BOOK REVIEWS

Petra Kuppinger (ed.). 2021, *Emergent Spaces: Change and Innovation in Small Urban Spaces*. Palgrave Macmillan.

This edited book, published in the Palgrave Studies in Urban Anthropology series, advances the exploration of urban change through an unconventional, underexplored lens. Even though urban ethnography has always paid attention to the micro-scale, a good part of the ethnographic analysis focuses on how people assimilate, adapt to, or resist broader economic, political, environmental, or social processes. The purpose of this book is, instead, to identify the seeds of urban change in ordinary lives and spaces, relying on detailed ethnographic work in geographically diverse locations.

The book aims to explore how specific groups of people plant seeds of social and urban change, conceptualising these actions as 'urban beginnings', following Sharon Zukin (2010). These explorations allow us to expand our understanding of the urban beyond the most typical foci that urban studies have used to build theory, in line with postcolonial views like Jennifer Robinson's 'ordinary cities' (2002). In addition to displacing the lens from the big metropolises of the Global North — which the book achieves by including work on big and small, North and South, growing and shrinking cities — the different chapters of the book conceive 'loose spaces', as conceptualised by Franck and Stevens (2007), as crucial spheres of urban life. In opposition to 'tight spaces', or more visible and controlled urban spaces, loose spaces can become sites of freedom, innovation, creativity, and social change.

With this aim, the book proposes nuanced views on the relation between macro-structural processes and people's agency. As a collective contribution, it transcends the gap between what Sherry Ortner (2016) calls 'dark anthropology', works dedicated to showing how power operates in and permeates every aspect of ordinary life; and the 'anthropologies of the good', which make visible how, even in contexts of oppression or precariousness, humans create new possibilities for life. The chapters of this book, although focusing more on the second glance, do not fail to understand the seeds of social change within the framework of political, economic, social, and cultural processes in which these 'small spaces' are immersed.

Part I, 'Migrants, Place-Making and Claims to the City', includes works that show, on the one hand, migrants' desires to join the existing system of their reception cities (like the Latin American migrants to Santiago aiming for inclusion through auto-construction in chapter 2) and, on the other, the ways in which migrants make and change cities, generating sometimes harmonious, sometimes conflicting dynamics. In this second group, we find the case of Nepali migrants generating solidarities through a restaurant in a small city in northern Chile which became their transitory home (chapter 5); the Spanish-speaking and francophone migrants in the American Midwest who managed to make themselves visible through soccer, changing the dynamics and uses of space and renegotiating racial and ethnic divisions

(chapter 3); or the conflicts over the use of public space and xenophobia that arose from Peruvian migrants' presence in a plaza also in Santiago (chapter 4). In this first part of the book, most of the seeds of change emerge more from survival strategies than from a desire to change the system.

Part II, 'Religion, Urban Innovation, and Urban Spiritual Geographies', in contrast, explores seeds for change more directly aimed at social transformation. Chapter 6 documents an individual initiative promoting God's love for taxi drivers in bumper stickers in Shanghai that activated potential for social change. Chapter 7 shows how Islamists in Phoenix, Arizona, use non-official, emerging religious spaces to negotiate urban change. Chapter 8 draws on a long-term ethnography of Islamic religious lessons taking place in living rooms to elucidate ideas of collective spaces beyond the public/private dichotomy, documenting how emerging spaces can gradually generate new social dynamics. Combined, these works show how religion, commonly associated with tradition maintaining, can also foster urban change.

Part III, 'Popular Culture, Lifestyles, Social Activism, and Infrastructures' groups a very diverse range of topics, motivations and scopes. It includes initiatives aimed at social change that question the economic status quo: chapter 11 shows the potential of small businesses to foster sustainability in Stuttgart, Germany, questioning production, consumption and lifestyles, while chapter 12, through punk and anarchist 'food not bombs' initiatives in Vancouver, shows

how urban residents make the contradictions of capitalism visible by de-commodifying food and cooking, subverting functions and divisions of space with the transitory time-spaces of the kitchen. Other chapters document more modest initiatives that unlock the potential for social change through transitory, emerging time-spaces, like the micro-granting dinner in Detroit shown in Chapter 9 as a 'loose space' for the actualization of diverse ideas of the good city. Chapter 10 brings a Brazilian midsize 'ordinary' city to the forefront, where bohemian queer emerging time-spaces become a site of possibility for diverse people, who out of these must face the prevailing and exclusionary 'tight' spaces of the city. Chapter 13 shows how inhabitants of informal settlements in Cape Town, South Africa, relate to space and time in the city through infrastructural labour. This chapter reinforces the relationship between the permanence of housing and the right to the city shown in chapter 2, but in a way that shows the contradictions of this infrastructural labour: improving homes and infrastructure solidifies their place in the city but simultaneously dissolves the possibility of moving to a formal home.

The last chapter ends with a sentence that captures Ortner's tensions between dark anthropology and the anthropologies of the good and that points to the contradictions latent across the book: 'small spaces, crafted by household labour, hold both the seeds of change and the grounds of collective frustration' (p.262). This group of empirically grounded contributions to contemporary academic debates enhances

our understanding of urban life and is a welcomed call to urban anthropologists and ethnographers to focus, amidst increasingly unequal and exclusionary cities around the world, on possibilities for urban and social change.

References

Franck, K., and Stevens, Q. eds. 2007. *Loose Spaces*. London: Routledge.
Ortner, S. B. 2016. Dark anthropology and its others. Theory since the eighties. *HAU-Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, 6 (1): 47-73.
Robinson, J. 2002. Global and world cities: A view from off the map. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 26 (3), 531–554.
Zukin, S. 2010. Naked City: *The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Adriana Hurtado-Tarazona
Cider, Universidad de los Andes, Colombia
a.hurtado10@uniandes.edu.co

Julia Tiemann-Kollipost. 2020. *Political Participation in the Digital Age: An Ethnographic Comparison Between Iceland and Germany*. Columbia University Press.

Numerous cities have turned to so-called 'e-democracy' projects and initiatives, with the intention of enhancing and broadening community participation in civic matters via digital means; often through residents proposing ideas for projects within the city itself. It is within this emergent phenomenon that Julia Tiemann-Kollipost's insightful ethnography takes place. In *Political Participation in the Digital Age: An Ethnographic Comparison Between Iceland and Germany*, Tiemann-Kollipost investigates the realities of two

online participation tools, *Betri Reykjavík,* based in the eponymous Icelandic capital and *LiquidFriesland*, an initiative based in the rural Friesland region in northern Germany, which are comparatively investigated. The author pursued this line of investigation to answer the question of 'how are people's repertoires and patterns of political participation influenced by the opportunities the Internet generally and digital democracy in particular entail'?

Of interest is Tiemann-Kollipost's argument that online political participation does not replace in person forms of participation, but rather supplements them. Within this work, she frequently rubbishes the notions of '*slacktivism*' and '*clicktivism*', often levied at online political participation, instead arguing that users of online participation tools are *bricolours* who are 'extracting and combining the information relevant to them from diverse media formats by multiple approaches' (p86). With the notion that online participation tools are another addition to the user's 'participation repertoire', the author further argues that 'online communities do not repress local social networks of families, colleagues, neighbours or friends, but rather, those groups make use of online communities and integrate them into their everyday life' (p181). This finding underscores the relative success of *Betri Reykjavík*, with the close-knit, urban population of Reykjavik building upon pre-existing social networks, whereas, *LiquidFriesland* closed in 2014; in part owing to the more rural, dispersed populace.

Another element of this divergence in performance lies in, according to Tiemann-Kollipost, the origins of each tool's creation.

Drawing upon the work of Harold R. Kerbo, it is argued that the *crisis* which gave birth to *Betri Reykjavík* — the 2008-9 financial crisis which upended the Icelandic economy and society — produced the 'liminal' conditions for a more 'open society', 'which came into being because of a moral shock in times of crisis within a fragmented society' (p188). Whereas, in Friesland, the tool was born out of *affluence,* with the notion that local government 'thought it would be nice to offer an additional way for citizens to communicate with the administration' (ibid).

However, whilst *Betri Reykjavik* may appear to be a success in relation to *LiquidFriesland,* there were significant issues with the tool. Firstly, users often faced what amounted to the 'black-boxing' of the tool's operation. For, when a user proposed a project, vague and abstract responses would follow from the authorities, with projects taking months and years to be discussed by the municipality. Another issue, away from the functionality of the tool, concerns the scope of participation afforded to the user. According to Tiemann-Kollipost, 'online participation tools linked to municipal decision-making processes like Betri Reykjavík and LiquidFriesland do not fulfil the promises of digital democracy' (p109), due to users facing 'repeated moments of opacity, confusion, and conflict' (p110), with the author continuing to argue that online democratic participation can only work 'if it is accompanied by extensive changes and restructuring of both the political culture and political communication' (ibid).

Julia Tiemann-Kollipost's work offers an essential insight into the actualities of digital political participation and does a good job of outlining the various issues inherent in the creation and operation of these forms of participation. However, there are a few areas where, in this reviewer's opinion, the work could be expanded upon.

Firstly, the author has interrogated these online participatory tools through a political participation lens. Whilst this is not an issue in and of itself, with little detail paid to geographically situating their ethnographic work — focusing on interviewing the users, developers and politicians involved with the projects — it is imbued with a sense of detachment. This is frustrating particularly given the nature of the tools under the spotlight, which are centred upon using a digital platform to affect change in the physical realm at the city level. It would have been a nice addition for the author to have included a section setting the scene as it were, rather than focusing on the locations through a political lens.

Another area where improvements could be made concerns those who participated in the interview process. The author has elicited important insights into the development and use of these tools, but owing to a lack of literature cited concerning critiques of smart urbanism — the broad umbrella term concerning digital interventions into the city — an important voice is missing; those who are unable to use online participation tools. With the further encroachment of the digital into the urban, the 'digital divide' is a significant challenge facing many communities. By

solely focusing on users of the platform, the voices of the excluded are unheard. This is an issue facing many cities which intend to follow similar paths and implement similar tools, with other ethnographic research highlighting the potential of these approaches privileging the input of the digitally capable (See, Pak et al. 2017 as an example of this).

Despite the above critiques, this text, through its insightful revealing of the realities of using and operating online participation tools, provides a critical and accessible account of this emerging phenomenon. Julia Tiemann-Kollipost, all in all, does a good job to uncover the limitations of online political participation, whilst also signposting its potential. Through her observation that these tools do not replace current participatory practice, rather augmenting and enhancing them, paired with the discussion of their limitations, *Political Participation in the Digital Age* should find its way onto the bookshelves (virtual or otherwise) of any scholar interested in the intersection of the political and the digital, or the advancement of digitally mediated urbanism.

References

Pak, B., Chua, A. and Vande Moere, A. 2017. FixMyStreet Brussels: Socio-Demographic Inequality in Crowdsourced Civic Participation. *Journal of Urban Technology*, 24 (2): 65-87.

Will Brown
Loughborough University
w.brown@lboro.ac.uk