

***Territory, Politics, Governance* Special Issue: Bridging across difference in contemporary (urban) social movements: territory as a catalyst**

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Version 30.06.2020

Bridging across difference in contemporary (urban) social movements: territory as a catalyst

In the past two decades, an abundant literature has explored the transformation of urban social movements and collective mobilizations in cities. Studies traced the impacts of globalisation, economic restructuring, the neoliberalisation of politics and austerity on the agenda, composition and modes of action of mobilizations (Leitner et al., 2006; Mayer, 2009; 2013). In cities of the global North, scholars have identified the emergence of new coalitions which bridge across heterogeneous groups – in terms of class, lifestyle, ethnicity or occupation – to challenge the impacts of urban development, growing socio-spatial inequalities, and the priority given to exchange value over use value in cities (Marcuse, 2009; Brenner et al., 2012). The ‘Right to the City’ Alliance in the USA is a good example (Purcell, 2013; Greenberg and Lewis, 2017). In many cities, the impacts of the housing crisis, gentrification, and large-scale development projects affect not just lower income groups, but increasingly, also, ‘middle-class’ groups, laying the ground for new cross-class urban struggles. Such developments would support the hypothesis put forward by Mayer (2013) (based on Marcuse, 2009) that new coalitions bridging the gap between the materially deprived and the culturally disenfranchised are emerging.

In parallel, beyond the fields of urban studies and social movement research, debates have grown about the implications of the increasing ethnic and cultural diversity of large metropolises for urban governance, public policies and everyday life – sometimes captured through terms such as ‘super’ or ‘hyper-diversity’. Vertovec (2007) coined the concept of super-diversity to describe the increasingly complex characteristics and legal status of new migrants in the UK. The term became used more broadly, prompting critics to question its usefulness as a poor substitute for the older notion of intersectionality (Valentine, 2008; Anthias, 2013; Vertovec, 2019). ‘Hyper-diversity’ was subsequently used to refer to an intense diversification of the population in socio-economic and ethnic terms, but also with respect to lifestyles and attitudes (Taşan-Kok et al., 2013). Scholarship from anthropology, sociology, geography and migration studies which has dealt with ‘multicultural’, ‘super’ or ‘hyper’ diverse cities has thrown light on the multiple forms of ‘everyday multiculturalism’ (Wise and Velayutham, 2009) and ‘commonplace diversity’ (Wessendorf, 2014) which are negotiated in cities. Yet less attention has been paid to how highly diverse social groups juxtaposed in a particular space might start to develop forms of collective action to address shared concerns.

This special issue contributes to these two strands of debates: the transformation and diversification of urban- or place-based social mobilisations on the one hand, and the interactions and collaborations between different groups coexisting in diverse territories on the other. Its four articles analyse how heterogeneous groups have sought to engage in new forms of solidarity, cooperation and collective mobilisation with others 'unlike them' (in socio-economic, ethnic and other terms), in response to processes considered a 'threat' to their neighbourhood, city or broader territory. Written by scholars from a range of disciplines, the papers take us to Istanbul, Madrid, Berlin and the regions surrounding Montreal and Boston. Each paper is based on in-depth empirical work characterised by long periods in the field, knowledge of the local languages, and deep concern for reflecting the voices of the diverse activists involved in the mobilisations. Three sets of questions – broadly corresponding to the 'what', 'who' and 'how' – underpin the papers:

- (i) Which kinds of urban and territorial issues, processes or threats act as catalyst for the emergence of new coalitions between highly diverse individuals, groups or movements? How does urban space or the 'territory' act as a politicizing force in the formation of such mobilizations?
- (ii) Who are the actors of those mobilizations? To what extent do they span across class, migration status, ethnicity and other types of social division, and illustrate cooperation between the 'materially deprived' and the 'culturally disenfranchised'?
- (iii) How do heterogeneous groups bridge across their differences in the mobilization process, and which challenges do they face? Which repertoires of contention and modes of action do they bring with them, how complementary or conflicting are they? By working together, do participants maintain their initial 'boundaries', identity or objectives, or do they transform in the course of cooperation?

The urban and the territory as *object* and *catalyst* of new social mobilisations

Castells (1983) was one of the first scholars to identify specifically 'urban' social movements which, in various European countries of the 1960s-70s, he observed to be related to collective consumption, the defence of particular neighbourhoods, and demands for increasing participation in local affairs. Subsequently, a wide-ranging set of social mobilisations encompassing different types of claims, participants and modes of action have been subsumed under the label 'urban social movements' (Lowe, 1986), which led to recurrent debates about their scope. First, the *nature* of urban movements, in particular the distinction between ephemeral, NIMBY-type local campaigns from more sustained mobilisations with broader demands, has repeatedly been debated. Second, some have called for increasing attention to collective mobilisations *beyond the urban core*, in suburbs, and rural settlements in the orbit of urban centres (Phelps et al., 2015), where the externalities of extended 'planetary urbanisation' (Brenner, 2012) generate ecological crises and threats to local residents' reproduction (see Van Neste). Third, some wondered whether, in highly urbanized societies, one can still talk about 'urban' movements (Saunders, 1981), claiming that these do not stand apart from other social mobilisations in cities, such as those for civil rights (Uitermark et al., 2012; Miller and Nicholls, 2013). In the context of the USA and South America, Greenberg and Lewis (2017) point to a shift in the primary location and target of popular protest 'from the workplace to the city'. They note the rise of new place-based alliances in which organizers 'find common cause across disparate groups whose similar experiences and physical proximity bridge their roles as citizen, neighbor, and

worker' (p. 5): 'the city is both the *ground* and the *goal*, creating new challenges as well as possibilities for organizing' (p. 12) (see also Tonkiss, 2005).

The papers in this special issue explore how networks of activism are built across heterogeneous social groups in response to particular issues acting as a 'structural push' (Nicholls, 2008). All deal with social mobilisations focused on rather classical urban or territorial 'threats'. These entail, first, *large-scale infrastructure projects* contested by those whose homes and livelihoods are directly affected, but also by others concerned about broader social and environmental impacts. Pelivan analyses the opposition against the Turkish government's plans to build a third airport in the periphery of Istanbul, which involved the destruction of forested land and the expropriation of farmers and residents. Van Neste compares two cases of 'place/infrastructure conflicts', focusing on movements against two pipeline projects in Quebec and against a natural gas transmission line in Massachusetts. These infrastructure projects are located in the rural-urban fringe – territories which are invisible in dominant media and political discourses. The projects are contested for their aesthetic and ecological impacts, the risks they pose to the environment and human life, the loss of land and property, and their broader impacts on climate change.

A second type of 'threat' acting as a catalyst for social mobilisations entails *development projects* in mixed-use residential districts. Pelivan unpacks the mobilisation against the planned redevelopment of the Fikirtepe neighbourhood, an informal settlement in the central Istanbul district of Kadıköy. This is one of many controversial projects which have emerged in the city over the past 15 years, as the authoritarian, neoliberal AKP government has promoted urban regeneration projects that entail large-scale demolition and displacement. More affluent neighbourhoods such as Beyoğlu also saw discontent emerge, here over increasing restrictions imposed on secular leisure activities (e.g. alcohol consumption and nightlife).

Third, social mobilisations around *housing* are addressed by two papers. Gonick focuses on the Spanish PAH (Platform of People Affected by Mortgages), which emerged in 2008 in response to the threat of foreclosures arising from the 'garbage mortgages' contracted by many low- and middle-income households. The PAH has campaigned against evictions and for national policy changes to stop the risky practices of banks. Hamann and Türkmen analyse a campaign against rising rents and the threat of displacement in a complex of 1000 social housing units in the Berlin district of Kreuzberg. The neighbourhood initiative 'Kotti & Co' was formed in 2011 by tenants (many of whom migrants from Turkey) to defend their housing rights, and has been explicitly embedded within a broader anti-racist struggle.

While concrete threats to homes, livelihoods or uses of space acted as trigger for the mobilisations studied in the four cases, they have not remained narrowly focused on those issues, nor isolated from existing or previous social movements. In Istanbul and Madrid, the mobilisations were linked with broader grievances expressed in previous social protests: the occupation of Gezi Park in 2013; the occupation of Madrid's Puerta del Sol in 2011 and the "Indignados" movement in Spain. In both cases, after the end of the occupation of central squares, activists dispersed across neighbourhoods: the 'sudden politicization of thousands of people gave rise to a rich ecology of assemblies, platforms, experimental collectives, and newly squatted social centres, (Gonick, p. 2), which focused on concrete urban issues (e.g.

the Solidarity and Defence groups in Istanbul). This process of 'localization' had also occurred in the anti-globalization movements of the late 1990s (Mayer and Boudreau, 2012).

In the four cases, thus, specific urban and territorial issues have acted as triggers for the formation of diverse alliances which target the local state, higher tiers of governments, or private sector actors such as banks and energy companies. But cities and territories are not just offering tangible topics of contention. The struggle over space, the context of place, and the politics of scale also play key roles in the process of making movements (urban or otherwise)¹. A number of scholars (Miller, 2000; Nicholls, 2007, 2008, 2009; Uitermark et al., 2012; Miller and Nicholls, 2013; Nicholls et al., 2013; Nicholls and Uitermark; 2017) have analysed cities as 'relational incubators' which facilitate the building of networks among diverse activist groups. Beyond the 'city', Halvorsen et al. (2019) have conceptualised the role of territory in 'socioterritorial movements' and identified ways in which 'territory matters' to such movements: as (central) strategy for realizing a movement's aims; to inform the identity of movements; as site of political socialization that produces new encounters and values; and when mobilized in processes of territorialization, deterritorialization, and reterritorialization to create new institutions. To various extents, the cases analysed in this Special Issue exhibit one or another of these ways in which territory matters.

New forms of collaborations and diverse alliances

In Castells' early analyses of urban social movements, he referred to mobilisations which combined labour movement organizations, political groupings and neighbourhood associations, and were 'more inclusive across lines of culture, race, gender, sexuality, and, significantly for Castells, class' (Greenberg and Lewis, 2017: p. 10). However, in Europe and North-America, Mayer (2013) noted that after the broad mobilisations of the 1960s, movements failed to bring together the culturally and politically alienated/discontented with the exploited, the dispossessed and those discriminated by or excluded from the "blessings" of Fordism. This long-standing schism now faces new chances of being bridged in joint mobilizations. Threats as the ones mentioned above have created opportunities for encounters and collaboration between groups who rarely crossed paths. In the Berlin case (Hamann and Türkmen), tenants of a working-class and precarious middle-class background, many with migrant origins, began talking to each other over the rising rents in their social housing complex. This led to the formation of a campaign bringing together men and women working in the low-wage sector, students, unemployed people, cultural economy workers, radical activists, social workers and academics. The movement faced the challenge of enormous diversity in its midst, in terms of class, national origin and values - ranging from the patriarchal, conservative religious orientations shared by many Turkish tenants, to the leftist, queer and atheist ones shared by many German residents. Yet 'what matters to the neighbours are not the differences among them, but their shared experiences of lacking political rights, low incomes, rising rents and structural displacement' (Hamann and Türkmen, p. 12).

In Spain, accounts of the emergence of the PAH stressed the role of activists already engaged in pre-existing housing struggles, in particular in Barcelona. By contrast, Gonick

¹ Social movement scholars initially paid little attention to the role of space in collective mobilisations, focusing on 'resource mobilisation' and 'political opportunity structures' (Nicholls, 2007: p. 609). Conversely, the scholarship on urban social movements has developed in relative isolation from the sociology of collective action (della Porta and Subirats, 2019).

shows that in Madrid, it was the activism of Ecuadorian migrants in the early years of the foreclosure crisis (2008-11) which propelled the PAH. Most had indigenous roots from the rural Andes and had long experienced marginalization and discrimination. A small group of Ecuadorian activists held Spain's first anti-evictions protests in 2008 and began to educate members of their community on the problem of mortgage debt. In parallel, in the periphery of Madrid, 'native' Spaniards also began to organise around mortgage defaults and evictions. These two groups met through political connections with the United Left Party and formed the PAH Madrid in 2011. Its diverse membership reflects how the effects of the economic and mortgage crisis were felt by a wide range of urban dwellers: migrants; pensioners; young families; middle-aged working- and middle-class households; unemployed; professionals from academia, law or social work; activists from the labour, feminist and housing movements or anarchist collectives. Gonick highlights and unpacks the 'role of modest transnational [migrant] flows and subaltern geographies' within the PAH, showing how Andean immigrants were at the forefront of activism and drew upon their 'activist and migratory experience to transform economic vulnerability into outrage and action' (p. 2).

In Istanbul, Pelivan analyses the composition of the networks which mushroomed in various neighbourhoods after the end of the Gezi Park occupation in 2013. These networks involved well-educated, secular individuals concerned about lifestyle, public space, heritage and the environment; small business owners and shopkeepers defending their livelihoods; low-income households threatened by urban transformation projects; and farmers resisting expropriation in the city's periphery. She shows how middle-class professionals attempted to forge bonds with people unlike them in terms of class, occupation and religious/political values. The mobilisation against the Third Airport, for example, resulted from the joint efforts of cyclists, environmental activists and professionals, subsequently joined by affected residents seeking to protect their farms. However, the encounters between those groups were temporary and fraught with difficulties.

The environmental degradation of extended urbanization poses another threat that brings actors with different orientations into joint battles against states and corporations. Van Neste analyses how pipeline projects in the hinterlands of Boston and Montreal allowed new connections between groups whose relationships had been historically marked by huge power differentials: indigenous communities; residents of different social classes – not necessarily directly affected by the proposed infrastructure; farmers; environmentalists; planners; local politicians. As with the opposition to Istanbul's airport, city-based activists have sought to forge bonds with actors in the 'periphery' directly affected by large-scale projects. Van Neste reveals the different motivations, forms of attachment and 'place subjectivities' of the various actors involved.

Bridging across diversity and difference in place-based social movements: framing, repertoires and challenges

Building on the territorial and relational conceptions of place developed by geographers, Nicholls argues that 'place' has qualities that support two complementary relational dynamics in social movement networks. First, proximity facilitates strong tie relations, through 'more opportunities for diverse organisations to connect to one another' and 'the stability needed to consolidate new relations into tightly clustered relational units'. Second, place 'harbours multiple "contact points" that spur new interactions between *diverse others*

(Amin and Thrift, 2002) ... making it possible for people to “discover” common interests and values across traditional cultural and sectoral divides’ (Nicholls, 2009: p. 84). Purcell (2013) labels the relationships built among different movements ‘networks of equivalence’: ‘broad counterhegemonic alliances in which each group acts in concert with others to achieve common projects; however, each group also remains autonomous’. This entails a continuous process of ‘balancing relations of sameness/difference and interdependence/autonomy’ (Purcell, 2013, p. 560). The mobilisations analysed in this Special Issue reveal how that process has been negotiated.

All four case-studies show that a basic ‘common ground’ in the *framing* and objectives of the mobilisation has to be established, in order to project a coherent narrative to those targeted by a movement (della Porta and Piazza, 2008). ‘Place’ plays a fundamental role here – attachment to place, place identity, or an awareness of distinct but complementary understandings of place. This shared framing is gradually constructed through exchanges between participants, which ‘allow different groups to empathize with the concerns, struggles, and suffering of other groups’ (Miller and Nicholls, 2013, p. 460). In this direction, Van Neste analyses how residents’ committees in the region between Montreal and Ottawa reached out to farmers and neighbouring First Nation Mohawks to fight against a pipeline project, leading to a transformation in the residents’ “place subjectivity”. In Berlin, Haman and Turkmen identify three elements that contributed to the formation of bridges across different groups in the Kotti & Co mobilisation: (i) inclusive protest practices; (ii) social practices of care and everyday encounter in protest settings; (iii) place-based subjectivities around a neighbourhood marked by a legacy of migration and social struggles. Erecting a wooden hut (nicknamed the *gecekodu*) in the midst of the neighbourhood was central to these three elements, giving visibility to the protest and providing an inclusive space of conviviality, encounters and debates, cared for by neighbours and activists.

Besides common frames, the case studies show that a diversity of *repertoires of contention* is inherent to highly diverse coalitions. For participants, bridging across difference means being open to different modes of action and political cultures of activism, even where this is difficult. Gonick (2016) showed how, in Madrid’s housing movement, two strands learned to collaborate despite their differences: ‘the radical autonomy of the Indignados’ and the ‘agonistic engagement of issue-based platforms’. In her contribution here, she focuses on the specific modes of action developed by Andean migrants, in particular the method of the verbal personal testimony in public assemblies. Andean activists drew upon their previous engagement in indigenous struggles in Ecuador to introduce practices that would become central to the PAH’s repertoire, alongside methods brought by housing collectives and the Indignados movement. This has not happened without tensions, especially around the question of engagement with state institutions, or gender and generational differences in action styles (e.g. the preference for direct action by young, often male activists seeking the physical thrill of ‘stopping an eviction’). Similarly, Van Neste’s study reveals a breadth of action repertoires (e.g. marches alongside proposed pipeline routes; objections to land surveys; representations in public enquiries; outreach to media; single protest events and local resolutions), which was both a strength and a source of tensions. These were manifested, for example, in subtle clashes stemming from the ‘diversity of rhythms’ in meetings between indigenous and non-indigenous activists.

The processes of constructing shared frames and complementary action repertoires are thus fraught with challenges and difficulties - in particular overcoming prejudices, ideological/political differences, and the legacy of past conflicts. This requires constant and not always successful efforts by activists and brokers to foster trust-building. In the anti-pipeline campaigns (Van Neste), the key challenge consisted in overcoming long-standing distrust between farmers and environmentalists; between environmentalists and 'directly affected homeowners'; between indigenous communities and other groups. In the Quebec case, residents admitted to struggling, initially, with understanding, and accepting, the very different relationship to place held by farmers and First Nation groups, but then coming to support Mohawk territorial claims. In Istanbul (Pelivan), divergent interests were hard to mediate. The alliance was relatively successful in the district of Beyoğlu, as the material concerns of business and shop-owners defending their livelihood converged with the socio-cultural priorities of secular middle-class groups defending their lifestyle. But in the other two cases, Pelivan shows the challenges to reconcile individual demands to protect homes, land and livelihoods with the principled opposition to large-scale projects held by middle-class activists in the name of a 'public' interest. In the Third Airport campaign, the scale of the project, its rapid operationalization and the repressive actions taken by the government additionally impeded a fragile alliance. In Berlin (Hamann and Türkmen), ironically, Turkish politics unfolding thousands of kilometres away provoked a conflict that nearly shattered the 'community of struggle' of the Kotti & Co campaign. In 2013, leftist activists were eager to issue a solidarity note in support of the Gezi Park protesters in Istanbul, while many Turkish-speaking 'Kotti' residents were supporters of the ruling AKP party suppressing those protests.

Another set of difficulties in the formation of diverse alliances is related to the classical challenge of 'place-based' local movements: the tension between remaining 'connected to "locality" whilst 'avoiding the traps of "localism"' or NIMBYism (Casaglia, 2018: p. 479). Harvey (2001) discussed this contradiction: borrowing the notion of 'militant particularism' from Williams (1989), he warned that many place-based movements are inward-looking, conservative and fragmented, thus unable to develop a broader politics of resistance, solidarity and radical change. This can be overcome by positioning localised struggles within broader agendas. As discussed above, (re)framing the issue at stake in a way that is shared by all participants is something that place-based movements made up of highly heterogeneous participants have to do from the onset. This can therefore facilitate the processes of rescaling and 'scale-jumping' (through linking with actors in other places), which many scholars have analysed as key to the long-term legitimacy and success of a movement (Nicholls, 2007, 2009; Miller, 2013; Miller and Nicholls, 2013). This means going 'beyond the local' to tackle 'the disjuncture between the geographies of lifeworlds and the geographies of systems' (Miller and Nicholls, 2013, p. 455). The movements analysed by Van Neste illustrate such balancing act: they seek to avoid the frequent 'disqualification of place activism through accusations of NIMBYism' by reframing localised opposition into broader demands regarding fossil fuel and clean energy, while also counteracting the exclusively environmental concern of activists from 'outside' by emphasizing place-specific impacts, including on Indigenous land. In the case of Madrid (Gonick), this balancing act was achieved through the Andean activists' framing of the problem of mortgage debt and evictions not as an individual one, but as rooted in structurally corrupt and fraudulent practices and processes. In Berlin (Hamann and Türkmen), the Kotti & Co movement played a catalyst role

for broader housing mobilisations that led to two city-wide referenda to block rent increases (in 2015) and expropriate large housing corporations (in 2019), forcing policy changes.

In the complex process of coalition-building, to what extent do individuals and groups working together maintain their initial 'boundaries', identity or objectives? Does mobilisation act as a 'platform for transgression' (Amin, 2002), challenging the boundaries of the original groups? Beyond social movement research, these questions have been at the core of a decade of reflections on the dynamics of 'everyday cosmopolitanism' and 'commonplace diversity' (Noble, 2009; Wessendorf, 2014). Another debate circled around new forms of hybridity potentially arising from projects supporting 'interculturalism' (Wood and Landry, 2008), a concept which has found popularity in programs promoted by the European Commission or the UNESCO (2002). Its critics point out that such an approach limits attention to issues of ethnicity - excluding other types of diversities; and often pays scant attention to the crucial intersection of 'diversity' with inequalities (Marconi and Ostanel, 2016; Briata, 2019). In that context, urban social mobilisations characterized by highly diverse participants may simply be interpreted as a positive form of 'everyday multiculturalism' (Wise and Velayutham, 2009), opening up possibilities of cultural transgression and intercultural exchanges in 'micro-public spaces of encounter' (Amin, 2002). More recently, however, Amin (2012) noted that, while people may share a neighbourhood and work for a common goal, they still 'remain strangers' without a substantial transformation of their identities. The case-studies show, indeed, that the collaboration between participants with different backgrounds does not imply the formation of a new or hybrid identity. Hamann and Türkmen capture this through the concept of "community of struggle", which, they argue, avoids undertones of a supposed 'multiculturalism that idealize notions of intercultural bonding built merely on tolerance' (p. 3). While the term "community" is a contested sociological concept often referring to an 'ethnized' group of origin, they contend that it describes 'the collective sense of organizing as it emerges in highly diverse, but long-term sustainable place-based political groups'. This understanding of community refers to sociabilities where 'the participants' ethnic, religious or political differences ... are re-negotiated and simultaneously placed into the context of the place-based struggle' (p. 3). Van Neste's and Gonick's explorations into whether social contacts and shared activities allowed different movement participants to form new political subjectivities suggest similar conclusions.

Conclusion

The impact which the social mobilisations analysed here had on the threats they were fighting has varied. Pelivan and Van Neste document failures in transforming into long-lasting coalitions and provoking changes in the formal institutional power balance, whereas Gonick as well as Hamann and Türkmen describe partial successes in influencing policies. Where inter-personal encounters across, and networks between, diverse positionalities have not led to durable alliances, those encounters have nevertheless spawned an increasing reflexivity on difference and privilege among activists, and a transformation of their 'place subjectivity'. As territories threatened by environmental ravages and predatory economic activities appear to multiply, past experiences will likely prove useful for future campaigns.

More research is needed to unpack the conditions under which territories function as catalysts for place-based movements which bring together highly heterogeneous social

actors. The authors of the four papers, who come from different disciplinary and linguistic traditions, illustrate how research is greatly enriched when traditional social movement investigation (inspired by sociology and political science) and 'urban studies' (a field increasingly influenced by geography) are combined. On that promising basis, further questions should be addressed: How do perceived 'subaltern populations' generate dissent? What are the conditions for success or failure of highly diverse place-based movements? How do forms of exclusion and discrimination get reproduced, wittingly or not, in such movements (e.g. in terms of gender, ethnicity or sexuality), and how can they be overcome?

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