# CONTESTED CITIES AND URBAN ACTIVISM

Edited by
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# The Contemporary City

In recent decades cities have been variously impacted by neoliberalism, economic crises, climate change, industrialization and post-industrialization and widening inequalities. So what is it like to live in these contemporary cities? What are the key drivers shaping cities and neighborhoods? To what extent are people being bound together or driven apart? How do these factors vary cross-culturally and cross nationally? This book series aims to explore the various aspects of the contemporary urban experience from a firmly interdisciplinary and international perspective. With editors based in Amsterdam and Hong Kong, the series is drawn on an axis between old and new cities in the West and East.

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# Contested Cities and Urban Activism

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# Introduction

CHAPTER 1

# Introductory Remarks and Overview

*Ngai Ming Yip, Miguel Angel Martínez López and Xiaoyi Sun*

The notion of 'urban activism' holds an ambiguous status in both the fields of social movements and urban studies. It usually conflates the meanings of 'urban movements' and all sorts of activist practices that take place in cities. 'Urban movements' is the conventional expression to capture sustained mobilisations and protests that challenge consolidated power structures in relation to the production and transformation of urban spaces. When these collective actions are neither lasting over time nor sufficiently challenging the rulers and managers over the territory, it seems convenient to just designate them broadly as 'activism'. Therefore, we argue that urban activism occurs within specific organisations not much coordinated with others, and when it is focused on single-issue

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demands and campaigns with limited duration and capacity to alter the deep roots of urban politics. Activists are engaged participants in collective action as members of disparate groups who can turn into contributors to larger movements under certain circumstances. We elaborate on this distinction more accurately.

Urban activism and movements have undergone waves of transformation in the past few decades. Earlier research tends to focus on large scale nationally or even internationally orchestrated campaigns which were often elaborated and 'institutionally-heavy' with reliance on professional organisers and involved in situ participation of supporters. Yet this has been overshadowed by the emergence (or revival, according to some) of 'new social movements' since the 1970s which were often fragmented and 'institutionally-thin' with non-materialistic demands around issues like identity, gender, ecology or idealistic mottos like peace (Roth 2000). However, more recently, 'old problems' like employment, housing and urban planning returned to the scene. The contradictions created by late capitalism, the retreat of the welfare state, and the advancement of neoliberalism are believed to be the underlying driving forces. Shared concern on the impacts of global events like climate change, impacts caused by the global flows of capital have underpinned many protests over the recent decades (Hamel 2000). Isolated actions are also being linked to each other by resources and mediation from international NGOs and movement organisations. Hence, as Harvey (2008) postulates, even localised urban struggles have to be approached from a global scale as global financial capitals are dominating most urbanisation processes.

In contrast to the global north to which most of the studies on urban activism make reference, the form and process of struggles in the global south take very different shape despite sharing the same global threats, like the environmental crisis and the proliferation of financial powers (as well as local government acting as their agents or in collusion with them). High in the agendas of urban activism in the global south are collective consumption issues like clean water, basic shelter, actions against displacement and better conditions for street vendors. Such localised actions are cut off from the international movement networks and are little known outside of their action localities (Mayer 2009). Indeed, integration of the actions in cities in the global south with the specificity of the local sociopolitical environments is often more pivotal than their connection with global movement networks or international NGOs.

Hence, local singularities remain as a crucial dimension in the study of urban activism and movements, despite their tensions with global scales or even the transnational diffusion of protest repertoires.

The shaping of the local specificity of urban activism goes beyond the immediate local context but is connected to the social, political and cultural environments at various levels—local, regional, national and even global. In this respect, as most empirical cases have been reported from the global north within the tandem formed by capitalism and liberal democracy, bias in the analysis appears to be inevitable. The assumptions that 'civil rights are protected, the press is free, courts and legislatures are independent of the executive, and mechanisms for regular transfers of political power are institutionalized' (Osa and Schock 2007) simply cannot be taken for granted for many countries in the global south. The recent erosion of those pillars in countries of the global north such as Russia and Hungary, or in developing countries (Turkey, Brazil, etc.), warns us about the constraints of national and local contexts for the expression of grass-roots claim-making.

Situations are even worse in transitional economies under semi-authoritarian rule, like China and Vietnam, in which 'repression or the threat of repression is omnipresent … the risk of associating with regime opponents and advocating policies not sanctioned by authorities is costly, and resources that may be used to oppose the regime are difficult to acquire' (Osa and Schock 2007, p. 124). Collective actions of protest are still being perceived as a threat to social stability and hence various forms of activism are censored by state-controlled conventional media or being filtered in the new online media (for instance, by the Great Firewall in China). Help or support from international networks may be also counterproductive because it attracts the attention of the state and ends up in even more extensive suppression.

Even in countries in which western-like liberal democracy is imitated or been newly set up (e.g. Central and Eastern Europe), political resources and channels of redress may have been monopolised by the elites and the media in addition to non-independent judiciaries. Equally notable are countries in North Asia. Despite their capitalist system is arguably well advanced, their developmental approach to economic growth put the role of the state in a dominant position which is further complicated by the interweave of social factions within closely knitted political interests.

## ACTIVISM, MOVEMENTS AND URBAN POLITICS: THEORETICAL CONCERNS

Academic definitions on urban movements rarely distinguish various forms of activism as their key components. We argue that although all forms of urban activism nurture urban movements, the latter generally imply more intense contentious politics than the former. Activism also refers to less coordination between disparate groups and less tendency to expand their social networks of alliance, support and action. We thus contend that the above are differences of degree more than essential distinct features. Movements cannot exist without activists, but many activist expressions are not able to shape larger movements. Overlaps may also occur between them and other forms of urban politics we cannot examine here (from political parties and elections to charities, sport clubs and hidden or dispersed forms of resistance to authority: Scott 1990).

The meaning of the 'urban' holds obvious spatial connotations. Local places and cities are the location for manifold protests but, for us, only those involving the configuration, production and transformation of spaces within a local scope (from neighbourhood sites to the metropolitan scale) should be considered 'urban'. This stance also excludes spatial determinism because we take for granted that urban spaces are, mainly, the result of social (as well as political, economic and cultural) processes which make and reproduce a dominant mode of production and consumption (Harvey 1996, Ch. 9). However, as mentioned above, the transnational nature in many locally bounded urban struggles has often been neglected (Mayer and Boudreau 2012, p. 284). Many movements have to deal with the politics of scales when authorities operate rescaling processes of resources, policies and decision-making processes, which oblige activists to 'multi-scalar strategies' (Martínez 2018a; Nicholls et al. 2013, p. 9).

Based on these premises, we define 'urban activism' as the social practices of protest and claim-making about urban affairs within specific economic and political contexts—usually, in short, a capitalist society (Heatland and Goodwin 2013; Pickvance 1995, p. 198; Pruijt 2007). The more they persist and tackle the power structures of cities, the more they can scale up to the category of urban movements. Hence, when activism is fully channelled through state institutions in the form of interest groups, it rarely raises the stakes of political contention between the citizenry and the political-economic establishment. The more

institutionalised the demands from below and responsive the authorities, the less need for activism. Sometimes the opponents of activists are not the state officials and rulers but private companies and managers, and even other social groups according to their residence, ethnic status and stigmas (Tyler and Slater 2018).

A brief account of two major theoretical approaches may further illuminate the framework that guides our inquiries on the topic of urban activism and movements. Firstly, the 'contentious politics' approach refers to 'people struggling with each other over which political program will prevail' (Tilly and Tarrow 2007, p. 2). This involves interactions between actors, claim-making bearing on someone else's interests, some forms of social organisation or coordination, and the direct or indirect involvement of governments. Not every expression of collective action is thus contentious. Some may remain within the walls of the state bureaucracy and representative democracy (voting, lobbying, running for office and so on) while others may scale up to social turmoil, uprisings and riots (or even wars). Urban movements and urban activism usually fall in the midst of those two poles. Tilly and Tarrow define social movements according to their routinised continuity in terms of claim-making campaigns, public performances (marches, petitions, meetings, etc.) and 'public displays of worthiness, unity, numbers and commitment by such means as wearing colors, marching in disciplined ranks, sporting badges that advertise the cause, displaying signs, chanting slogans, and picketing public buildings' (Tilly and Tarrow 2007, p. 8). Crucially, for them and us, activists comprise the 'social movement bases' besides organisational and cultural resources. However, if these social movement bases do not give birth to 'political identities' (a similar argument is held by Andretta et al. 2015, p. 203) and, simultaneously, do not turn into sustained 'movement campaigns', activism becomes only a kind of 'minimovement' (our term) or one-time protests that can hardly threaten the legitimacy of the power holders.

Despite the dominant realm of state politics and policies, social movements are specialised in exploring and promoting repertoires of action beyond state institutions. Overall, political conditions either facilitate or hinder activism. They may operate not only at the local but also, very often, at the regional, national and even international-global scales. Hence, Tilly and Tarrow point out 'scale shift' as one of the main processes that researchers must reconstruct and explain. This concept is particularly useful in order to incorporate an urban or spatial view into

the analysis of political mobilisation. According to them, scale shift means both the diffusion of contention and the coordination of collective action at higher (upward) or lower (downward) levels. Although most activism is locally initiated, it can shift venue 'to sites where contention may be more or less successful, and can threaten other actors or entire regimes' (Tilly and Tarrow 2007, p. 95). Instead of just focusing on the venue or location of protest, we can expand the concept to the spatial goods or policies (e.g. housing, or education and health facilities) addressed by activists at different state instances when their claims are diffused by emulation, territorial expansion of the main organisation and appeals to social groups from other cities, and subject to the same deprivation framed by the early risers (see also Martin and Miller 2003, p. 148; Nicholls et al. 2013, pp. 8–10).

Only on a marginal note, Tilly and Tarrow mention that activists' claims might be on other targets such as 'owners of property, religious functionaries, and others whose actions (or failures to act) significantly affect the welfare of many people' (Tilly and Tarrow 2007, p. 119). To complete the picture, we might add various social groups and hegemonic worldviews (or cultural codes) as the direct targets of activists (Hamel et al. 2000; Dikec and Swyngedouw 2017, p. 4). Another criticism concerns the role of social movement organisations. They can often be replaced by loose social networks and the mobilisation of different supporters and allies according to class, gender, cultural, ideological and spatial allegiances (Goodwin and Jasper 2004). Strong and durable campaigns, struggles and political identities seem more significant than the nature of movement organisations—although their mobilised resources may make a difference. Finally, a tight connection of social movements with their most significant context, the development of capitalism and urbanisation (Mayer and Boudreau 2012, p. 279; Hetland and Goodwin 2013; Rossi 2017) is usually missing in the contentious-political process approach.

A second approach that nurtures our views on movements builds upon the tradition of critical political economy. In the 1970s and 1980s, Castells defined 'urban movements' as those able to both transform the whole urban system of planning and management, and to challenge the reproduction of capitalist relationships (Castells 1972, pp. 321–323). For him, less challenging forms of protest and community participation would match what we designate as 'urban activism'. This distinction implied a hierarchy between them (revolutionary movements vs.

reformist citizen participation) which dismissed the aforementioned overlaps (movements encompassing activism, protest and participation) and the fact that most urban movements do not necessarily defy the heart of capitalism. However, Castells offered two valuable premises for the analysis of urban movements: (1) the articulation of economic, political, social and ideological dimensions of urban movements and activism within the hegemony of capitalism; (2) the space as a dimension of class struggles when turned into the field of 'collective consumption'—the spatial means and public services necessary for the reproduction of the labour force (Saunders 1983, pp. 113–127). These tenets still ruled in Castells' next twist (1983) where the examined cases clearly showed low-key anti-capitalist activism. This result led him to replace the target of urban movements: instead of being able to change the urban system and the capitalist society, they just tackle the 'urban meaning'. This 'urban meaning' still refers to class and socioeconomic struggles, but it centrally incorporates a historical and cultural skeleton (Castells 1983, p. 302). In addition to class, he introduced gender, ethnicity and residents' aspirations to control their own local environment, facilities and administration as key components of urban movements/activism (Castells 1983, p. 291).

Castells was criticised for endorsing urban movements with a high capacity to produce social change without taking into account the performance of state authorities, capitalists' actions and even institutional means of claim-making such as voting, petitions and lobbying (Pickvance 1975, pp. 32–39). His theoretical models did not integrate well the structural contexts in which every movement exists such as 'the coexistence with a broader political movement, the presence or absence of political parties, and state structure and government policy' (Pickvance 1985, p. 35). In addition, political opportunities are usually articulated with other contextual features regarding the urbanisation process, the economic cycles and cultural trends about, for example, the quality of urban life (Pickvance 1985, pp. 40–44; Fainstein and Hirst 1995, p. 198; Lowe 1986, pp. 152–186; Marcuse 2002).

It is also worth noting that other scholars engaged with this approach from alternative angles. Mayer (1993, p. 149), for example, showed how empowered urban movements of the 1970s in West Germany such as rent strikes, squatting and massive demonstrations against urban renewal became increasingly associated with other social movements (such as the women and the environmental ones) and that eventually led to electoral alliances.

Later on, many community groups were incorporated in municipal programmes and moderated their demands. However, instead of an inevitable path to their institutionalisation and defeat, urban movements became more diverse, fragmented and occasionally able to get mobilised again. In the late 1990s and the early 2000s, the anti-globalisation wave brought many urban movements into broader coalitions in order to oppose privatisation and welfare state dismantling (Mayer 2006, p. 203; Della Porta 2015). Hence, the new context of globalisation transformed urban politics due to city-branding strategies, construction of mega-projects, shrinking municipal budgets, outsourcing of services and competition for attracting capital investment (Mayer 2016).

Another alternative strand of analysis was provided by pioneering Harvey's (1973, 1982) insights into the capitalist city. Instead of focusing on 'collective consumption'—i.e. the spatial conditions for the reproduction of the labour-power—Harvey promoted the notion of urban space as the reproduction of capital, the material basis for producing rents and profit by means of private property and speculation. 'The city in Harvey's analysis assumes a much more dynamic significance. It is a 'productive' rather than reproductive instrument within capitalism' (Merrifield 2014, p. 20). According to Castells, urban movements tend to contentiously engage with the state provision and management of collective consumption. As for Harvey, urban movements would not be necessarily attached to the specific local places where they live and protest because their goal is, if they take a progressive stance, to interrupt the circulation of capital wherever the space it takes over. Movements should thus be studied in their connections to the context of global flows of capital and the urban landscapes which are configured, occupied and manipulated according to the capitalists' interests. As Merrifield contends, since the neoliberal turn initiated in the 1970s, even social democratic municipal governments succumbed to state encroachment, divested from collective consumption budgets, privatised and outsourced most of their services. In turn, they started subsidising capital in order to befriend spatially attached global investments landing in their cities (Merrifield 2014, p. 19). Many urban movements reacted to the core of these crucial processes, while others behave within this context without even attempting to challenge it.

Unlike Castells, Harvey was not initially focused on urban movements' research. This changed over the years when he recalled the notion of 'militant particularism' to indicate that there are many particular and

local grass-roots struggles whose 'interests, objectives and organisational forms are fragmented, multiple and of varying intensity' (Harvey 2001, p. 190). This implicitly invites to ask, in our terms, how urban activism shifts into urban movements or 'broader [institutional] politics'. Whether progressive or reactionary in social, economic and environmental grounds, militant particularism entails community building. Once we know how particular communities and urban struggles are produced, we should disclose how connected they are with more universal phenomena such as the circulation of capital, environmental impacts and class inequality (Harvey 2001, pp. 192–196; see also Smith 2001, pp. 41–46 for a critique of a class-based universalism).

Attempts to bridge political economy and contentious politics approaches have not been very explicit in the current literature on urban activism and movements (among the exceptions: Jacobsson 2015b), although empirical research in the field has significantly increased over the last two decades (see, e.g., a wide range of publications about urban squatting: Anders and Sedlmaier 2017; Cattaneo and Martínez 2014; Martínez 2018b; Mudu and Chattopadhyay 2017). A recent analysis of housing movements in line with expanded political economy and intersectional concerns resembles very much the framework we have presented above (Madden and Marcuse 2016). Regarding the links between urban space and protest, there is also a considerable academic production (Carlsson 2001; Mitchell 2003; Nicholls et al. 2013; Routledge 2017; Shephard and Smithsimon 2011). In particular, some have called attention for an explanation of 'multiple spatialities' such as territory, proximity, boundaries, networks, mobility-flows, spatial configurations and patterns that may intersect with social movements (Jessop et al. 2008; Tilly 2003, p. 221). We can skip the risk of spatial determinism (i.e. the assumption that spatialities 'shape' movements, without identifying any clear association of those spatialities with political-economic opportunities and constraints) by accounting for the 'spatial technologies of power' (Miller 2013, p. 290) and 'spatial infrastructures' such as barricades, protest camps (Feigenbaum et al. 2013) and the occupation of vacant property, for instance, when they play relevant roles in urban activism and movements. Despite many social movements may be studied based on their significant 'spatial dimensions' (as well as their historical ones such as duration, acceleration, path-dependence, stages of development, turning points and so on), the analysis of urban movements and activism focuses straightforwardly on their 'spatial claims' (Tilly 2000, p. 137).

Regime change, at the national scale, is also one of the key contextual factors to look at. This seems counter-intuitive given the main drivers for urban movements and activism come from the local scope when they start mobilising. Nonetheless, there is sufficient evidence that urban movements, for example, 'flourish in the phase of collapse of authoritarian regimes and prior to the subsequent formation of political parties' (Pickvance 1995, p. 206) as it was the case in Spain, Portugal, Brazil, Hong Kong, Russia, Poland and Hungary, although 'it is dangerous to generalise about capitalist societies on the basis of what happens in regime transitions' (Pickvance 1995, p. 206). Political opportunity structures are crucial in the analysis of urban movements but other contexts such as the type of welfare regime, the presence of corporatism, the degree of state centralisation and the economic situation and capitalist cycles of growth and stagnation (Pickvance 1995, pp. 212–214) should not be neglected. In sum, the structural emphasis of both the political process and the political economy approaches requires attention to how contextual conditions are articulated with the processes of political agency-subjectivity constitution, creativity-performance and discursive framing by activists themselves (Rutland 2013, p. 997; Marcuse 2009; Smith 2001, pp. 41–46).

## Urban Activism Beyond the West

In non-democratic countries, activism that targets state authorities is always being perceived as a threat to the ruling regime. Hence, it is not surprising that collective actions which are not tolerated by the state would in fact face the risk of being repressed. Yet, in non-democratic countries, repression may not always be in the direct form of coercion (e.g. arrest and prosecution). The threat of repression and the use of violence, either directly by the state apparatuses or indirectly by its undercover agents (violence by proxy), are equally effective in suppressing activism (Osa and Schock 2007). However, repression does not always work the way the state authorities expect. Rather than cracking down on activism, repression may instead provoke higher level of contestation. For instance, Almeida (2003) employs examples of activism in El Salvador in the 1960s and 1970s and illustrates how state repression may be able to suppress the action of challenging organisations at the beginning but sustained repression would radicalise activism and provokes even bigger actions. In India and East Timor, escalated state repression

triggered backfire and brought about transformative events (Hess and Martin 2006).

Hence, despite the hurdles in organising activism, either because of the personal safety of the organisers being threatened or because it is difficult to mobilise resources for their actions, activism in non-democratic countries does emerge and some of its expressions even have been successful in breeding large-scale transformations. In fact, political opportunity structure that is conducive to activism (access to state institutions, elites' cleavages, allies between movements and powerful parties, social recognition, limited repression, etc.) is still available in non-democratic and authoritarian states.

In the first place, repression of non-democratic regimes is not uniform and cannot always be kept at a high level. As the legitimacy of the state is still an important pillar in sustaining the ruling regime, the capacity (or the promise) to sustain economic growth is often one important instrument in maintaining legitimacy. Hence, when the legitimacy of the state is being challenged by activists, particularly when the country faces economic crisis, repressive measures may be tightened up in order to suppress activism. However, it is also not uncommon for the repressive state to relax social controls which are perceived as a more effective means to ease pressure on the state, particularly when the state launches promises to boost the economy (Osa and Schock 2007).

Secondly, the ruling regime in non-democratic states has cracks. Even in authoritarian states or dictatorship, competition among the ruling factions would create division. Elite division may trigger elite defection which is conducive to the creation of opportunities for challenging organisations (McAdam et al. 2001). Material or moral support for challenging organisations may also be rendered by organisations outside the state institutions or from international organisations. In this respect, pre-existing networked organisations are of eminent significance. These networked organisations may survive from a previous cycle of repression relaxation, as in the case of El Salvador when education and labour organisations were able to preserve their organisational functions (Almeida 2003) or in the case of Poland in the socialist era in which the Catholic Church and the trade unions survived under the repressive regime for respectively cultural and political contingency reasons (Osa 2003).

As Pickvance (1999) argues, 'the fact that citizen organizations of non-political character are permitted allows political activists to operate

under non-political labels and to exploit the ambiguity about what is tolerated. And beyond this, independent political activity can exist which can be the basis of social movements' (pp. 358–359). Like the case in Poland, 'non-political' networks help to lay the ground for future social movements as the cost of mobilising would be greatly reduced (Osa 2003). Martin et al. (2001) also illustrate how low-profile non-violent actions can lead to big transformative events in a repressive regime. Like the downfall of Suharto in Indonesia, the sustained actions of a large number of small-scale resistance were able to win over social support and led to the shift of power in the ruling regime which favoured the opposition. As a consequence, small, localised activism on everyday routines may pave the ground for organised actions, movements, political parties and even regime change in the future.

Downfall of the repressive regimes and subsequent migration to a liberal-democratic political system would often generate an expectation of an increased level of activism. On the one hand, discontinuation of the non-democratic regime should lead to the relaxation of repression on activism and on the other hand the incoming democratic regime, which impels an increased level of political participation to enhance its legitimacy, would make articulation of citizen's demand more accommodating. Grievances which have been accumulated in the old regime as well as those that are generated from the economic turmoil that is often associated with political transitions would further push up the level of activism.

However, the experience in the former Eastern Bloc shows contrasting outcomes. A study on the protests in four Eastern European countries (Hungary, East Germany, Slovakia and Poland) over the 1990s (Ekiert and Kubik 1998) indicates that these four countries did not show higher level of protests than their Western European counterparts. Instead, two of the countries even showed a substantially lower level of political mobilisation. In addition, incidents of protest also bear little relation to the economic performance of these new democracies. Countries that experienced a marked economic decline and social dissatisfaction (like Hungary) in the early 1990s had a low level of protest whereas countries that recovered the quickest from the 'transitory recession' (such as Poland) experienced the highest incidence of protests.

Hence, as Ekiert and Kubik (1998) argue, such contrasting outcomes reflect the complex interaction between protests and the changing social

and political environment in the democratic consolidation process of transitional economies. There is still no single theory on social movement that is capable of explaining the variation in the protest level but instead a combination of 'resources in a broad sense [which include] traditions, symbols, and discourses alongside material and organizational elements… with the concept of institutional opportunities, which are produced by emerging organizational patterns of the new polity' (p. 581).

Liberalisation of the political institutions also has long-term impacts on how activism is organised. As social and urban movement in liberal democracies is largely sustained by professional social movement organisations, the opening up of the new democratic countries attracted such professional organisations. As a result, activism in the newly democratised countries has undergone a short spell of NGO-isation of movements in the early years of democratisation, largely fuelled by financial and technical support from the West. However, such impetus has not been able to sustain. Dependency on international donors has led to the fragmentation of NGOs in the new democratic countries. New but small organisations mushroomed to compete for the scarce funds. This drives NGOs to align their activities with the interests of international funders away from the concerns of local communities (Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2013). As a consequence, this contributed to weaken the support of the professional movement organisations from the local communities. Detachment between NGO and local communities is further exacerbated by the legacy of the socialist regime on form of general distrust towards political and formal organisations (Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2013).

At the same time, the introduction of neoliberal urban and housing policies into the transitional economies has led to increased dissatisfaction with the reformed regimes. The privatisation of social housing, the gentrification processes, the deterioration of the private housing stock coupled with notorious housing shortages, etc., have widened the gap between the wealthy and the have-nots and generated frustration among ordinary citizens. With organised NGOs alienated from local issues and local communities, this leads to the decline of previous social movements while triggering new forms of small-scale grass-roots activism which are funded locally and target at local problems and needs (Jacobsson 2015a).

## STRUCTURE OF THIS VOLUME

This edited volume aims to advance our understanding of urban activism beyond the established theorisation on social movements that has been dominated by thesis of political opportunity structure based on the experience from the global north. In so doing, we collect theoretical and empirical chapters that cover a diversity of urban actions across a broad range of countries in both the east and west hemispheres as well as cities in the global north and global south. One important thread of this volume is to focus on non-institutionalised urban actions that have the potential to bring about structural transformations of the urban system. These forms of urban activism are overlooked by mainstream literature on social movements which tend to concentrate on large-scale processes led by international networks. Also included are actions in authoritarian regimes that are too sensitive to call themselves 'movement'. In fact, such actions are symbolically or materially embedded in the political process but are not associated explicitly with established political parties or state institutions.

This volume is composed of four sections. Section one is an introductory section. In chapter one, we introduce a definition of urban activism in connection to the theoretical approaches in the literature of social movement and urban social movement, in addition to an overview of the topics include in this volume. In Chapter 2, Miguel Angel Martínez López offers a classification of urban activism and movements by highlighting different empirical manifestations and basic theoretical concerns.

Section two pays attention to new and emerging forms of urban activism in the global north and south. This section presents issues that emerge (or re-emerge) at places where few may expect such issues would take root. For instance, the production and circulation of *ignorance* in an economically advanced country (Scotland and the UK) in which state intervention in housing has a significant history. Likewise, struggles for the right to produce food in Athens (Greece), not for leisure but as means of survival and autonomous self-management, represent a sharp contradiction in a mature urban setting at a critical economic stage and political turmoil. A movement for educational rights in China is also a surprising development in a country in which inequality in education is generally being tolerated as the norm although a group of parents dared to launch activists challenge against a tightly controlled authoritarian regime.

Thomas Slater in Chapter 3 explores the ways the Living Rent campaign in Scotland challenged the production and circulation of ignorance in respect of housing affordability and rent control. Slater uses the term of intentional ignorance production, or *agnotology*, to designate the knowledge people could have known or should know but in fact they do not, and traces how such ignorance is intentionally produced by the powerful institutions to retain their vested interests. In particular, the Living Rent campaign confronted the claims that rent controls threaten the quality, supply and efficiency of the housing sector by proposing alternative arguments and reasoning. The chapter demonstrates that the future achievements of housing activism in the UK depend on their ability to strive for policy changes against the backcloth of the production and intensification of ignorance by powerful institutions.

Inés Morales-Bernardos in Chapter 4 examines the urban food activism in Athens in the context of the new neoliberal wave in Europe in general and the slashing of social protection in particular. Challenging the resulting crisis of social reproduction and the rise of far-right activism, the activists organised the reproduction of food in a non-state-centric, autonomous and invisible manner in the urban peripheries. Efforts were made towards de-commodification, the direct and collective organisation of social reproduction, the caregiving and the food provisioning. These forms of activism were to meet everyday needs and thus contributed with new repertoires to the 'politics of feminine'.

Anqi Liu in Chapter 5 looks at the Equal Rights to Education Movement in China as a cultural process. Initially being involved in the movement driven by inflicted personal experience, the participants grew a sense of collective 'we' and solidarity during the movement, which contributed to the change of the goal from addressing personal grievances to striving for education justice. Meanwhile, the movement also provided a venue for the participants to acquire skills in self-organisation, deliberation, and solving internal and external disputes. The Equal Rights to Education Movement is thus considered as a cultural process in which the civic awareness, rights consciousness and autonomy of the Chinese citizens were developed.

Section three focuses on the strategies and tactics of urban activists. Particular attention is paid to activists' networks with the state and other social actors as well as with allies and members. The four chapters in this section offer accounts on how movement organisations confront the harsh social and political environment to push their advocacies forward.

The cases in Hong Kong and Italy both highlight how movements overcome their internal divisions in order to face powerful adversaries.. The cases from Indonesia and Spain compare different organisations on how they strategise their actions and goals. They illustrate how strategies and outcomes are articulated with contingent environmental factors.

Hongze Tan and Miguel Angel Martínez López in Chapter 6 engage in a sociopolitical analysis of cycling advocacy in Hong Kong. In contrast to other global cities in which public dissatisfaction with the 'public transit & private car' transport system contributed to the emergence of civic cyclists who successfully made cycling an increasingly visible issue in the public arena, cycling activists in Hong Kong have yet to struggle for the positioning of urban cycling in Hong Kong, whether it is a recreational leisure activity or an alternative mode of transportation. While cycling activists elsewhere are able to force their governments in responding to their demands, the internal divide among cycling activists in Hong Kong has largely constrained the further development of cycling activism as well as limited the outcome of their advocacy.

Sonia Roitman in Chapter 7 investigates the ways policy decentralisation and community engagement have changed the forms of urban activism in Indonesia. She compares the similarities and differences between two types of activism, one that is initiated by 'deprived' citizens who live in informal settlements demanding poverty alleviation and against social exclusion (called *Kalijawi*) and the other is organised by a diverse group of 'discontented' citizens protesting against the commodification of the city (called *Warga Berdaya*). Despite differences in their origins and strategies, they both advocate for a more just city and the realisation of an equal access to the 'right to the city'.

Robert González in Chapter 8 compares two forms of noteworthy urban movements emerged in Spain as a response to the neoliberal urban-renewal regimes: the pro-housing movement and the squatters' movement. While they both display confluences, yet they should be considered as two different movements. Not only because the former had a more formal organisation with a more integrated identity while the latter was more diversely organised with a more diffuse countercultural identity. It is also because the pro-housing movement focused on specific goals of housing policies while the squatters had broader objectives connected with radical and anti-capitalist traditions. The comparison deepens our understandings of the relations of different stages, political and economic conditions, and outcomes of urban movements.

Gianni Piazza and Federica Frazzetta in Chapter 9 explore the potential of the squatters' movement in Italy to extend their action beyond their locality and reach to the regional, national and global scales. In particular, the authors look at the ways the squatted Social Centres activists, who were labelled as violent by the media and the authorities, participated in two LULU (Locally Unwanted Land Use) movements and performed as central actors bringing generational resources, political-organisational experiences and repertoires of action to the movements. It was found that while the Social Centres activists favoured the cross-issues and cross-territorial scale shift, they still tended to maintain the unity of the movement despite the large differences with other groups.

Section four examines the relationship between urban activism and citizenship, in which the key concern lies in Lefebvre's promulgation of the right to the city. The three chapters in this section explore how the claims on the right to the city can be advocated. The case in Bangkok illustrates how a seemingly technical one-off flood management decision triggered a long-term struggle to claim back the right to the city whereas, on the contrary, the case of Korea takes a long-term perspective in inspecting how activism on the right to housing changes along the development of civil society. On the other hand, the examined case in Buenos Aires addresses the right to the city from the perspective of the negotiations between autonomous movements and mainstream politics.

Danny Marks in Chapter 10 focuses on one particular form of urban activism in the global south: the activism during a 'natural disaster' and the effects of the activism on claims to the right to the city. After the peri-urban fringes of Bangkok were heavily flooded while the inner city was protected by the national government, the floods exposed the vast inequalities that exist in the capital city of Thailand. The unequal governance of the floods led to protests among residents in the flooded areas who asserted that 'we are quality citizens of Bangkok too'. A thorough examination of such activism demonstrates the strong linkage between environmental justice and the right to the city.

Seon Young Lee in Chapter 11 offers a general review of the housing rights activism in South Korea over the last three decades. Three waves of activism were outlined. The first wave was regarded as a direct response to demolition, eviction and financial losses driven by the large redevelopment projects whereas the second wave, termed as owner-occupiers' activism, displayed more complicated conflicts among different social groups. The third wave went even further to demand an

alternative urban redevelopment system and to change the conventional concepts of housing and urban development. The trajectory of the housing rights activism suggests that civil society building over time challenged the dominant power relations in a (post-) developmental state.

Ibán Díaz-Parra in Chapter 12 critically examines the extent to which a Squatters and Tenants' Movement (MOI) organisation in Buenos Aires (Argentina) reflects the Lefebvrian concept of the right to the city. The operation of the MOI cooperatives suggests that while the activists believed in the principle of 'self-management, mutual aid, and collective property', they still had to negotiate with the state and comply with the latter's socio-spatial interventions. More importantly, the author probes the ideological dimension of the struggle for urban centrality and addresses a key political question on the possibility or impossibility of transforming socio-spatial orders.

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