“Reframing the Problem of Public Space in the Sustainable City”

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Paper presented at the RC21 International Conference on “The Ideal City: between myth and reality. Representations, policies, contradictions and challenges for tomorrow's urban life” Urbino (Italy) 27-29 August 2015. http://www.rc21.org/en/conferences/urbino2015/

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Abstract:

To refute the desirability of a 'sustainable' global future would seem eccentric. But while this goal positions a failure to plan for the future as irresponsible, our postmodern sensibility renders 'planning' itself hubristic; the world seems increasingly complex, uncertain, and non-linear. With this dilemma in mind, it seems productive to question whether the 'city' should necessarily be the focus for our collective efforts to further a sustainable future. If the real, emergent city always exceeds the horizon of planned one, can the city ever be sustainable in the ways envisioned? Should we, then, somehow expand our normative envisionment of urban sustainability to encompass unpredictable emergence? Problematically, the aspiration seems oxymoronic: it expresses a desire to plan the unplannable.

This *impasse* is particularly apparent in the conceptualisation of public space in urban sustainability plans and policies. Here, 'topographical' approaches (Iveson, 2007) are the norm, exhibiting a spatial determinism which, this paper argues, is reflective of an unacknowledged utopianism pervading the field more generally. Unpredictable or transgressive public behaviour forms no part of such visions. But if, instead, we adopt the 'performative' approach typical of political theory and activism, the target shifts towards behavioural outcomes which are abstracted from materiality, with more compliant, quotidian public life receding into the background. Normatively and ontologically, the two approaches may appear irreconcilable; individually, however, both only provide a partial account of their subject matter.

After exploring the problematic above, this paper presents an alternative, cohesive model of publicness, understood as an assemblage of space and performance, by shifting onto the descriptive plane. This shift obviates the dual traps of utopianism and disregard for everyday behaviour. Its descriptive coherence, furthermore, opens up possibilities for a more productive normative framing of the 'problem of public space' in the sustainable city.

Introduction

This paper outlines a new theoretical model of 'public space'. The aim is not to provide an all-encompassing synthesis of what Barnett (2014:6) calls the multiple "grammars of public value"; instead, the model is motivated specifically by a grounded contention that the goal of 'planning' for sustainability contains a series of unresolved tensions, which are exacerbated by the global focus of the sustainability agenda on urban space. The model was developed in response to the requirements of fieldwork in which I hoped to explore and compare the 'cityness' of urban space resulting from the implementation of sustainability plans in two very different cultural settings. It forms a theoretical basis on which to describe and cross-comparatively analyse the publicness of urban space, without privileging certain types of cityness over others.[1]

The paper begins by problematizing the ambition of planning for sustainability in the 'urban age', to suggest that the 'cityness' of the sustainable city is unsatisfactorily conceptualised in mainstream approaches. Cityness, it is suggested, can be usefully approached by considering the 'publicness' of urban space. If only because open spaces are traditionally closely associated with the distinctively 'urban' qualities of cities, the paper then provides some illustrations of the conceptualisation of open space in mainstream urban sustainability documentation. The new model is then introduced, and in conclusion some of the normative perspectives which it may enable are discussed.

Urban sustainability in the real world

It is observably the case that urban sustainability has been increasingly 'mainstreamed' into policy-making internationally over the last decade (Joss, 2011). From a generous perspective, this proliferation of activity at different levels (Joss, Cowley & Tomozeiu, 2013) provides welcome evidence that a set of originally normative prescriptions (Joss, 2011) are widely being translated into practice. And yet the high-minded principles and promises of radical transformation with which urban sustainability is discursively

[1] The 'city' and the 'urban' are not conceptually differentiated in this paper.

framed are at odds with a reality of only slow change on the ground. Individual achievements are often structurally irrelevant, or may represent little more than 'business as usual'. Much mainstream activity might even be pejoratively labelled "neoliberal urban environmentalism" (Whitehead, 2013:1348). It might be contended that the real-world application of sustainability ideals has inevitably involved their dilution as they have emerged through existing institutional and market structures. Even this more cynical perspective, however, still permits the possibility of incremental change, and – from a 'transitions' perspective (Geels, 2002a; 2002b; 2011) – of innovations within 'niches' having unpredictable wider significant transformative influence. It may remain difficult to describe any city as convincingly 'sustainable' in absolute terms, but particular initiatives might still be valorised as necessarily limited real-world experiments, potentially functioning as 'stepping stones' to more substantive future changes (Ryser, 2014).

Such initiatives, furthermore, should not be associated exclusively with structurally powerful actors (Bulkeley & Castán Broto, 2013:365); they may equally constitute 'bottom-up' experiments (Hegger et al., 2007). Whitehead suggests that what Krueger and Agyeman (2005) call 'actually existing sustainabilities', which he contrasts with "rhetorical commitments", often "occur outside of officially sanctioned programmes for sustainability" (Whitehead, 2012:29). This paper, nevertheless, focuses on urban sustainability as conceptualised and implemented by dominant institutional and commercial actors, precisely because such initiatives are backed by significant financial and/or political resources. It would seem uncontroversial to contend that the principles embodied in these initiatives play a relatively significant role in shaping the practices of sustainable urban development internationally.

Whitehead's (*ibid*) observation that such initiatives are overlayered with different forms of rhetoric is closely aligned with Vallance's et al. (2011:346) argument that the contemporary "sustainability movement" retains unacknowledged "[u]topian underpinnings". The deliberate or unwitting vacuuity of this rhetoric is one motivating

factor behind a growing body of literature which questions the social, economic and environmental credentials of many such schemes (see Rapoport, 2014). Cugurullo (2013a; 2013b), to take just one example, argues that the utopianism evident in the marketing of *Masdar City* in practice serves the interest of the UAE's ruling classes. Again, though, to acknowledge that 'eco-city' rhetoric may deliberately obscure contingent political and commercial agendas is not to deny the potentially aspirational force of its utopianism.

But while the sustainability of such initiatives has been explored in the literature, their *urban* qualities generally go unquestioned. One reason to question these, if rhetoric is the critical target, is that the labels attached to such initiatives ('eco-city', 'low carbon city', 'green town', etc: see de Jong et al., 2015) tend to assert their urbanity. The influence of the eulogistic discourse of the 'urban age' (Brenner & Schmid, 2014; Joss, 2015) might also be questioned in this context: the 'city' has become an increasingly powerful imaginary, concentrating our hopes for the future across a variety of fields (Caprotti, 2015) – but how is the city itself conceptualised in these aspirations? A second reason relates to a growing scale of ambition over time. Tentative early experiments focusing on individual streets or collections of buildings, such as the 1990s *Ökostädte* in Germany and Austria (Damm, 2015), have given way to more holistic visions of 'city-wide systems' (Joss, 2015). Sustainability certification frameworks now extend to neighbourhood level (Joss et al., 2015); 'retro-fitting' sustainability policies often apply to entire local authorities; sizeable new Asian 'eco-cities' are being built. As localised experiments, urban sustainability initiatives might be forgiven even if they constitute little more than 'premium ecological enclaves' (Hodson & Marvin, 2010) or marketing strategies for state or commercial actors. But if the goal of urban sustainability really is to transform our collective 'urban future', then the rhetoric surrounding these experiments may need replacing with plan-making that more convincingly addresses the disorderly, multiple reality of lived urban space.

The significance of such questions is here explored through the lens of public space, for reasons outlined below. First, however, they are located within a broader set of questions relating to an unresolved tension within the ambition of planning for (urban) sustainability.

The problem of planning the sustainable city

As an international 'consensus concept' (see e.g. Blowers, 1997; Dobson, 2009; Cuthill, 2010), sustainability describes a collective sense of responsibility towards the future. Problematically, however, its rise as an agenda has coincided with a loss of faith in our ability to 'plan' anything in a traditional sense. Our contemporary sensibility constructs the world as complex, uncertain, and non-linear (Chandler, 2014), and characterised increasingly by what Rittel & Webber (1973) labelled 'wicked' problems. While sustainability ambitions have come to land on the quintessentially unpredictable, complex space of the city, the very ambition of planning has come to appear hubristic in its ignorance of this complexity (Van Assche & Verschraegen, 2008).

If traditional 'top-down' urban planning, based on hierarchy and positivism, is no longer seen as practically effective or desirable in many western countries (Friedmann, 2005:190–192), its broader applicability as a mode of development has been undermined further by a theoretical refocusing on the Global South in recent years among urban scholars (see e.g. Robinson, 2006; Yiftachel, 2006; Shatkin, 2007; Watson, 2009; Parnell & Robinson, 2012). Based on such studies, it has been widely argued that informality and extra-legality is or has become the norm for urban life and development across large parts of the world (see eg: Al-Sayyad & Roy, 2003; Watson, 2009b; Chiodelli & Moroni, 2014; Singh, 2014; Eskemose Andersen et al, 2015). In what have been called 'informal hypergrowth' cities, large proportions of the urban population have "built their own city without any reference whatsoever to the whole bureaucratic apparatus of planning and control in the formal city next door" (Hall & Pfeiffer, 2000, cited in Roy, 2005:148). Even if it is acknowledged that traditional urban planning may achieve some of its aims in the developing world, it still tends to have

limited reach, and may actively create problems (Rakodi, 2001). While developing cities have thus been characterised as exhibiting a "complex continuum of legality and illegality" (Roy, 2005:149), McFarlane and Waibel (2012) argue that the interface between informal and formal processes has traditionally also been underestimated in western planning systems too. The question of how to direct sustainable urban development through institutional plans and policies, in other words, only appears to be more problematic if a global 'urban future' is invoked. It would seem unclear how its ambitions might be achieved intentionally by policy-makers if planning appears to function internationally as only a minor factor among many others in shaping urban space, and when urbanisation most typically proceeds in the absence of, or as a result of the unintended consequences of, planning undertaken by state authorities.

We might conclude that radically new modes of governance are required, which better address problems of complexity, perhaps with whole new vocabularies and conceptualisations of agency. Even if planning continues to provide "a simple and highly structured view of the world" (Allmendinger, 2002:42), the ongoing spread of communicative planning (see eg Healey, 1997) and more 'heterarchical' decision-making processes (Jessop, 2002; Joss, 2015) may signal the beginnings of a new, less state-centric mode of societal organisation. But if such a shift is not forthcoming, the urban framing of our envisioned sustainable future may turn out to be fundamentally misguided.

The importance of open spaces

The cityness of the sustainable city is approached here through the lens of its 'publicness' as a space. The public dimensions of space are understood primarily in terms of formal *access* by citizens, and the extent to which the formal space and behaviour within it are *visible* to all. Following Parkinson (2012) in particular, the question of *ownership* is treated as a potentially important but actually subsidiary variable in determining the public qualities of space; ownership does not necessarily determine access (Light & Smith, 1998; Kohn, 2004; Parkinson, 2012:58). Equally,

however, if a more globally relevant model of the publicness of space is required, the aim of dividing space neatly into that which is privately and municipally owned may be unrealistic. This ownership-based binary has been interpreted as historically and geographically contingent, associated with the emergence of the representative bourgeois state (Low & Smith, 2006) and twentieth-century western cities more particularly (Body-Gendrot *et al.*, 2008): "In much of urban Asia, there has often not been anything public to undergo privatization" (Hogan *et al.*, 2012:61).

Given the emphasis on access, and to tame the subject matter to some extent, the *open* spaces of the city are privileged here as particularly important. This move requires a caveat: as Parkinson (2012), among others, has observed, the public life of a city cannot be found exclusively in its squares, streets and parks. However, it is justified to some extent by their *visibility*, which Weintraub (1997) identifies as a commonality across different theorisations of the public. There is a broad historical consensus, furthermore, that open urban spaces somehow fundamentally define the character of a city, and even the quality of cityness itself. They enjoy a "cherished place in the lexicon of urbanism" generally (Keith, 1995:297): from Jane Jacobs' (1961:39) famous interest in their significance in shaping perceptions of a city as a whole, to UN-Habitat Executive Director Joan Clos' recent assertion that public spaces such as streets are "[w]hat defines a character of a city" (UN-Habitat, 2013:10). Fyfe (1998:1) suggests this widespread interest reflects an understanding that city streets "manifest broader social and cultural processes", illuminating discussions about "wide theoretical questions about the interplay between society and space". Normative treatments of 'streetlife' are often infused with an approach captured in one of Weintraub's (1997) senses of the public – the 'cosmopolis' of spontaneous social interaction and unpredictable diversity, which contributes significantly to the "fulfilling gregarious life" promised by cities (Jacobs, 1995:314), with a uniquely urban type of cooperative, patterned interaction with strangers (Lofland, 1998). There is no reason why the model advanced below might not be extended to other types of space – but it is proposed at least that open spaces provide a rich starting point for understanding the nature of the

cityness which characterises particular urban settlements. In particular, they may illuminate the ways in which the real, lived city exceeds the planned one.

The open spaces of the sustainable city

To claim that public open space lies at the conceptual or normative heart of urban sustainability would be an exaggeration. And yet the collective open spaces of the urban fabric are regularly seen as having multiple benefits for sustainability. These benefits relate variously to social goals (eg promoting inclusivity, building social capital and democratic inclusion, encouraging healthy lifestyles and recreation, and promoting public safety), economic security (eg creating attractive environments for potential residents and investors), and environmental aims (eg promoting walkability, managing storm water, and supporting biodiversity). While no comprehensive survey of the treatment of open spaces in urban sustainability plans and policies is attempted here, a few examples may help illustrate their common association with multiple sustainability dimensions. In, Curitiba (Brazil), internationally lauded since the 1990s as an exemplar of urban sustainability thinking, improvements made to the public transport system during the 1970s in the name of social inclusion (McKibben, 2003; Macedo, 2004) were tied to partial pedestrianisation of the city centre and the construction of various green parks, to provide recreational and environmental amenity and mitigate flooding (McKibben, 2003). The promoters of *Whitehill & Bordon* 'eco-town' in the UK emphasise the potential for open green spaces to promote "health, sport, art and culture" (W&B, 2012:46), and see them as a key "selling point" for the city (ibid:31). The Chinese city of Huaibei plans a new water park which, as well as providing "crowd pleasing entertainment designed for high densities of people" and communicating environmental educational messages, will grant the city a "unique branding" (Robert Edson Swain, 2010:76). The World Bank's *Eco2 Cities* framework praises the role of 'pedestrian walkways' in increasing "physical and mental well-being, while creating a sense of community and reducing crime" (Suzuki *et al.*, 2010:37). For *Masdar City* (UAE), "[e]nsuring accessible leisure and recreational opportunities for workers, residents and visitors to Masdar City is central to the sustainability objective

of creating a viable work-life balance" (Masdar, undated). San Francisco's *Treasure Island* eco-development promotes its proposed network of open space as "culturally and environmentally rich for all types of recreational activities" (TIDA, undated).

The traditional importance of open spaces within urban design, in short, dovetails well with the multiple and holistic goals of sustainability. But one characteristic common to such treatments of space is that the behaviour envisaged within them is essentially compliant, and typically relates to everyday leisure activities. It might be absurd for plans to promote anti-social activities or crime, but countercultural or challenging behaviour, including political protest, remains unconsidered. For Freiburg, non-compliant behaviour is asserted away: "All users of public space must respect the activities of others" (The Academy of Urbanism, 2011:14). The possibility of disrespect, of social tension, is thus constructed as 'out of place' in these spaces; they are envisioned in fundamentally static, apolitical, utopian terms.

A second common characteristic is a tendency towards spatial determinism. In Spain, *Ecociudad Valdespartera* theorises its public spaces in terms of their "quality" as sites of "basic neighbourly relations, cooperation, civic participation; in other words, social cohesion fostered by their spatial configuration, in terms of density, shape and multifunctionality" (de Miguel-González, 2010:143). The leisure, amenity and art facilitated by these spaces will "strengthen the identity of the new neighbourhood and generate an urban culture" (ibid:298). The common use of the word 'liveable' implies that cities exist spatially prior to the public that may 'live' in them: Freiburg boasts "a great variety of liveable public spaces" (Academy of Urbanism, 2011:14); Almere, in the Netherlands, aspires to be "liveable and healthy…a vital community with a wide diversity of living and working possibilities, in a salutary abundance of space, water, nature and cultural landscapes" (Almere, 2009:8). In the strategy document *Sustainable Sydney 2030: The Vision,* Gehl urges recognition of the "role of streets, parks and squares in public life" (City of Sydney, 2008:15), asking us to "watch what will happen" as a result of its central thoroughfare being closed to vehicles: "[t]here

will be human life along the whole length of it" (ibid: 16). *Treasure Island*'s network of open spaces will "create social vibrancy" (TIDA, 2011:61). The essential unidirectional logic is that the open spaces of the city produce a type of social cohesion, generated by the formal aspects of space; the publicness of these spaces is not produced performatively by the behaviour of the citizens 'within' them.

Urban sustainability documentation then, in its focus on formal characteristics, typifies what Iveson (2007) calls the 'topographical' approach to public space. Just as Harvey long ago argued that 'plastic arts' with most influence on the western spatial consciousness have relatively weak analytical traditions (Harvey, 1973:24), Parkinson (2012) more recently contends that urban practitioners' and theorists' interest in questions of inclusion and equity falls far short of a sophisticated understanding of the relationship between the materiality of different city spaces and the democratic process. It is not unreasonable that different disciplines should "tend to focus only on one aspect of public value at a time" (Barnett, 2013:449), but there is at least some risk that urban development policy-making and practice is compromised to the extent that its social and political theoretical underpinning is weak. While urban design "aims at the creation of useful, attractive, safe, environmentally sustainable, economically successful and socially equitable places" (Carmona, 2014:2), it may in practice function as "a movement without social content, …value free, …even the hand-maiden of global capitalism" (ibid).

Iveson contrasts such approaches with the 'performative' ones more typically found in political theory. Here, public 'space' has metaphorical meaning only; it appears primarily to describe a mode of communication rather than derive its definition from any physical locations: "democratic politics are imagined to take place in an abstract terrain" (Purcell, 2008:76). Their analytical target is behaviour, often emergent, unpredictable and potentially transgressive; not only is this abstracted from materiality, but more compliant, quotidian public life recedes into the background. This rejection of spatialisation is problematic if we accept Purcell's (2008:76) argument

that “spatial relations are deeply and inescapably intertwined with political, social and economic relations”, and therefore “[a]ny project to democratize cities must take account of the importance of democracy’s spatial and urban dimensions”. It fails if nothing else to account for the observable fact that “material spaces are often recurrent: the same spaces are used for different political activities through time” (Leontidou, 2012:303).

Normatively and ontologically, the two approaches may appear irreconcilable; individually, however, both only provide a partial account of their subject matter. Notably, Parkinson (2012) recently attempted to reconcile the two, but his normative concerns were limited to the spatial needs of the democratic process; he accepts that “the purposes of public space are not just political” (Parkinson, 2012:86). It would seem that we still lack a more rounded theorisation of the relationship between a city’s publicness and its space (Staeheli & Mitchell, 2004:152; Low & Smith, 2006:7).

Emergent and Civic Assemblages of Publicness

Mobilising traditional public space thinking may force us, then, to choose either a spatial determinism which ignores transgressive behaviour, or an orientation towards discursive outcomes abstracted from materiality and everyday life. A model of publicness is proposed here, however, which obviates the normativity of these choices by shifting onto the descriptive plane, and embraces both ontologies by considering publicness as an ‘assemblage’ of space and behaviour.

The recent use of assemblage theory in urban studies, drawing on DeLanda’s (2006) broader project, has been facilitated by actor-network theory, in which “assemblage refers to the immanent effect of the association of heterogeneous elements (humans, organizations, tools, objects, technologies, texts, organisms, other cities)” (Jacobs, 2012:416). Accordingly, “the city is not socially constructed, but enacted into being in networks of bodies, materialities, technologies, objects, natures and humans” (Farías, 2010:13). Rather than privileging either the social or the material dimensions of the

city, “assemblage distributes agency across the social and the material” (McFarlane, 2011). For the purposes of the current model, criticisms that assemblage theory’s ‘flat’ ontologising diminishes its usefulness with regard to questions of power or ethics (see eg Bender, 2010; Allen, 2011; Brenner *et al.*, 2011) might be deflected since the immediate aim is not a normative one. Rather, as a basis of a project to better embrace the unpredictability of the city, it may be valuable in its encouragement of a “sense of…the unities and disunities, of the stabilities and instabilities, and especially the complex and heterogeneous networks of connection and association out of which the city as a social and as a physical entity is formed and sustained (Bender, 2010:317). “The actual city”, then, “exists only in concrete assemblages and provides no encompassing form for its multiple enactments” (Farías, 2010:15); assemblages are neither fixed nor shapeless, but instead relatively and unevenly obdurate. In this sense, they resonate with contemporary understandings of the ‘public’ as variously enacted and relatively fluid.

The emergent, multiple quality of this enactment echoes Dewey’s (1989) theorisation of the public as a “particular modality of being implicated in inherently dynamic formations, which stand out first and foremost for the requirement of some kind of collective action upon them” (Marres, 2012:44). The Deweyan ‘public’ is, according to Bennett (2010:100), “a contingent and temporary formation existing alongside many other publics, protopublics, and residual or postpublics. Problems come and go, and so, too, do publics: at any given moment, many different publics are in the process of crystallizing and dissolving”. But if ‘publicness’ in this sense describes a problematic entanglement, Bennett’s use of the term ‘protopublic’ usefully opens up a gap between the conditions of entanglement and its public expression. If Dewey’s ‘problem’ relates to institutions not being sufficiently dynamic to guarantee a voice to entangled, frustrated publics, it is the visible expression of this frustration that would define it as publicness in the current model, and as emergent in the sense that the expression takes place outside formal institutional channels.

But is also possible to imagine the assemblage of emergent publicness without reference to the problems predicated by the focus of theorisations such as Dewey's on processes of political claim making. While we might locate the realm of visible everyday 'politics' in the emergent public life a city, as distinguished from institutional political life (Offe, 1985), emergent publicness need not be driven by a conscious desire to effect political change. Its assemblage may, alternatively relate, for example, to hedonism or even criminal intent. The commonalities in all this emergent public behaviour are its visibility and its subversion of a dominant, relatively obdurate, assemblage of spatialised norms.

Crucially, however, in the current model, 'emergence' is only one of two possible modalities of publicness. The other, here labelled 'civic' publicness, describes visible social behaviour assembled in compliance with constraints of different types – institutional, material, or other. There may be no explicit compulsion for individuals to behave in a civic manner; the relevant norms may, rather, have been internalised. Emergent publicness, in contrast, assembles itself as a reaction to material conditions, economic circumstances, and/or institutional constraints. This distinction might be analogically illustrated by Canetti's (1984) discussion of 'open' and 'closed' crowds. Canetti characterises an open crowd as 'natural' and 'spontaneous', it forms and disintegrates unpredictably, and there are "no limits to its growth" (ibid:16). A closed crowd, however, is defined by its boundary, and tends towards permanence (ibid:17). Emergent publicness, like the open crowd, is self-organising, evanescent, unpredictable, reactive, and unbounded. It assembles spatially without deference to, or in spite of, dominant norms and constraints, which co-constitute it only in a negative relational sense; it is associated with the challenging (and blurring) of boundaries. Civic publicness however, like the closed crowd, is regulated, exclusive, bounded, and more oriented towards obduracy. While civic publicness reproduces a particular definition of the 'common good'; emergent publicness questions this definition.

The visibility fundamental to this model of publicness is important in a further subtle sense, relating to the challenge which emergent publicness issues to spatial norms. This touches on questions of legality: if civic publicness assembles in line with what is 'legal', emergent publicness does not constitute illegality so much as 'a-legality' (Lindahl, 2013). If the assemblage is classified as illegal by the state, it may be rendered invisible (punished, repressed, or forced into the personal sphere). Emergent behaviour is only public, then, up to the point where it is excluded. It exists in the grey area between what is explicitly permitted or encouraged within institutional or material constraints and what must be removed from sight.

The potentially problematic implications of imposing exclusively 'civic' values onto space are implicit in other commentaries, and relate to the question of visibility. Mitchell (2003) aligns the expectation of 'civility' with that of the city as aesthetic spectacle, arguing that both have negative implications for justice and the public sphere: he is uncomfortable that the removal of homeless people from the streets of US cities is indicative of "a highly sanitized city and a fully deracinated politics – a politics that elevates the importance of aesthetics over the needs of some people simply to survive" (ibid:9). Ignoring the possibility of public dissent effectively equates the political life of the city with its institutions, as "something that takes place, safely, within the formal planning process" (Roy, 2009:9).This outcome may be the result of planning having remained an essentially 'liberal' project, whose conceptualisation of the 'public interest' "has been for the most part a moral, rather than political, exercise" (Roy, 2008:97). The question, however, of precisely how current practices of urban planning might be adapted to embrace emergent publicness remains unanswered.

This model, nevertheless, specifically avoids privileging the emergent over the civic as a marker of cityness. This would be in arrogant denial of the relative unfrequency of radically emergent behaviour in everyday life, and the importance of an active collective desire for a general sense of civic order. A normative privileging of civic

publicness need not only be interpreted negatively as the imposition of one conception of order onto the multiple actual and potential orderings of the 'real' city; it might instead be more optimistically aligned with the liberal principle of civility, enacted through tolerance, which serves to enable social differences to coexist in space, or equally with the cultural preferences of more collectivist societies.

Conclusions: Implications for Normativity

This paper has advanced a theoretical model of publicness as a particular type of assemblage, with a civic and an emergent modality. In order to have broad cultural applicability, the model avoids normatively privileging either modality as representing a more desirable 'citylike' characteristic; the concept of assemblage, meanwhile, obviates the theoretical *impasse* between the topographical and performative approaches to public space. To conclude, however, it may be useful to reintroduce normativity into the equation, by considering some of the critical questions which the application of a model of civic and emergent publicness raises for the goal of sustainability.

We might wonder, first, how initiatives underpinned exclusively by a sense of civic publicness will cope with emergent public behaviour disrupting or undermining their goals. This question may be more pressing in societies tending towards individualism and visible questioning of authority, but also has relevance to both authoritarian and collectivist societies. In thinking this through, it should be acknowledged that in some ways such disruption matters little. If a sustainability scheme fails on its own terms, useful lessons might still be learnt through critical reflection, and adjustments made. Plans themselves, furthermore, are shaped partly by unpredictable processes which often involve emergent publicness; the decisions which they embody should not be confused with the preceding decision-making processes (or ongoing contestation following their publication). In practice, plans can change and be replaced over time; they might therefore be better understood as describing temporary agreements, or "punctuation points" (Innes & Booher, 2015:206). On this view, the danger lies "not so

much in individual plans' linearity as in the possibility that "temporary agreements may become part of the structure of domination and become fixed rather than adaptive. The antidote is to continue to surface and address conflict creatively" (*ibid*). The risk here is that the goal of urban sustainability will recede further if its current multiplicity coalesces into a superficially singular normative consensus which is unchecked by ongoing reflexive and external criticism, including the acknowledgement of contingency and conflict. Reflecting on the publicness of space in both its civic and emergent modalities, then, reminds us of both the contingency and temporary nature of plans, and of the inevitability of unpredictable change and conflict in the city *qua* public space.

Second, it may be worth considering that the problem with overly civic notions of publicness in the envisionment of sustainability lies not so much in their ignorance of emergence, as in their potential for oppression. While it may never be possible to plan *for* emergent publicness, the possibility that civic approaches will render some public life invisible should not be forgotten; and this may have negative implications for both democracy and sustainability. Our understanding of these implications will be furthered by close analysis of the particular types of civic norms imposed, the qualities of the visible publicness that results, and that which is removed from sight. However, these normative implications do not reside in the model itself; rather, drawing them out requires reference to specific social, cultural and political contexts.

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