# The Phenomenology of Change

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# The Phenomenology of Change: How Conflict Drives Urban Transformation

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*Here we propose a new methodology for learning from conflict, referred to as a 'phenomenology of change' approach. This framework can be used to ascertain how, why, and under what conditions conflicts can lead to social, spatial, and political transformations in the urban built environment. This approach builds on examination of ongoing struggles and actions undertaken by citizens and urban governing officials during conflict. It uses this evidence to document whether and how authority is renegotiated as well as the conditions under which the issues under contention and the identity positions of stakeholders will positively or negatively impact the likelihood of built environmental change. Drawing on the five case studies in the special issue, we come to four general conclusions. 1. Change is more likely when actors strategically combine one action repertoire with another. 2. Conflicts over space are particularly well suited to the formation of institutionalized engagement processes for renegotiating authority, thus making change more probable. 3. Despite the importance of negotiating with institutions during conflict, opportunities to engage in such processes are not equally distributed among all races and classes of citizen. 4. The temporality of conflict – that is, the length of struggle – has a direct bearing on both the likelihood and durability of change. The article concludes with a focus on the roles of urban professionals in mediating conflict, reflecting on their relations with both citizens and governing authorities, and discussing how insights drawn from a phenomenology of change framework can be used by professionals to enhance desired transformations in the urban built environment.*

## The 'Power' of Conflict?

Given the nature of capitalist development and the unequal social and political dynamics that drive urbanization, conflict is almost inevitable in cities. At the same time, cities have long been central to the rise and maintenance of democratic structures and practices (Castells, 1983). Dikeç and Swyngedouw (2017) emphasized the importance of seeing the urban as a political site where discontent with the current situation is expressed by a variety of political movements. These works set the agenda for an urban political theory that is sensitive to considering the city as an immanent site for nurturing political subjectivities, mediating political encounters, staging interruptions and experimentally producing new forms of democratization that prefigure radical imaginaries of what urban democracy might be about (*ibid*., p. 3). In this special issue, we have sought to advance that agenda a step further by investigating the conditions under which

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conflicts help produce inclusive, democratic and sustainable cities.

The literature on inclusive and democratic governance reveals a tension between those who believe that moving towards a more inclusive democratic mode of urban governance should include deliberation and consensus (Goodin and Dryzek, 2006; Guarneros and Geddes, 2006; Melo and Baiocchi, 2006) and others who maintain that democracy is about contestation and conflict (Fraser, 1996; Mouffe, 2000; Young, 2000). The latter, often framed as the agonistic approach to democracy, understands conflict and protest as a central vehicle for improving democratic governance by including and responding to plural voices (Ranciere, 1999; Tilly and Tarrow, 2006). We accept the agonistic approach but are aware that its implications for governing and planning the built environment remain very abstract (Metzger *et al*., 2014; Verloo, 2018; Wagenaar, 2014). We therefore seek to provide a more practice-oriented analysis of the mechanisms behind agonistic politics and how they may change the city over time.

To do so, we work under the assumption that practice-based agency matters, and that positive urban change – or a lack thereof – is more than a function of existing power structures, whether with respect to capitalism, market conditions, or political regime type. It also depends on contentious processes unfolding in real time. This approach aligns with the literature on practice that argues for a shift from studying how people perceive and comprehend the world, to studying the ways in which people intentionally act within it in order to transform their conditions (Griggs *et al*., 2014; Pickering, 2010). We believe that the field of urban studies could benefit from this approach – which in many ways draws on phenomenological theory as much as urban theory – because it focuses empirical attention on *how* change happens more than why it may be desirable. Looking at the actual practices of public and private actors allows scholars to make sense of the underlying mindsets, motivations, and agendas of engaged agents who struggle for change and how to cope with conflict in the process. By turning our attention to conflict and how it unfolds, we have a better understanding of the complex 'hows' of change, not merely the aspirational 'whys' of its importance.

Finally, analysing the actions of stakeholders involved in conflict holds the promise of opening new windows of understanding about the role of embedded local knowledge in motivating and structuring action. To the extent that we see critical urbanism as a scholarly field for thinking and acting towards a more socially just and ecologically sound urbanism (Brenner, 2009; Brenner *et al*., 2012; McFarlane, 2011), studying the embedded logics that motivate contentious citizen action and determine how local authorities respond will provide a more interactive and robust understanding of urban change in ways that help transcend the epistemological divide between citizen and state practices in urban theory.

This special issue examined the processes through which urban conflicts have produced change. Our authors have focused on citizens, planners, architects, a university acting as a developer, and local, regional and national authorities whose social, political, and spatial practices were shaped and reshaped through conflict. These case studies have contributed to studies of the city and its built environment in three ways: 1. by providing insights into the idea that conflicts in and over urban space are not solely matters to be managed or contained, but also something that can advance transformative change; 2. by revealing the conditions under which conflict leads to negotiations and institutional interactions between citizens and authorities in ways that produce new forms and spaces of agency; and 3. by showing that *how* conflicts unfold and *how* stakeholders interact is key to understanding the dynamics of urban transformation, perhaps even more so than knowledge of why conflict emerged in the first place.

In this concluding article, we reflect on these three points – and the case studies from which they are drawn – to offer a more systematic overview of the mechanisms through which conflicts lead to more inclusive, democratic and sustainable cities. We do so by proposing a new conceptual framework for the study of conflict, referred to as the 'phenomenology of change' approach, which we see as capable of revealing how, why, and under what conditions conflict might produce beneficial outcomes. The foundational elements of this framework were developed iteratively through engagement with the authors of our case studies, each of whom was asked to consider the ways that moments of conflict served as opportunities rather than barriers to transformative urban change.

## The Phenomenology of Change

Phenomenology is the study of complex structures of consciousness, as revealed by the first-person point of view in relation to the structures that enable experiential perception (Smith, 2018). It also involves the study of the meanings that things have in everyday experience, for example the significance of spaces, places, events, the flow of time and the self, among others. As a subdiscipline within philosophy, phenomenology invites the examination of conditions as they are experienced and intentionally acted upon in everyday `life-worlds'. When applied to urban change a phenomenological lens not only allows a focus on the meaning of urban conditions embedded in individuals' or groups' consciousness, but also how this factors into action. It also allows for a recognition that in cities we are likely to see multiple and thus contesting perceptions of the same space, places, or events.

In any given socio-political and economic context, different actors will have unequal access to both experiences and the resources to assert their positionality. This will fuel a multiplicity of practices and experiences that together shape the nature and sequencing of contentious engagements, with the sequence itself driving the relationship among the various stakeholders. The temporality and sequencing of stakeholder practices during conflict are not just shaped by previous experiences; they also are produced through real time interactions as protagonists simultaneously make sense of what is going on, reflect on their own actions as well as those of others, and at the same time perform new acts based on assessments that reconcile, settle, or escalate tensions. A phenomenological approach thus acknowledges that what stakeholders see is always limited and selective. It therefore prioritizes *how* events are seen as much as *what* is seen (Whittemore, 2014, p. 302).

Further, because a phenomenological approach recognizes a diversity of views among citizens and authorities, and notes how they may differentially attribute meaning to objects in their local environments, it requires methodologies that can include an array of narratives and languages that represent the varying frames of reference used by various 'discursive communities' (Healey, 1992). Understandably, conflicts among these various interpretations are thus expected and need to be documented. A phenomenological lens thus builds on all these premises to reveal the structure of stakeholder experiences, the diverse narratives and understandings of conflict, and how the progression of intentional actions will eventually shape the ways that conflict writes itself into the city.

Most important perhaps, it is in the very moment of contestation that the legitimacy of any given government's authority and its institutions are revealed or potentially undermined. This is an insight about the power of disruption that aligns with the path-breaking work of the ethno-methodologist Harold Garfinkel (1991), which we find revelatory despite his rejection of the macro-structural approach to studying human behaviour. Although we depart from Garfinkel in highlighting the wider socio-political,

economic, and institutional contexts that impact the daily struggle for transformative change, we embrace his turn to subjective lenses of interpretation and the ways that spaces of agency are constructed through everyday interactions. For Garfinkel, '… meanings or discourses are re-instantiated, ratified, stabilized by people any time they interact – for another next first time' (Garfinkel 2002 cited in Caronia and Mortari, 2015, p. 405). Similarly, any such phenomenological approach 'stresses the uniqueness of the local contexts and knowledge' (Whittemore, 2014, p. 301), including those conditions established by forces beyond an individual's control as well as the possibility of agency even in conditions not of one's choosing. Put simply, with this framework we not only pay attention to the grounded specifics of context and culture, including those connected to larger systems of oppression and inequality, but we also allow for an understanding of how subjective intentionality and agency collide with existing social structures, power relations and institutional arrangements that enable or constrain a renegotiation of authority (Giddens, 1979, 1984).

With these considerations in mind, we asked our contributors to build their case studies around three sets of questions intended to reveal the aforementioned phenomenological dynamics of conflict and change. The first required a focus on the *actions of citizens and representatives of institutions* involved in conflict, as well as attention to the strategies and tactics that stakeholders used to produce or prevent change. In addition to detailing the contextual settings of conflict and documenting how people acted in those settings on an everyday basis, we asked our contributors to reflect on the practices of professionals in interactions with 'others', and how their experiences with conflict shaped their behaviours and practice. In this request, we drew on Schön's theory of learning-in-action; 'through reflection, practitioners can surface and criticize the tacit understanding and make sense of new situations of uncertainty or uniqueness' (Schön, 1983, p. 62). In building our phenomenology of change framework, we find 'reflection repertoires' to be useful tools for revealing the motivations and languages used by actors engaged in conflict. Such reflexivity may also add an extra learning loop to the analysis of learning through conflict, one that moves beyond the reflections of the protagonists within our case studies and allows our own collective interpretive understanding of the ways that conflict leads to changes in the practice of people, movements, or institutions.

Second, to address *how* change may occur through conflict, we wanted our authors to conceptualize change relationally, particularly as driven by interactions between citizens and the state or between public and private actors. This required, first, an effort to understand the ways that *authority gets renegotiated* through conflict. We asked each case study writer to consider how everyday contestations over the existing urban fabric might have changed relationships among residents and between residents and authorities. These would include a focus on the myriad ways in which people claim their 'right to the city', and the new identities that formed in the process, but also the specific nature of citizen engagement with governments and institutions used to make such claims. In short, we asked our authors to pay attention to conflicts that can play out among citizens, between citizens and governments, or between governments and other institutions.

Third, we asked our contributors to examine how the *central issues* motivating conflict as well as the identity positions of the stakeholders involved might have impacted the likelihood of change. Not all citizens are equally dispositioned to negotiate authority, in no small part because identity constructions built on race, class, citizenship, or cultural experiences can shape the proclivities and possibilities of engaging in conflict as well as the receptiveness of authorities to contentious claim-making. For this reason, we seek to unpack the relationship between

conflict and change starting from the assumption that we must understand the various subjectivities and hierarchies at play. We must ask whether all citizens involved in conflict considered themselves – or were considered by authorities – equally capable of demanding something from the state? Or were certain contesting individuals or groups treated differently by institutions and authorities, and did this impact the nature or likelihood of change?

Finally, after we invited our authors to consider these three questions in their case study research, it also became clear to us that there may have been a fourth dimension for consideration, having to do with the temporalities of change. It was clear that in some of the cases change occurred slowly and in others rapidly. This led us to ponder whether strategies, perceptions, and discourses of conflict differed when protracted issues are at stake; and if so, were the transformations it produced lasting or ephemeral? Stated differently, whether conflicts unfold rapidly, and whether they disappear or become 'institutionalized' in longer-term conversations with governments, could also have a bearing on outcomes.

## Driving Forces of Conflict and Change

We now turn to what we, as editors of this special issue, learned from our case study authors and their accounts of the ways that stakeholders enacted and negotiated change. In what follows we summarize the empirical insights in response to the above three guiding questions intended to reveal the phenomenology of change.

### **1**. *What Types of Actions from Citizens or Other Stakeholders Seemed Most Likely to Enable or Hamper Change?*

Our first conclusion is that conflicts that showed the greatest potential to advance change occurred when citizens did not limit themselves to a single action but simultaneously involved a variety of actions, and when these actions and negotiations unfolded at various scales and spaces simultaneously. We also found that conflict was more likely to produce change when one of the following three conditions were met: when citizens or other stakeholders combined routine interactions within an embrace or strategic navigation of larger societal norms; when they pursued both formal participatory mechanisms and ongoing campaigns of public protest; and/or when they used design strategies to develop alternative institutional spaces for mediating conflict, whether within existing governing networks or the court system.

*Everyday Interactions Supplanting Navigation Rubrics*. The residents of the racially diverse neighbourhood of Riverwest, Milwaukee resisted cultural exclusion and actively pushed to expand the traditional boundaries of community belonging via a new `navigation rubric', which produced an alternative understanding of neighbourhood codes of conduct (i.e. how one should act in the neighbourhood) and wider social control strategies (i.e. how to define and deal with problems) (Perry, 2017). More affluent residents from dominantly white and/or middle-class backgrounds used a relatively mainstream navigation rubric that enforced a strict conformity on historically normative understandings of how the quality of neighbourhoods could be improved – via aesthetic changes accommodating gentrification – and that accepted the role of traditional institutions in improving safety and stability. This mainstream rubric, however, overlooked the fact that gentrification would not benefit everyone equally and that institutional control of public spaces often advances the experience of safety for some residents more than others. This caused tensions and conflict among residents at the block-level. In response, residents of various backgrounds developed an alternative rubric that they called 'live and let live' and which supported communal relations

that were guided by normative flexibility, compromise, and a willingness to contextualize the behaviour of others. It thereby allowed people with different expectations 'to do their thing and they will, in turn, let you live your life as you choose' (see this issue: Perry, 2021, p. 19). Through the combination of everyday interactions and shared navigation rubrics, neighbours thus changed their codes of conduct and created discursive spaces in which residents of various backgrounds learned new forms of engagement which improved their ability to read and respond to their surroundings.

*Protest Combined with Participation.* In Bogotá and Antwerp citizens engaged in a formal participatory process. In Bogotá this was a participatory process instituted by a University that sought to redevelop the downtown neighbourhood *Fenicia*. Despite the best efforts of the University to formulate a participatory process that included original residents of the area, during both the design stages and subsequent decision-making processes, there were several occasions when citizens organized demonstrations and rallies that they combined with social media activism and periodic discussions in panels and forums promoted by the resident's organizations. Likewise, in Antwerp the participatory process was instituted by the city of Antwerp which (together with the Flemish government and road agency) proposed an infrastructure project to close the circle road via a tunnel and an overpass over the neighbourhood Oosterweel. Citizens of Oosterweel contested the plan and were given an opportunity to submit an alternative trajectory for the circle road to the obligatory Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process that would systematically compare the two proposals and guarantee a proper public debate on the various options. When the results of the EIA came out late and paid scant attention to the citizens' alternative plan, residents decided that 'if they wanted to be taken seriously, participating in the policy procedures would not suffice and they had to become activists' (see this issue: Wolf, 2021, p. 63). That activism consisted of framing the project as a risk to public health because of fumes and fine particles, a local media campaign and public presentations of their alternative plan, and activating other institutions which could join them in their contestation. In these cases, both the procedure of decision making as well as the central issue (the spatial plan itself) were contested. When distrust and disagreement about the procedures and planning model reached a boiling point, residents strategically used action repertoires outside of the formal processes and engaged in activist forms of protest.

In Tel Aviv a similar action repertoire of protest combined with a more formal engagement with institutions (in this case, legal authorities) to help advance change. Initially, the demonstrations for and against asylum seekers took place at street-level, with protests built around physical and spatial strategies intended to activate public spaces so as to generate widespread public awareness of a certain topic and enforce societal or political change (Della Porta, 2015; Goodwin *et al*., 2009; Tilly and Tarrow, 2006). At the same time, however, protesters sought to link the micro-level physical actions in the neighbourhood with the meso-level institutional powers embodied in the nation-state, by eventually framing protest demands around the limits and possibilities of the law. Hatuka's compelling proposal to look at the scalar features of contestation and the multilayered political and legal manifestations of protest (see this issue: Hatuka, 2021, p. 98) contributes to the understanding of protest as both a physical occurrence and a legal initiative.

*Design Mediation.* A third action repertoire involved the use of design mediation tools to create new institutional spaces for reframing the fundamental issues under contention. In urban planning and policy circles, mediators are usually understood to be professionals

deliberately brought into conflicts to serve as neutral arbiters. They work on the relationship and trust amongst stakeholders, develop a shared procedure that is legitimate to and trusted by the stakeholders involved, search for ways to enlarge the array of solutions, and build consensus for shared agreements (Fisher *et al*., 1984; Forester, 1999, 2004; Susskind and Cruikshank, 1987). But mediators can also be a party to the conflict, and when they are intricately familiar with the issues under contention, they can design alternative spaces for consensus more readily than external mediators. In Antwerp, Paris and Bogotá professionals in various capacities stepped in to mediate, but what made their actions so consequential were the uses of spatial representations and design tools to accommodate but also deviate from the plans that were the central issue of contestation.

In Antwerp and Bogotá mediators ultimately intervened to move beyond a rational planning strategy in which infrastructure experts (Antwerp) and a private developer (Bogotá) had proposed a plan without consulting residents and other local stakeholders. These plans were met with such distrust that the experts had to change their practices and strategies in order to formulate a procedure that would include the strong voices of the community and ensure the legitimacy of the plans. In both cases, albeit after several years of contestation, the initial stakeholders were forced to start a new process in which both the spatial elements of the plans and the decision-making procedures were to make inclusive deliberations possible. In Antwerp this procedure included involving an external urban planner who sought to mediate among organized groups both in support and opposition to the design of the ringway as well as the local and national government representatives. In Bogotá this new process unfolded in the context of participatory urban design workshops convened by the Faculty of Architecture that provided creative space for residents to imagine the future of their urban spaces in alignment with their own perceptions of what a good neighbourhood should be. These design charrettes both reinforced citizens' sense of agency and inclusion even as they strengthened the role of the university as a mediator.

Design mediation does not always unfold only at the scale of the neighbourhood or the city, however, nor does it always involve a dyadic relationship between citizens and local planning authorities. In the case of Paris, designer-led mediation unfolded on several territorial scales simultaneously (city, region, and nation), with architects holding a distinctive professional take on design as an iterative negotiating process, rather than merely a physical outcome. With these tools, architects were able to insert themselves into conflict over transport by offering a new infrastructure design unimagined by other stakeholders. Architects' relative autonomy from both citizens and local as well as national state planners drove their capacities both to mediate conflict and to propose a new infrastructure policy agenda that itself created new institutional spaces for longer term transformative change in infrastructure connecting Paris and its surrounds.

**2**. *Did Conflict Prompt a Renegotiation of Authority either among Citizens or between Citizens and Government, and through what Means?*

One of the things we learn from social movement theory is that the successes of stakeholders who seek to produce change through protest are highly contingent on the responses of those in higher power positions (Jasper and Duyvendak, 2015; Jenkins and Klandermans, 1995). Protest and structures of governance exist in an interdependent relation of power and should therefore also be analysed in their inter-relationality and not as separate. The renegotiating of authority unfolds in spaces that are shaped by institutional arrangements. The analyses of whether and how a *renegotiation of authority* takes place during conflict, whether through disruptive practices or other forms of claim-making,

helps shed light on that interdependent relationship and its transformative potential.

Authority can be defined as the legitimate power that people or organizations consensually possess and practise over others. In 'Politics as a Vocation', Max Weber argued that authority can be defined in three types. Relational-legal authority, where legitimate power takes shape through rules and regulations. Negotiating this type of authority requires a renegotiation of policies or of the constellation of (legal) norms and rules. Traditional authority, in contrast, refers to the power that is legitimized through respect for long-lasting cultural patterns. Renegotiating traditional authority may involve challenging dominant ways of living, the use and meaning of public space, or societal structures like configurations of race and class. Finally, charismatic authority legitimizes individual power because of extraordinary personal abilities that inspire devotion and obedience (Weber, 2008).

Although challenging charismatic forms of authority seemed less relevant for the stakeholders of our case studies, there was evidence that traditional authority was renegotiated through community-based practices. For example, in Milwaukee neighbours' willingness to view diversity beyond the boundaries of race and class and their social construction of a new 'live and let live' rubric challenged traditional authority and its mainstream cultural foundations by unmasking its classed or raced character. These measures also destabilized broad social categories that were used by citizens and authorities alike to privilege or exclude, thus creating opportunities to advance alternative explanations for issues or different assessments of neighbourhood belonging (see this issue: Perry, 2021, p. 27). What was more common in our cases, however, was a renegotiation of relational-legal and traditional authority via policy arbitration and/or spatial practices.

*Renegotiating Relational-Legal Authority via Policy Procedures.* The activism in Antwerp resulted in enough signatures to force an advisory referendum (meaning that it was not binding local decision-makers to the outcome) in which almost 60 per cent of Antwerp's residents voted against the Oosterweel trajectory. This not only formalized the legitimacy and political significance of activist groups in ways which could no longer be ignored, but also compelled institutions to go back to the drawing board and rethink their plan for the ring road, which led to a new design proposal that would tunnel the road underneath the neighbourhood. Because of significant changes in the plan, the new proposal required a second Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process in which protesting groups could again submit an alternative plan. This second time, these same groups negotiated a change in the EIA procedure and redefined technical procedures to compare the plans. Despite the advances embodied in the second EIA process, the outcomes were again contested as citizens found that guidelines were subsequently altered in favour of the plan proposed by institutions. It was at this moment when trust in the process and in institutions hit rock bottom that the relational-legal authority of the established EIA process proved an ill-equipped conflict arbitrator. The only way forward was to establish a new policy procedure, which resulted in the mediation process described above. That mediation process was institutionally unembedded and therefore celebrated the flexibility to include a wider range of topics than the previous institutional-embedded process allowed for (see this issue: Wolf, 2021, p. 71).

Likewise, in Tel Aviv clashes among protesters for and against asylum seekers also produced a renegotiation of policies. Hatuka concludes that the actions of citizens produced three key changes with a direct bearing on policy procedures: 1. a new phase in civilian consciousness of the people's power over political actors and political orders; 2. a new phase in the participation process, which had become multi-layered

and produced interaction between protesting citizens and the legal sphere; and 3. a fragmentation in the homogeneity of Israeli society, which fuelled ideological contestations (see this issue: Hatuka, 2021, p. 113). These changes are significant because they reveal an increase in people's abilities to access relational-legal authorities, even as it also challenged traditional authority via growing consciousness of people's power and reduced homogeneity. In an agonistic conflict, the relationship between the act of protest and the change it seeks to produce should be understood as processual. Grounded in protests set in motion by the concrete experiences of residents in a particular urban location, people demanded to renegotiate the legitimacy of relational-legal authority, which in turn had a bearing on larger asylum policies and the national level powers that make such decisions.

*Renegotiating Relational-Legal Authority and Traditional Authority via Spatial Practices.* Our case studies also suggest that conflicts in and over space can offer the opportunity to renegotiate both relational-legal and traditional authority simultaneously. This occurred in Milwaukee, where new navigation repertoires for resident engagement in community space and place shaped a local culture that functioned as a guide for dealing with tensions and conflict. One of the reasons these everyday encounters had such an effect is because of the spatial organization of the neighbourhood via 'face blocks' – which are defined as the street, sidewalks, and properties facing the same block-length stretch of street (see this issue: Perry, 2021, p. 18). Face blocks structure everyday encounters because residents have to become familiar with one another as they meet on their front porches. These spatial patterns offer daily conviviality that may make contestation easier to mount and conflicts more likely. Yet they also create avenues for negotiation within the community and, as we have seen, renegotiate traditional authority.

Interestingly, by building alliances through spatial contiguity, citizens had greater capacities to renegotiate relationships with local institutions like the police or the municipality. For example, when white residents observed something out of the ordinary involving a black neighbour on their streets, they would no longer immediately mobilize the police because they had learned to reflect on their entitlement and realized that racialized notions of looking 'suspicious' were not sufficient reasons for a call to the police. In the 'live and let live' rubric, so-called troubles on the block were managed via informal and direct responses, while involving the police was reserved for more serious matters. Other examples of renegotiating the hegemony of relational-legal authority through spatial practice involved an open letter from residents to the local government challenging the aesthetic rules of what front yards should look like and the cultural value of graffiti. This challenge to the city's legal authority is connected to on-the-block battles through which residents negotiate the legitimacy and utility of upholding dominant socio-spatial norms (see this issue: Perry, 2021, p. 25). Everyday encounters can thus scale up to consequential engagement with institutions – from successfully opposing an attempt to ramp up aesthetic regulation of space to influencing the type and amount of policing in the neighbourhood.

We saw similar outcomes in Bogotá. In its role as mediator between residents and the city, the University helped renegotiate both relational-legal authority and traditional authority via its deployment of new design tools to assist residents in reconfiguring their own neighbourhood spaces. Through a process of deliberative design workshops with activist groups as well as individual stakeholders, a long-standing culture of distrust of private developers transformed into a collaboration, and by so doing provided new forms of inclusion seen as transcending traditional cultures of authority. Yet this same process also shaped a renegotiation of

relational-legal authority, by first focusing deliberations between residents and authorities on specific issues: formal participation of owners and inhabitants; guaranteed replacement in the same blocks as current occupation; freezing public service tariffs; and the allocation of resources for social projects to mitigate impacts on the community (see this issue: Pinilla and Arteaga, 2021, p. 45). Second, the activation of these new participatory mechanisms enabled the adoption of new legal methods for formalizing agreements over land management in which both residents and local landowners were included and in which a large majority signed onto the project.

Conflicts in Paris over a networked rail infrastructure also challenged the nature of relational-legal authority and traditional authority, by revealing the inability of existing governance structures to reconcile the tensions between city and suburb. With the national, urban, and suburban authorities representing different constituencies, there was limited room for compromise on the rail's purpose and pathway, owing to the historic distribution of legal powers within the city and with respect to the longstanding centralization of French governmental authority. In this conflict over transport policy – which must also be understood as a struggle over space and inclusion, albeit on a wider territorial dimension than in our other cases – social or political reconciliation among the conflicting parties was only possible through the creation of new metropolitan-scale governance arrangements. In this instance, conflict produced an entirely new institutional authority, one which was better able to serve and integrate the conflicting claims among the various constituencies in the Paris region.

**3**. *How did the Central Issue motiving Conflict and the Identity Positions of Stakeholders engaged in these Conflicts Impact the Nature and Likelihood of Transformative Urban Change?*

These cases have made clear that not all citizens have equal access or the same means to negotiate with authorities. It is therefore critical to reflect on the mechanisms through which citizens were empowered legitimately to demand something from the state, and when these capacities were recognized as such by local authorities. For example, stakeholder's racial, class, or political identity and/or legal status can impact both their willingness and their ability to negotiate with institutions. To be clear, such capacities are not something essential or fixed: identities are discursively constructed and constantly under renegotiation within and between citizens and state, as well as in society at large (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000; Eriksen, 2001). For this reason, cultural identities and social status are bound to shape the positionality of stakeholders in relation to each other and thus their ability to access negotiated relations with actors in higher positions of power.

In our case studies, the role of cultural identities and social or legal status in both conflict and change can be roughly divided into two categories; 1. case studies where the central issue was defined around race, class or national identity – as in Milwaukee and Tel Aviv – and thus where the access of stakeholders to demand something from the state was unequally distributed; and 2. case studies where conflicts centred around spatial plans in which all involved citizens were recognized as legitimate stakeholders in the negotiation of conflict as in Antwerp, Bogotá and Paris. Below we will discuss how these differing positionalities shaped the likelihood and nature of change.

In Milwaukee, residents from various race and class backgrounds were historically excluded from governance institutions, a legacy that limited their ability to express demands within the formal institutional structure of urban governance. In consequence they were forced to negotiate belonging and change amongst themselves. Yet because of these legacies, different residents had competing understandings of who was legitimately

allowed where and when. Overall, citizens organized at the block level were able to challenge and negotiate previously restrictive practices to expand their legitimate capacities to access public space and communal activities. However, these processes were still dominated by more affluent residents who were dispositioned to shape these literal and figurative spaces of agency. Less affluent residents, who were also engaged in these processes, had neither the agency nor the legitimate status to initiate these negotiations. Furthermore, the changes were highly localized: they had place-specific impact but did not necessarily alter the legitimacy or positionality of marginalized groups at a higher scale.

In Tel Aviv the central issue of conflict was in fact who belongs in Israel and who does not, thus putting the question of legitimate claim-making status squarely on the table and making such issues the precise source of contestation. Yet at the same time protesters used these concerns to advance grievances over social configurations, resources and territory, thereby connecting the issues under contestation with the legitimacy of those making claims. Hatuka defines the struggle for and against asylum seekers as an agonistic conflict in which adversary groups share symbolic and institutional spaces (see this issue: Hatuka, 2021, p. 100). An agonistic environment differs from other identity-based conflicts when its stakeholders form 'we' groups that have an intention to negotiate within a political order that is conflicted in its nature, and to enforce change without completely overturning existing democratic arrangements (Mouffe, 2000). In the Tel Aviv case, both adversary groups were citizens of Israel enjoying similar rights and access to authorities, yet they adopted opposing views on the presence and inclusion of refugees. This conflict brought change because both citizens and the state learned how to find an intermediate legal space to advance their opposing claims without *completely* destabilizing the regime or rupturing the social contract between citizens and the state.

In Paris, conflicts over the rail network also implicitly involved understanding who should be included or excluded, albeit in territorial terms. Questions about the extent to which the suburbs should be integrated into the city via a new transport network were also fraught with cultural and ethno-national assumptions about belonging, and whether the needs of lower-income immigrant populations should outweigh the economic growth priorities of urban and national elites. For this reason, the contrasting positions on the project emanating from the central government, the city of Paris, and the peripheral suburbs arose from the class and ethnic differences in their constituencies, thereby driving conflict over the project. However, the resolution of conflicts through a new route design laid the first step for transcending these class, ethnic, and territorial simmering conflicts in ways that produced gains for both economic elites and low-income, immigrant residents alike. Even so, it was the creation of a new metropolitan governance authority to manage the newly designed network that most advanced change. It did so by offering a new negotiating space to link urban and suburban constituencies together in the discussion of future urban policy priorities, thus institutionally advancing change beyond a single policy success.

In Antwerp and Bogotá, the processes of dealing with conflict were also highly institutionalized in ways that reinforced ongoing processes of engagement among citizens, local developers and the city government. Although the formalization of a platform to debate outcomes extended the length of conflict, it allowed authorities to change incrementally their relationships with citizens. Although citizens were first treated as uninvited intruders in policy matters, and in later stages as disruptive activists, through the institutionalization of mechanisms for dialogue they became partners in a deliberative process. These incremental transformations in citizens' 'legitimate' capacities to make claims on the city helped foster stakeholder-wide

acknowledgment of the interdependent relationship between citizens and institutional actors. With these relationships institutionalized, subsequent policy outcomes were not only more permanent, they also had long-standing regulatory impacts that transcended the initial contours of conflict and had the potential to expand future rights to the city within a larger public.

## Final Reflections

With our phenomenology of change framework, we have arrived at several conclusions about the mechanisms through which conflict can transform urban politics, spaces and communities. Overall, we have come to see conflict as a process of constant engagement in which stakeholders learn how to advance their aims as well as what it takes to negotiate change with institutions. Instead of managing or controlling contradictions and tensions, many of the professionals and citizens studied here willingly engaged in agonistic processes. They did not shy away from political and social differences, but rather acknowledged their democratic value (Mouffe, 2000). Whereas others might see conflict as a stalemated relationship between adversaries, in line with Mouffe we understand conflict as a continually evolving process of negotiated engagements among stakeholders, adverse as they may be to each other's originating aims. Our aim here has been to better understand the nature of those engagements and the processes through which people shape positive outcomes through such interactions. We have seen that even as citizens have found a variety of spaces and strategies to negotiate their desired outcomes with institutions, professionals working as architects or private developers – as well as local, regional and national government actors that employ them – they also appear to have learned how to engage and respond to contesting citizens. Such everyday forms of contestation have advanced stakeholder knowledge about *how* to engage and to do so more inclusively, and *how* to modify or change institutional arrangements, legal procedures and spatial plans in the process of demanding change. As a result of these efforts, community actions, spatial plans, and infrastructure projects have laid the groundwork for making cities more inclusive and democratic.

Although each case study reveals a different pathway to arrive at such outcomes, with different issues under contention and different types of conflicts, several commonalities in these phenomenological processes emerged. One is that strategically combining one repertoire of action with another, particularly when this involves crosscutting scales of action and spaces of negotiation, helps enable change. In most of our cases, successful action repertoires from those who contested the *status quo* – either on their own or in combination with a spatial plan – were not limited to one scale or type of action. Those who combined formal participation in decision-making with campaigns of public protest generally saw success, as did those who embraced mediation goals while also innovating design practices, and also those who coupled demonstrations and street-level activism with attention to larger legal initiatives.

A second common thread in our cases was the importance of renegotiating 'authority' over the built environment in order to advance change, although this was often the outcome as much as the origin of a given conflict. Strategies that led to a renegotiation of relations between citizens and authorities ranged from the deployment of everyday interactions to challenge existing policy to concerted efforts to recast policy procedures and, on occasion, to demand changes in the scope of the law, all of which altered prior governance practices. Among our cases, contentious practices unfolding in and around space were particularly noteworthy with respect to strengthening citizens' capacities to challenge – and thus renegotiate – authority over the built environment. Among other things, conflicts over space often allowed for

a simultaneous renegotiation of both traditional and relational-legal authority, thus linking citizens to decision-makers in more relationally complex ways.

Third, although engagements between citizens and authorities were themselves a first step in advancing change, the possibilities for doing so were not equally distributed. Not all citizens had equal access to a seat at the table. Citizens with certain cultural or social identities were not always on the radar of local authorities, thereby affecting the likelihood that the negotiating authority would advance change. In such conditions, the phenomenology of change took a different path. This was especially so when conflicts centred around issues such as class, race or national citizenship. In these instances, neither local nor national institutions made the same effort to resolve tensions generated by citizen contestations by offering spaces for negotiation. In contrast, conflicts centring around spatial plans appeared more likely to foster institutionally embedded changes and new structures of authority. They were thus more likely to produce change capable of transcending the boundaries of a specific conflict in ways that that also reinforced democratic arrangements for the wider public. The success of space-based struggles to transform the built environment appeared to correlate with the degree of homogeneity among citizens, whose capacity to join together to make forceful claims on authorities was less hamstrung by race, class, or other identity divisions that might have weakened their power to ensure engagement with and response from authorities.

To be sure, we also found that solidarity-producing claims for identity-based rights among certain stakeholders sometimes hampered the inclusivity of other groups, especially when protagonists for change adopted new identitities that alienated existing or potential partners and thus re-energized or restarted the cycle of conflict and change. Put differently, conflict strategies on the part of citizens that temporarily short-circuit the realization of desired outcomes do not necessarily thwart the incremental realization of change. Rather, they may in fact help challenge the distribution of gain in ways that continue to generate contentious pushback. In such circumstances, old demands may be strengthened and new allies may emerge in ways that drive the phenomenology of change framework we are promoting here. The point here is that even when conflict does not enable groups of citizens to experience a greater sense of belonging, realize more inclusion in decision-making, or attain equal rights, the phenomenological cycle leading to transformation does not end.

Finally, as we have seen how a range of different conflicts unfolded in our four cases, we have also become aware that the temporalities of these processes will affect the nature and likelihood of transformative change. We have argued elsewhere that policy disagreements which are more protracted in time, particularly those building on contentious interactive engagement among protagonists and antagonists extending over years, often make transformative change more likely (Davis, 2018). In several of our cases a similar dynamic seems to have been in play. In Paris, Bogotá, and Antwerp long-standing and protracted conflicts forced the creation of new institutions that themselves offered new platforms for continued conversation and contestation about policy outcomes, thus fuelling agonistic interactions between citizens and the (local) state. These extended periods of dialogue also made it possible for stakeholders to modify or even reverse their roles in ways that both advanced collaboration and transformed institutional agendas for change. In fact, residents who started out as antagonists often became participants and then partners in a mediated process between citizens and authorities. Likewise, state actors often – although not always – changed their roles from being opponents who could not be trusted to partners who, on the surface at least, acknowledged grievances and acknowledged or protected citizens' rights. These

constantly switching roles also reinforced the phenomenology of change by linking the experience of citizens and authorities to each other in ways that remained elusive to protagonists in short-term conflicts.

The latter insight into the temporality of engagement is also important to our understanding of the relationship between agency and structure, if only because the outcomes of long-term conflict described above, and more importantly the mere fact of change itself, can prove a problem to our understanding of who is the agent and who is the structure. These are, of course, fundamental questions that extend beyond the scope of this conclusion to the special issue. But they are worth pondering, if only in a preliminary fashion. The case studies presented here suggest that, notwithstanding the diversity in institutional contexts, powerful political-economic forces that routinely hamper transformation were present in all cases. At the same time, however, stakeholders' abilities to force spaces of negotiation even within cities and societies marked by inequalities also shaped new paths, institutions, relationships and communities. It matters, then, how stakeholders intentionally act in situations where structural conditions reinforce inequities and thus produce conflicts. Although structural conditions that appear outside citizen control may cause tensions and uncertainty, with careful observation and understanding of the self and the other, they can be challenged. Conflict offers the possibility to turn a situation into something different, and potentially better.

One could understand the ways that conflict produces change by adopting the Weberian metaphor of a train on a railway track: a pathway on which a certain sequence of actions and events moves forward, ready at any moment to be redirected on yet another pathway if the track is switched. What Weber termed as 'switchmen of history' reminds us that ongoing and well-structured processes of negotiation and conflict can derail business as usual. A track's switch can be changed, meaning that something can be done to steer the carriage in a different direction. Only by knowing that the switch is flipped will we know that change is possible, such that the nature of the actions that redirected these pathways will determine where and when the train arrives. Some have called such events 'critical moments' (Cobb, 2006; Laws, 2020; Leary, 2004; Verloo, 2018; Yuana *et al*., 2020), a concept which offers an invitation to deciphering the sequence of events, relationships, notions of self and other, and specific track-switching actions that can lead to change. What is important here is to acknowledge that all conflicts can function as the 'switchman' of change, leading to pathways of negotiation and further conflicts that could hold the potential to produce positive change.

But what can urbanists learn from these reflections on the potential of conflict to produce long-term changes in the urban built environment? One is the importance of rethinking the role of institutional actors who are mediating these conflicts and engaging in negotiations with citizens and authorities. Although these actors often understand themselves to be mediators and conflict managers who are separate or above the process of conflict, our analyses suggest that they should also be seen as participants in the process of conflict. As mediators, they must embrace the fact that their role is to include the various perspectives equally, so as to come to better informed decisions. Professionals' commitment to mediation stands apart from the normative stance of protagonists, who themselves often drive the conflict that necessitates mediation. Being able to manage both roles requires a reflective and inclusive approach to conflict; it invites professionals to reflect on their knowledge (Schön, 1983) and to understand how their knowledge is just one of the multiple interpretations of what the city is and could be. But as both mediators and participants in the negotiation process, they are still embedded in the phenomenology of change.

In pondering the practical lessons that could be imparted to professionals, citizens and politicians negotiating conflict in the built environment, let us close with just a few. First, is the importance of refraining from either circumventing or de-politicizing conflictual issues, and instead embracing such topics within the spaces of negotiation, which then become spaces for agonistic democracy (Mouffe, 2014). The case studies of Bogotá and Paris provide examples of this, even as the case on Antwerp shows the risk of *not* engaging with sensitive issues. Second is the need to be bold enough to jettison standard practices or established processes and start from scratch, especially when mistrust and antipathy among stakeholders is so high that any movement forward would require re-establishing a process of trust and community building. Again, the cases of Paris, Antwerp, and Bogotá reveal the power of starting anew.

Third, practitioners must be prepared to identify unexpected spaces or sites for stakeholder negotiation, such as at street-level, during community events, or through the formation of *ad hoc* stakeholder engagements that are flexible enough to include a wider range of topics than is normally permitted by those institutions and authorities who normally monitor or participate in urban negotiation processes (as seen in the cases of Milwaukee and Antwerp). As a related aside, activists, urbanists, and scholars alike need to consider the possibilities and limits of institutional versus physical spaces of negotiation. Will they reinforce faultlines of exclusion, do they generate trust, do they offer new opportunities for collective strengthening of citizen claim-making *vis-à-vis* authorities? Fourth, in accordance with Mouffe and others who claim the importance of confronting the political, we argue that planners and policy-makers should not shy away from the reality that their decisions (and the outcomes of a contested planning process) are political by nature, and thus enable one group over another. The decisions they make should be transparent with respect to whose ideas, interests or wishes are not covered, so that adversaries can organize themselves democratically. Acknowledging these choices as part of 'the political' is exactly what makes democracy stronger and more transparent (Mouffe, 2014).

Finally, we want to return to the importance of paying heed to the methodologies used to study episodes of conflict. The empirical insights that are needed to undertake a phenomenological approach to the study of conflict are complex and demanding. They require deep understanding of the action repertoires of stakeholders and the experiences that mobilize intentional engagements. They also require nuanced study of the nature, temporality, and spatiality of interactions among stakeholders, how they are moulded by both individual experiences and institutional context, and the ways these processes produce new spaces of agency. A phenomenological approach to urban conflict suggests a renewed interest in subjectivities, and greater scholarly reflection on the knowledge generated from research that examines intrinsic phenomena and not purely extrinsic principles (Langsdorf, 1995, p. 179). Such objectives tend to privilege qualitative over quantitative study even as they require methodologies that allow scholars and practitioners to enter into the experience of the subject (*ibid*., p. 181).

Both ethnographic fieldwork and in-depth interviewing are vital to such aims, and they are clearly present in the case studies presented here, which showcase our contributors' capacity to combine individual protagonists' self-reported accounts with more general ethnographic observations to shed new light on the actions of stakeholders beyond their self-reported description. This is important, especially in situations of conflict, because self-reported descriptions of behaviour and attitudes can differ from what people actually do in situated interactions (Jerolmack and Khan, 2014; Verloo, 2020). We suggest, therefore, that scholars, practitioners, citizens and

politicians confronting, managing, or learning from conflict should step out of their methodological comfort zones, seek both analytical and interpretive accounting for the complexity of real-world struggles for change, and embrace the agonistic experiences that can make conflicts transformative and, by so doing, provide new spaces for collective learning.

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