a structured way; it is often determined by crisis management (Pleysier, 2011) and by the availability of vacant infrastructure at the time of crises. Because of the organisation of reception infrastructure as a crisis measure, these infrastructures are mainly large-scale vacant infrastructures such as holiday parks, nursing homes, hospitals and military barracks; sometimes in remote locations. Fedasil, the Belgian federal reception agency, signs contracts with local authorities and private partners. Additionally, there are also smaller local reception infrastructures (LRIs). As a result of filtering, categorisation, and the restriction of mobility, asylum seekers are assigned to a particular type of infrastructure. Highly-protected Syrians, as well as people in short-term resettlement programmes, are housed in small-scale local reception initiatives; Afghan refugees are allocated to large-scale, geographically more isolated centres for an extended procedure of about one year. This is evident from the following statement by a policy officer: ‘The reception model must ensure that the local reception infrastructures are able to proceed more quickly with the integration of asylum seekers who are in any case allowed to stay in Belgium, and, conversely, those who have to stay in the asylum centre know what awaits them’ (San, 2016, p.1). As a result, there is little or no focus on the integration of asylum seekers residing in collective reception centres, even though there are also refugees who start in this type of reception centre. In summary, Belgian asylum policy allocates social security to specific locations and uses allocation as a way of regulating, limiting, or determining mobility.
In addition, the accommodation itself can also be considered as an instrument for regulation within domopolitics. In this respect, a ‘home’ discourse or the perception of asylum seekers as ‘residents’ are almost entirely absent in the interpretation of policymakers and officials (Van der Horst, 2004). This results in geographically isolated locations or specific types of infrastructure, as well as specific local implementation of asylum policies. Both significantly influence the daily lives of asylum seekers (Platteau et al., 2016) and the extension and maintenance of social networks. The latter is inherent to the transition from reception to housing based on the concept of path dependency. In addition to the spatial context in and around the centres, such as the presence of social, economic or transport facilities or places for encounters, the implementation of policies by local staff members of the reception centres is very important (discussed in more detail below). Another less obvious aspect is the stereotyping of asylum seekers and refugees in politics and policy which can have local impact. This discourse and a lack of proper communication has led to massive protests against new asylum centres or the creation of hostility between locals and residents of the centres. Allport (1954), Blommaert et al. (2004) and Soenen (2006) have already proven that contacts in terms of small encounters are crucial for the development of mutual trust and the further integration of newcomers. More attention is paid to this issue in the analysis of the case studies.

Despite the need to invest in integration during the pre-recognition phase, strongly regulated large-scale collective centres are politically considered as the ultimate standard. As a result, a strange paradox occurs. During their stay in these asylum centres, refugees are not supposed to integrate into society; and yet, immediately after their formal recognition, politicians expect refugees to integrate as quickly as possible.

4.2. Social Networks in the Transition from Reception to Housing

Aigner (2018) describes four different gateways for refugees to the housing market: migrant-assisted entry, non-assisted entry, welfare-assisted entry, and local-assisted entry. In Belgium, refugees receive support from social assistants of both the regional Integration Agency and local public social welfare centres. As already described, due to financial cutbacks and the increased pressure on local authorities, the amount of time that these people can or want to invest in the search process for housing is limited (VVSG, 2017; Saeys et al., 2018). The ‘non-assisted entry’ has proven to be unsuccessful because of limited language skills, scarce financial resources (CPAS support), discrimination, and a lack of both social housing and affordable (private) housing. The increasing importance of actions by civil society has already been mentioned and can be referred to as ‘local assisted entry’.

In addition to the assistance by NGOs, social networks often prove to be crucial in terms of finding adequate housing in highly competitive situations (Hanley et al., 2018; Adam et al., 2019) through the so-called ‘migrant-assisted entry’. According to Moris and Loopmans (2015) financially weaker tenants facing prejudice solely find housing within specific niches. These properties are rare in the regular rental housing market and are often accessed through personal contacts within private networks. Such transactions can also be observed within the migrant-assisted pathway where refugees, via other migrants or their limited social networks, find a place to live at the moment of transition to the regular housing market. As a result, refugees coming from remote large-reception centres, often relocate to specific parts of cities, also known as ‘arrival neighbourhoods’. These areas are often the first points of entry for refugees to these cities, and give them access to cheaper housing, enable them to earn an income through informal forms of employment, and to participate in already existing ethnic institutions and so on (Park, 1915; Burgess, 1928). A high level of social cohesion often characterises these arrival neighbourhoods. They are transition zones from which migrants leave as soon as they acquire more advantageous socio-economic positions (Massey, 1985; Saunders, 2010). At the same time, it appears to be difficult for newcomers to extend their social networks beyond these arrival areas (Beeckmans, 2017). Despite the great solidarity between migrants and the opportunities offered by these neighbourhoods, this entrance may also bring potential harm, such as the danger of ending up in a network where refugees find, via mediators and in exchange for money, a dwelling that is too small and of low quality (Saeys et al., 2018). In addition, these neighbourhoods are often stigmatised urban areas, which can result in the stigmatisation of refugees through their association with these areas (Darling, 2016).
4.3. The Interrelation Between Spatial Contexts, Social Networks and Domopolitics Defining Path Dependency

The connection between structural integration, in terms of access to the housing market (actual dwelling), and social integration (social networks) has already been made explicit (Esser, 1980). Additionally, the living environment of the (broad) surroundings of a dwelling, and in particular, its social-spatial dimension, also provide necessary conditions for integration through interaction (Ager and Strang, 2008; Francis and Hiebert, 2014; Balampanidis, 2020).

Life paths, daily or long-term, are defined by socialisations which take place in specific spatial environments. These socialisations influence subsequent choices and possibilities in residential location, activity patterns and social networks (Heringa et al., 2018). Despite acknowledgement that domopolitics has an impact on the daily lives of asylum seekers, there is a total absence in asylum policy of vision concerning asylum seekers as ‘residents’ and reception contexts as ‘living environments’. The specific socio-spatial characteristics of a given living environment, such as the presence of (public) meeting places, define opportunity frameworks (Balampanidis, 2020) that allow or limit interactions with others in terms of socialisation and the extension or maintenance of social networks. Otherwise, social ties create, as Heringa et al. (2018) state, familiarity with certain spaces, activities, and types of people.

In other words, personal capital, such as language, money and social networks (Putnam, 1993, in Ager and Strang, 2008; Aigner 2018), political constraints and spatial opportunity frameworks determine the conditions for integration in terms of daily spatial and social interaction. Existing social capital is part of these social ties. However, the employees of centres can also act as social ties within the reception stage. The same applies to initiators of transit housing projects in the intermediate stage. These people implement or cope with certain policies and, as a result, impose certain (political) constraints. However, they also organise activities in the area and provide links to both people and places in the given neighbourhood. A lot depends on how centres, and volunteer organisations, choose to deal with top-down policy, or the lack of it.

During the reception phase, Fedasil manages reception centres through an approach which ‘integrat[es] the centre in the neighbourhood’ through neighbourhood initiatives. The main aim of these initiatives is to integrate the centre as an institution and not the asylum seeker as an individual (interview Fedasil Brussels, personal communication, April 2017). This approach is, with regard to prominent political discourses, in favour of the development of mutual trust among asylum seekers and locals as generalised groups, but does not contribute to the strengthening of individual social and spatial interactions. However, research on collective reception centres in Belgium by Platteau et al. (2016) indicates that there are varying local implementations of top-down imposed policies. This diversity is related to the interpretation of the ‘concept of integration’ by community workers and by the management of the centres. Their vision has a significant impact on the organisation of activities that can interconnect centres with neighbourhoods (Platteau et al., 2016). The nature of these activities differs when centres wish to focus solely on the integration of the reception centre with the neighbourhood or, the integration of individual residents in the community. Platteau et al. (2016, p. 54) reveal this with a statement by a centre director: ‘Our task is not the individual integration of residents; they are here only temporarily. The centre, on the other hand, is structural, which is why the centre needs to be integrated into the institutional landscape’. Much also depends, of course, on the asylum seekers and local residents that the centre wants to reach with these activities and on the location where they take place (Platteau et al., 2016).

5. Case Studies

The spatial context of reception centres in Belgium (Poelkapelle) and the Netherlands (Houthaven, Amsterdam) were analysed with regard to their embeddedness in the neighbourhoods as opportunity frameworks for individual (social) integration of the refugees.

Similarly, housing types and environments in the intermediate stage can be considered as a framework for social integration through contacts in day-to-day situations. Housing types that facilitate refugees and
locals living together can result in an extension of social networks. This can be of great value in the search for (permanent) housing. In order to demonstrate their value in terms of extending refugees’ social networks, two cohabitation projects were analysed.

5.1. Reception Stage

Large-scale reception centres can improve social and spatial interaction that increase the likelihood of successful social integration and structural integration in terms of access to housing. From an urban planning point of view, these conditions for improvement mainly refer to the geographic location and the spatial characteristics of the direct and wider surroundings (as opposed to the architecture of the centres themselves). That is why this contribution focuses on the difficulties and opportunities of spatial location and organisation (scale, geographical context, and so on) as an opportunity framework (Balampanidis, 2020) as well as on the programmatic organisation of centres in terms of initiatives to connect them to their respective neighbourhoods.

5.1.1. Local Functioning in Line or Against Federal Policy

The first case is a Belgian state-driven initiative in the remote rural municipality of Poelkapelle. Neighbourhood activities, such as guided tours and movies, mostly inform neighbours of the centres’ functioning and the situation of its residents in an attempt to change attitudes and create a sense of security. As one community worker stated: ‘Until the establishment of the centre, no stranger had been seen walking the street in Poelkapelle’ (Interview Fedasil Poelkapelle, personal communication, April 2017). However, current community activities do not lend themselves to actual encounters between residents and centre residents. Despite this lack of encounters, interviews with centre residents at one of these neighbourhood initiatives (a movie night) indicated this to be their main reason for participating: ‘I participate because I want to talk to people a lot outside the centre and this is the only way, but there are not a lot of days like this and not a lot of people are participating’ (interview at resident centre Poelkapelle, personal communication, April 2017). Platteau et al. (2016) stress the importance of activities that are also useful for centre residents. By focusing on activities that respond to the interests of both centre and neighbourhood residents, both parties will be more inclined to participate. It results in more of what Valentine (2008) has described as ‘meaningful contacts’: contacts that change values and attitudes in the form of positive respect, more than mere tolerance (Valentine, 2008, in Van Kapel and Nuis, 2014). Recently, investments are being made to engage asylum seekers in local activities through, for instance, voluntary work. However, this remains only a small part of the mission of the Belgian government since asylum seekers will, according to their own perceptions, stay only temporarily in the reception centre as there is no certainty concerning their likelihood of asylum recognition. In addition, the rural municipality of Langemark-Poelkappelle has little means of support (facilities, leisure and sympathisers) to integrate 300 asylum seekers through participation in local associations and sports clubs or through personal ties with residents (interview Fedasil Poelkapelle, personal communication, April 2017).

In the second case, a project of the Dutch NGO ‘Ondertussen’ in the former Houthaven in the city of Amsterdam is trying to connect a (future) reception centre to the adjacent neighbourhood. Contrary to the governmental approach in the first case, the civil society organisation is trying to create a win-win situation for both the existing neighbourhood residents and the future asylum-seekers. That is why the mission of ‘Ondertussen’ is, at first, to invest in the reinforcement of the surrounding neighbourhood, starting from the needs and interests of current residents, such as the construction of a new community centre. The network of activities is defined by the organisers as an intermediate environment in which future asylum seekers will be more engaged in relation to the neighbourhood. Residents of the asylum centre will be linked to this community network through personal interests, making contacts more meaningful (Valentine, 2008). The engagement of asylum-seekers starts from their talents and their ability to actively take charge of their own lives (interview with initiator of Ondertussen, personal communication, April 2017). The vision of ‘Ondertussen’ is that these efforts may also be beneficial if asylum seekers return to their country of origin because they are more likely to be mentally prepared (interview with initiator of Ondertussen, personal communication, April 2017). This perspective is in sharp contrast with the Belgian government’s approach that invests little or nothing in integration based on personal interests because of the uncertainty of final recognition.
5.1.2. Difficulties and Opportunities in the Spatial Context

Each geographical context has its pros and cons. Though centres in remote rural contexts face less opposition from nearby residents, they face more challenges to get these people involved in their daily operations and also face problems when trying to stimulate contacts between local residents and centre residents (Platteau et al., 2016). There are no public meeting spaces within a radius of one kilometre from the centre in Poelkapelle. The social and economic facilities in the area are limited, which results in insufficient services for the capacity of the reception centre. Poor access to public transport adds to this problem: ‘We can’t leave here and during the weekend we do nothing ... there are only three buses the whole day and there are no activities in or out the centre... we do nothing’ (interview at resident centre Poelkapelle, personal communication, April 2017). A new approach is needed, but the scale and location of centres such as Poelkapelle make this challenge less achievable. The urban context of the (future) centre of Houthaven, on the other hand, offers more potential for integration through interaction at, for example, public meeting spaces. Furthermore, good access to public transport is beneficial for the development of local networks in other parts of the city.

5.2. Intermediate Stage

A first project in the intermediate stage, called Startblok, is located on a brownfield in Amsterdam, and houses about 500 students and young adults including equal amounts of refugees and locals. It has been developed within the ‘housing first’ principle from the Dutch dispersal system in which all municipalities have to do their part in housing refugees. The system encourages municipalities to consider alternative forms of housing and to develop methods of integration within both the immediate environment and more extensively throughout the municipality (interview Orbit NPO, personal communication, February 2017). Although Amsterdam has a significant problem with regard to a lack of affordable (social) housing which affects a lot of young people including graduates and students, it is also obliged to temporarily house asylum-seekers and provide housing for a certain number of refugees after recognition. That is why the housing association ‘De Key’, the municipality of Amsterdam, and ‘Socius Wonen’ started a container dwelling project in 2016 to tackle both issues at the same time. A similar stage of a new beginning in the life of the residents facilitates the connection to one another: ‘Contacts certainly take place more often because of the equal lifestyle of residents’ (interview with Startblok resident, personal communication, April 2017). However, the project also has some disadvantages. The location is remote, which allows for little or no contact with residents of other neighbourhoods. A large number of residents also results in ethnic segregation, strengthened by language barriers: ‘You can see that, because of language communication problems, people of certain groups are attracted to each other. Particularly, because of the large number of residents’ (interview with Startblok resident, personal communication, April 2017). To
increase social integration through contact with other ethnic groups, key persons (‘gangmakers’ in Dutch) facilitated and stimulated contacts in this large-scale project. This type of scale and location is often seen concerning temporary housing. Container units, such as those used in this project, (architecturally) leave a temporary impression, and people prefer not to see them in their neighbourhoods. In this way, a type of ghetto is built that makes its residents feel unwanted. As a result, this type of project is often placed on the outskirts of a city or municipality (interview Floris Alkemade, Plattegrond, November 2019). Other kinds of typologies or units that are implementable in the urban fabric (e.g. inside vacant buildings) should, therefore, be explored.
A second case involves a co-housing project ‘Solidair wonen’ in the middle-sized Belgian city of Sint-Niklaas. It accommodates vulnerable individuals, such as refugees and long-term homeless people. These people have similar urgent problems; specifically an immediate housing need. Yet there is a difference: homeless people need permanent housing situations, while housing projects in this intermediate stage are somewhat temporary for refugees. The intentions of the project are great; however, the (mental) vulnerability of some residents goes much further than a genuine housing need, creating a less than ideal situation for the refugees. Their integration is hampered due to the lack of a robust support group. The local Belgian residents cannot offer the stable living situation that the refugees need to participate and to be introduced to Belgian society, habits, and language. During interviews, some of the residents indicated that they had limited social networks and were also a little indisposed (isolated): ‘Because of my past, I am quite reclusive and I live a bit like a hermit. Therefore, I do not receive many guests or friends’ (interview with resident of Solidair wonen, personal communication, March 2017). Because of this, the expansion of (local) social networks for newcomers through other residents appears to be more difficult.

Even though shelter as well as housing in the intermediate phase are temporary situations, they should be seen as proper residential contexts. The locations, scales and typologies of these projects should be assessed in relation to potential social and spatial interactions. In need of ‘home’ discourses, or the perceptions of asylum seekers as ‘residents’, it is imperative that, through activities, an effort is made not only to integrate centres in their neighbourhoods, as is the case in Poelkapelle, but also its residents, as is the case in Houthaven. Such an approach will contribute to improving stronger social ties and know-how of newcomers in favour of their future housing pathways.

6. Conclusion

This article is a plea to raise awareness for a (currently-absent) political and socio-spatial nexus between reception and regular housing. From the reception phase onwards, interventions should focus on the social integration of newcomers in terms of providing interactions with others. These interactions generate knowledgability (language, spatial environment, social systems) that determine path dependency in terms of subsequent opportunities and choices in residential locations, activity patterns and future social networks (Heringa et al., 2018; Adam et al., 2019). The socialisation of refugees during the reception and intermediate stage is influenced by political constraints and the spatial context as an opportunity framework for social-spatial interactions.

Reception in Belgium should be organised more structurally and not be based on crisis measures. Such an approach would take into account the aspects of spatial context and (neighbourhood) activities as the local implementation or interpretation of federal asylum policies. The reception policy (domopolitics) should be more focused on a ‘home’ discourse in which, instead of the current emphasis on stagnation and isolation as a part of filtering ‘real refugees’, reception is seen as an (influential) part of the housing trajectory of refugees. Evident from the presented case study, the current location of several Belgian collective reception centres, in terms of accessibility (public transport), the absence of nearby public meeting places and with regard to the scale of the municipality (population and local services), is rarely ideal for providing social and spatial interactions. To organise reception structures, a geographical ‘qualitative’ distribution plan is needed in which asylum seekers are spread across municipalities, based on the presence of adequate social, economic and transport services. The number of asylum seekers to be accommodated should depend on the population size of the municipality. By doing so, a ‘true opportunity framework’ for social and spatial interaction would be provided that might be beneficial to the development of ties and networks.

In the absence of the conditions mentioned above, a strange paradox occurs. During their stay in asylum centres, refugees are not supposed to integrate into society. Immediately after their formal recognition, politicians expect refugees to integrate as quickly as possible. However, ‘access to housing’ no longer has an active presence in integration policies. For this reason, it is vital that, analogous to the Dutch ‘housing first’ principle, this again gains greater prominence within regional integration policies. More permanent housing is preferable but, because of shortages in the (social) housing market, investments in transit housing
or organisations providing these types of housing should be a short-term priority. Investment in transit housing extends the search time as well as providing an opportunity for the development of (social) networks. Emphasis should be on the possibility of providing housing in the vicinity of reception centres, so that ties that have already been developed (spatially, socially) are not lost as they may be relevant for further integration processes (e.g. work, and language).

The non-permanent character of these transit residences is of great importance. Moreover, they are integral to the particular housing trajectory of refugees, since first housing accommodation after reception is often temporary. This finding became evident from interviews within the ‘Solidair wonen’ project. Despite the temporary character of such accommodation, it is crucial to take into account location and typology. Container dwellings such as those in Houthaven (Amsterdam) are temporary units situated on derelict or underdeveloped sites and are unpopular with local communities. This type of accommodation is not the context in which residents can be part of a community.

These pressing interventions and investments concerning reception and initial (transit) housing are a vital first step towards the development of housing pathways for social inclusion and integration, as well as the recognition of refugees’ human dignity despite their temporary legal status.

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