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Editorial Introduction to the Topical Issue "Philosophy of the City"

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1 Overview of the field

In recent years, the philosophical interest in urban issues has developed into a vibrant interdisciplinary field of its own. The development is linked to the obvious consequences of the broad global phenomenon of urbanization but also due to the increasing interest in practical and multidisciplinary approaches within different branches of philosophy. Philosophy of the City as a field of contemporary thought is open to heterogeneous topics, yet at the same time, it has already proven to break disciplinary barriers and bring different, previously distant branches of philosophy together to study urban issues. Joining forces in understanding the particular challenges of the urban lifeform seems indeed necessary since many of the issues require a flexible and problem-based approach. The increase in the philosophical interest in cities is of course not unique as parallel development is taking place in many other fields. One could even state, that philosophy is a latecomer, since urban studies have been developed more systematically already since the 1960s. There are many reasons as to why modern philosophy did not show interest in cities until relatively late, such as its linguistic and analytical emphasis. The focus of traditional Western philosophy on universal issues and immutable ideas has not helped either in developing an especially well-equipped methodology to encounter urban issues. Reasons for the omission have stemmed also from the fast industrial and subsequent postindustrial development of cities globally: the city as an "object" of study has been in such a flux that pinning down its features and prominent phenomena for any meaningful reflection must have seemed like a daunting task for philosophers of past generations.

The philosophical approach to study the city can have various types of starting points. One of the traditional and a seemingly easy one would be to focus on finding a definition to the city itself. However, as is visible in the many contributions of this volume alone, the quest for a definition might be better fulfilled while focusing on either more detailed or practical concerns instead. The pragmatist approaches have been influencing many areas of philosophy since the last decade of the previous century, and this is especially visible in how the research questions and hypothesis are posed in Philosophy of the City as well. Topics ranging from social justice to planning and design, from urban technologies to architecture, and so forth are influenced by the idea that philosophy could and should succeed in engaging in practical applications. Ethical considerations are central in many sub strands of Philosophy of the City through specified analysis of the political, ecological, social, and aesthetic facets of urban life. In cities, natural is not antithetical to humanmade or social dimensions do not overrule the individual experience. This at times challenging coexistence, of people, species, ideas, values, and phenomena is what has become to define cities as we know them. Cities have always been also the places for invention of new ideas, ideologies, and socio-political movements. Many of the technological innovations, for example, are developed in and for the

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urban context. Political ideas are formulated and actions around testing them intensify in cities. These are patterns of development which seem to continue as we move further into the twenty first century. However, things are also changing and the as the urban lifeform as an area of philosophical interest has now solidified its position, the focus can be more in which ways cities differ from each other. Although the global development of cities has followed some criticized general patterns, attention should be given more to differences in size and type, scale and tradition, use and values, ideals and reality.

Because of its multidisciplinary and pragmatist intentions, Philosophy of the City as a project is also part of the newly articulated paradigm of public philosophy. Urban issues tend to gain broader attention also in the philosophical context due to their broad relevance and reach: one cannot address the city without the people and the communities that it concerns. The interest in the social dimension of urban life is thus an overarching theme in the area of the Philosophy of the City. Its outreach goes also into this direction, toward engaging in discussion with the various stakeholders, including planning professionals, activists, artists, as well as community members and representatives. Academic philosophy still has some self-reflection to do in this regard, to which extent its contribution is to be purely academic and in which ways methods of co-creation and public engagement or direct outreach could be developed. As a positive side, the recognition of this public function of Philosophy of the City has already changed the way ideas are articulated and philosophy is written: the philosophical process and the resulting ideas and further questions should be understandable by the people they concern, at the very least. We cannot afford to leave the Philosophy of the City only to professional philosophers. This is especially crucial in the times when trust in expertise and the value of scientific knowledge have been severely questioned.

The recent edited general volumes on Philosophy of the City have collected together various approaches[1] and are complemented by more specialized contributions in the field.[2] This increase in publications proves that the time is ripe to make the work of philosophers of the city visible in more organized ways. It is clear based on these volumes, that the authors with an orientation in Philosophy of the City represent many different branches within and beyond philosophy as well as diverse thematic orientations. The political, social, epistemological, metaphysical, ethical, aesthetic, and environmental implications of the urban lifeform have so far been each represented in the tradition. The temporal perspective in the Philosophy of the City tends to focus on understanding the present conditions or leaning toward the future. Urban planning, placemaking, and other practices that deal directly with how cities of the near- and far-future will be like, are thus important areas of reflection for the philosophical approach. The geographical scope of the philosophy of the city is still an area to be developed further, but it seems fair to say, that most continents are already better represented than in more traditional philosophical arenas. Cities globally range from melting pots to surveillance hot spots, from hubs of diversity to monocultural non-places, from safe havens to unlawful occupations, from affluent to underdeveloped areas, from communitarian to authoritarian spaces, from global megalopolises to rural small towns, or from organically grown to fully planned compositions of human life. This variety is and needs to be presented in the ways in which Philosophy of the City is made.

The international Philosophy of the City (PotC) Research Group has since 2013 gathered together philosophers and other scholars and professionals with an interest in contemporary cities. The broad, global PotC network serves to develop and promote the Philosophy of the City as a branch of contemporary philosophy. In addition to this central task, it functions also as a link between professional, academic philosophy, and the theoretically interested professional who work directly with urban issues and development. Fields ranging from urban planning to environmental science and ecology and from geography to architecture and the arts have been involved from the start. The PotC Research Group members are involved in addressing practical urban issues and crossing disciplinary boundaries in order to properly do so. In the

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1 Meagher, *Philosophy and the City: Classic to Contemporary Writings*; Jacobs and Malpas, *Philosophy and the City: Interdisciplinary and Transcultural Perspectives*; Meagher et al., *The Routledge Handbook of the Philosophy of the City*.
2 Epting, "The Philosophical Dimensions of Urban Transportation;" Kochhar-Lindgren, *Urban Arabesques: Philosophy, Hong Kong, Transversality*; Lehtinen, "Special Volume on Urban Aesthetics;" Nagenborg et al., *Technology and the City: Towards a Philosophy of Urban Technologies*.

research agenda of the evolving network, the so-called wicked problems or the grand challenges humanity is facing such as global climate change, fast technological change, or growing inequality have always ranked high. The practical interest is in tune with going back to the roots of the specific Western tradition of philosophy, which stems from the idea of the ancient Greek polis as its main founding environment. In terms of the importance of genuine discussion, developing skills for argumentation, and engaging the community the ancient values of philosophy still apply. However, today there is a broader understanding of who are allowed to engage in philosophy as free citizens and what is ultimately at stake with increasing the inclusiveness of the philosophical profession.

Philosophy of the City is often made in the urban setting, in active engagement with the city. It seems already fair to state, based also on this topical issue at hand, that the cities in which PotC Research Group has held their conferences have become central to the development of thinking about cities: Brooklyn, NYC (2013), Mexico City (2014), Hong Kong, Portland OR and Mexico City (2015), San Francisco (2016), Porto (2017), Bogotá (2018), and Detroit (2019). The Summer Colloquiums have been hosted since 2018 in Enschede (NL) and Lahti (FIN). The 2020 Warsaw Summer Colloquium and the Bilbao conference were canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic and now the network is committed to continuing its activities online as long as is necessary. It seems clear, that global challenges such as the pandemic (ongoing at the time of this publication) and climate crisis require also philosophers to develop new methods of collaborating and responding to shared exceedingly wicked problems. The aim of this topical issue is to present contemporary themes and approaches in the fast-developing field of philosophy of the city. The issue brings together current trends and emerging ideas through a collection of invited papers, all of which speak for the value of the philosophical approach to urban issues.

2 Contents of the topical issue

This topical issue confirms that the Philosophy of the City is forming into a dynamic field that advances philosophical thinking in close contact with more practical areas of world-making. The issue features ten invited and peer-reviewed contributions from Philosophy of the City Research Group's annual conference which was in 2019 organized in Detroit (University of Detroit Mercy). The selected contributions bring up themes such as urban mobility, social justice, housing, infrastructure, human behavior, urban experience, heritage, violence, technology, architecture, food production, politics, and community. This topical issue is not intended to be a mere collection of ongoing projects in the area of Philosophy of the City. The overarching idea has been to offer a view to a dynamic and developing area of study, but also to go already further than that, to bring forth blind spots and future research topics that need to be pointed out and discussed.

As the editor of the volume, I have put emphasis on bringing forth a new generation of young philosophers of the city and presenting their work together with established experts of the young field. The shared interest in urban issues connects the contributions, whereas there is more diversity in the themes and more detailed approaches. None of the articles focus only on developing the methodology of the Philosophy of the City, but methods and the scope of the inquiry are studied with a particular case and a point of view as a starting point. In this way, *how* to think about cities is developed at the same time while actively engaging in responding to an existing and defined set of questions. The articles together form not one image of a city but present instead a multiplicity of cities: a safe and equal context in which a diversity of topics can be brought up for discussion and further philosophical work.

I have interpreted that the task of philosophy regarding the vast area of urban lifeform has so far been to question and redefine concepts and to show points of inconsistency in the current more or less public discourses. This selection of article aims in its part to show that Philosophy of the City can also go beyond that, into pointing new areas of interest and concerns and to make connections between ideas and phenomena that have previously been considered being of interest only separately. This synthesizing quality of

philosophy is complemented by its speculative power, which in the case of the Philosophy of the City can help to think not only how cities are, but also to an even greater extent, how they should, could, and will be.

The topical issue begins with Remei Capdevila-Werning's contribution "Preserving Destruction: Philosophical Issues of Urban Geosites." The peculiar particularity of urban geological sites or geosites underlines how cities are hybrids of both human and geological forces. The article presents as its case study Olot, a city in Spain, which is formed around four dormant volcanoes. The strange anthropogenic quality of the city, its geological location, aesthetic as well as historical, cultural, and economic features are described in detail in the article as the case is used to illustrate the preservation of human-inflicted landscapes and the intriguing logic of their metaphysical status. The controversy of preserving that which has first been destroyed raises questions about the human influence and decision-making covering human activity even more broadly. There is a need to go beyond the traditional heritage perspectives in order to understand the complex constituents of the contemporary urban geosites.

The focus is on selected natural elements in the urban sphere also in Shane Epting's "Infrastructure, Urban Sprawl, and Naturally Occurring Asbestos: An Ontological Thought Model for Wicked and Saving Technologies." As the human population keeps expanding its cities to cover more surface of the planet, encountering substances harmful to humans is common practice and requires being prepared. As an example of this, increased worker safety is needed in the occurrence of asbestos deposits to fight invisible microscopic particles. Epting proposes that the philosophical issues that arise from cancer-causing naturally occurring asbestos include a reclassification of certain technologies more specifically in their relation to being. Bringing together Las Vegas and Heideggerian conception of technology, Epting evokes the idea that global climate change necessitates a recalibration in understanding how technologies and their functions relate to the concept of being. This thought pattern is tested in the context of infrastructure construction and maintenance which enable urban sprawl. "Wicked technologies" are a category that is proposed in addition to "saving" technologies by Epting. The links between these modes are presented as an expansion of the Heideggerian taxonomy – however, the practical relevance of doing so becomes explicit with the case of infrastructure.

Reinforcing yet diversifying the significance of the many forms of urban human–nature relations, Samantha Noll's article "Growing Resistance to Systems of Oppression: An Exploration of the Transformative Power of Urban Agriculture" brings up the increasingly central topic of urban food production. Although different forms of urban agriculture have been discussed broadly in recent years, the discussion has tended to revolve around either endorsing technological development or searching acknowledgment for the more traditional ways in which food production has taken place in cities. Instead of focusing on this partly artificial dichotomy or on how pressure is put to scaling up existing models, Noll proposes that a loosening and rethinking the regulatory practices would benefit urban agriculture also as an important vehicle for social justice. This transformative power is found in the myriad ways in which work, community, and place values are linked to the many meanings of food. Food-sovereignty as a concept is linked by Noll to local food initiatives in their original logic of self-organization but also as they form alternatives to global and industrialized mass cultures of food production. This is having an effect also on the urban landscapes globally, but in radically more positive terms than with many other recent human activities.

In "Architectural Values, Political Affordances and Selective Permeability," Matthew Crippen and Vladan Klement discuss urban forms of architecture through the concept of "selective permeability," which is linked to the postphenomenological idea of multistability and the Gibsonian theory of affordances. The authors carve an interpretation of the public spaces and locations through what type of activities they make possible in the first place. Theoretically, this article contributes to the applying and redeveloping theories from the postphenomenological philosophy of technology to the urban realm. In the city, one engages in a continuous process of interpretation, negotiation, retreat, and microtransgressions in relation to what one can and cannot do. Crippen and Klement acknowledge in an important way that the ability to engage and act is not distributed equally. The article contests the view of a homogenous urban agency and calls forth a re-evaluation of the mainly political and economic factors that create further discriminatory design practices and ridges in the perception and use of the city.

Louise Pedersen's article "Moving Bodies as Moving Targets: A Feminist Perspective on Sexual Violence in Transit" brings an important topic into this issue. A city is a place for making new, positive, and meaningful connections but unfortunately, it is also a contested place in which discrimination, abuse, and straight-out violence based on race and gender take place. Pedersen is conscious here of the existing feminist and gender theories of the city and paints a strong image of the pre-Covid urban transit from the feminist perspective. Pedersen recounts the alarming rates of gendered violence as a sign of spatialized patriarchy, the mental and physical load of which is still severely hindering the range of opportunities even in the self-titled most civilized nations of the world. With the focus on public transportation, in particular, the case becomes especially clear: public transportation is supposed to open up the use of the city equally to everyone. Nonetheless the very common acts and threats of sexual violence end up limiting the mobility patterns of many of its users. The misogynist harassment as described and defined by Pedersen links to the previous contribution as it can also be interpreted as a form of selective permeability that is not anymore created by the physical formations of the city but instead the structurally and relationally conditioned abusive behavior of the fellow passengers.

Juan Pablo Melo approaches the notion of the human home as a dwelling using a media pragmatic perspective. In "Reconsidering Dwelling: Notes Towards a Media Pragmatics" Melo takes into consideration the legal, bourgeois notion of the dwelling by comparing it to the Greek oikos. Paradigmatically, the city is a place to dwell. However, less philosophical attention has been given to how habitation and the individual dwellings are understood in this broader context. Media pragmatics is presented by Melo as a methodology with which it is possible to trace the seemingly never-ending network of relations, contracts, and connections that tie us to a place as well as the society and all the phenomena it produces. In Melo's treatment, critical media theory offers an opportunity to continue developing "post-Kantian, postanthropocentric philosophy" which is then used here to analyze the case of the home as a dwelling. The original Heideggerian notion is here used to denote an interface that mediates the private and the Habermasian public sphere. Based on this account, it is never possible to fully understand how we dwell in the city if we do not take into consideration what is the home, whether there is one in the first place, and how we dwell in it.

The next article, Madeline Johnson's "City in Code: The Politics of Urban Modeling in the Age of Big Data" brings up the topical theme of computing and big data and how they are used to conceptualize and further develop cities. The increasing reliance on big data tends to obscure the fact that the ways in which it is used are not transparent and open to critical evaluation. In the case of urban planning, urban modeling follows the smart city paradigm and strives for a comprehensive understanding of a city in favor of more fragmented and experience-based knowledge. Johnson gives selected guiding glimpses and a useful interpretation of the enormous technological paradigm shift to data-driven or even data-centric urban planning. According to the insights presented here, the cost of even great technological advances should be brought together with re-evaluated and reinforced notions of human freedom and culture as constitutive factors in the urban political life. Johnson uses the position of philosophy of the city to develop a form of thinking- and looking-with-data to inform urban governance with a culturally more nuanced understanding of its role in visualization and urban modeling.

The city of Detroit has been a particularly fascinating case also to philosophy and it is directly referred to in two of the articles. The first one is Jules Simon's "Welcoming Newcomers and Becoming Native to a Place: Arendt's Polis and the City Beautiful of Detroit," in which Simon uses Arendt's account of the polis to locate and discuss the many roles of contemporary public urban spaces. Finding future-oriented strength in the particularity of the case of Detroit, Simon shows how an inclusive, humane city is welcoming and non-discriminating toward people based on their origins or reasons for changing location. As case examples and beyond that, as inspirations, Simon concludes to visualize the historical and social developments of Mexicantown and the entire transformation of the River Rouge Ford Complex manufacturing plant in Detroit. Simon presents that the Arendtian reconceptualization of contemporary and future cities as intrinsically cosmopolitan makes it clear that the cities' public spaces are symbolic of their hospitality and inclusivity. Instead of a mere descriptive ethos, creating an active social agenda and humane governance to support engaged, open, and welcoming urban communities is at stake here.

Henrik Pathirane builds on nuanced discussions in Gadamerian hermeneutics and brings them to new terrain in his article "Philosophical Hermeneutics and Urban Encounters." Fleeting encounters are a quintessential part of any contemporary urban experience, yet their significance has rarely been studied from the philosophical perspective. The article reminds in the same vein as that of Pedersen's, that the city is also a bodily space, not only a conceptual constellation. The corporeal dimensions of non-verbal communication rely on eye contact, facial expressions, and gestures which are all nuanced and often misunderstood. The underlying issues of oppression, whether for example political, racial, or gender-related seem to be never very far below the surface. As Pathirane points out, the everyday urban encounters give rise in equal amounts to the moments of the benevolence of strangers and the nuanced acts of everyday transgressions.

The final chords of the topical issue come in the form of another eulogy to the city of Detroit. David Koukal shows in "Detroit Bike City and the Reconstitution of Community" how the simple and shared moment of moving through one's city on a bicycle can become a constitutive act and sign of a community on the mend. As the postindustrial sweep is still changing urban communities and landscapes globally, Detroit has already established itself as a well-known example of a city slowly rebuilding its identity. Koukal draws a phenomenologically vibrant image of the "Slow Roll" bike culture as a form of community building practice. Perhaps nowhere else does the use of bicycle have such strong implications as in "the Motor City." I hope that the readers will share with me the sentiment, that these times if any call for these types of aesthetically rich collective practices, taking place in the shared urban space, forming healing connections between the communities and the city as a place of their own.[3]

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