

Editorial Introduction to the Topical Issue on Philosophy of the City

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Broad and vibrant philosophical interest in cities has been on a steady rise since the beginning of this century. The movement has focused on how to use and apply philosophical concepts and create methodology to the study of urban environments. This endeavour has from the start been a decisively broad approach, engaging philosophical and philosophy-minded communities around the globe and cultures. The interdisciplinary and transcultural tendency is all the more crucial as many of the problems and challenges linked to urban growth and the contemporary conditions for urban life are increasingly shared in the globalized cultures and economies of the day. The particular form of philosophy concerns the city, most often takes place in a city, and the city can thus be understood also as an event of philosophy (Kochhar-Lindgren 2020).

The increase in not only interest but in the systematic study of Philosophy of the City is also apparent through the publication of specialized edited volumes in the very recent years on the topic (Meagher et al. 2020; Nagenborg et al. 2021). The Philosophy of the City Research Group (PotC RG) is an international open network of active researchers and practitioners working at the intersection of philosophy and the city. The role of the Research Group has been to facilitate connections between philosophers and other scholars of the field and to solidify the position of the new branch of philosophical and transdisciplinary inquiry. Following its annual conferences many topical issues have been published in various international philosophy journals such as *Environmental Ethics* (Epting 2018), *Open Philosophy*

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(Lehtinen 2020), and Topoi (Simon 2021). Now, the recently inaugurated *East Asian Journal of Philosophy* joins this list with the publication of six selected research articles and essays in this Topical Issue.

Philosophy of the city tends to address “the city” in general, and not any specific city. If it is concerned with a specific city, then only as a case study for a broader question posed about the urban form of life. This is what distinguishes it from empirical studies of cities as they are done in anthropology, sociology, history and urban studies – even though the boundaries to these disciplines are obviously porous since philosophers of the city seek to address currently relevant questions and are thereby empirically engaged in their philosophical inquiry.

However, since this is the *East Asian Journal of Philosophy* Topical Issue, it is tempting to wonder about the dynamics of the specifically Asian urban context. After all, according to the United Nations Habitat report (United Nations 2020), 96% of urban growth in the next ten years will take place in Asian and African cities (United Nations 2020, p. xvi). This rapid growth has contributed to the characteristic and often misunderstood experiential “messiness” of the layout and organization of Asian cities (Hou and Chalana 2016).

It is this perceived messiness that sometimes leads to the Othering of “the” Asian city, and to Orientalizing notions of a special essence, a distinguishing characteristic that makes it completely different from, and incomparable with “the” European city. Fantasies of irrational spaces and minds more concerned with the spiritual than with the material have fueled colonialist exploitation (Lobo 2021). Just as gesturing towards “non-Western” cultures, even as positive examples worth emulating, leads to crass simplifications, insisting on the Otherness of ‘the’ Asian city obstructs more nuanced analyses of the historical and cultural circumstances that have led to this perceived “mess.”

One of the factors for the explosive growth of Asian cities has surely been the outsourcing of industries and work to Asia since the second half of the 20th century (Cabannes et al. 2018). What seems like messiness to the European gaze, particularly in the East Asian context, might be the spatial logic shaped by the figuration of the Chinese (and in Japan Kanji) writing system. By contrast to the linearity of European scripts, Chinese and Japanese characters are multi-directional and modular, that is, built up of multiple independent components. This spatial logic, instilled from a very young age, translates into the spatial logic of cities that grow multi-directionally and modularly (Shelton 2012; Li 2014), creating the impression of a mess where there is in fact merely a spatial order alternative to linearity.

Each of the six articles of the Topical Issue presents a relevant contemporary approach to philosophy of the city. The array of themes range from justice issues to digitalization and smart city development and the gendered use of urban space

to the implications of the Covid-19 pandemic. The concepts presented and used represent current themes in Philosophy of the City and also areas of interest for further transcultural study of the links between philosophical approaches and urban topics. The styles and objectives of the contributions vary and one can find more traditional philosophical research articles joined by more poetic style. This also reflects the broad range of the contemporary Philosophy of the City.

The Topical Issue is opened by Shane Epting's article "People Love Cities – but do Cities Love them Back?" in which Epting muses on the multitude of ways in which affection towards one's own city is expressed and celebrated. The reciprocity of this affection, "urban love" is further examined by delving deep into the practices, relationships, and exchanges that are typical to urban everyday life. According to Epting, in art, entertainment, as well as popular culture cities are featured prominently as phenomena that arouse human curiosity and intellectual as well as creative interest. Epting seeks to explain the further resonance of these declarations of love to the practices that urban life constitutes. Epting's contribution is an apt reminder of an idea that could be highlighted as a central theme of this Topical Issue: that cities exist in order to serve their residents and any discussion aiming to facilitate this process is leading us forward in understanding the urban lifeform.

Sage Cammers-Goodwin's article which presents the readers with a case study of a sensor embedded 3D printed pedestrian bridge, traces how digitalization is changing the nature and uses of contemporary cities. Cammers-Goodwin's article "From Digitalization to Capturing 'Cityness': Is it Possible to Make the Essence of Good Cities Measurable with Sensors and Algorithms?" presents "cityness" as a value concept for further study that combines quantitative and qualitative approaches to the quality of urban life. The bridge installed in De Wallen, Amsterdam becomes emblematic of multiple strains of development that are taking place in cities at the moment: increased datafication of the use of the city, infrastructural innovation, as well as intentional increase in light transport modalities in order to reach climate targets through sustainability transformations. Operationalizing cityness with the help of digital tools such as GIS or IoT systems thus complements other, more qualitative approaches to studying the livability of built urban environments in clarifying why certain characteristics of cities clearly have tangible benefits for the users of the city and how to further foster the development of these types of characteristics.

In "Bridging Temporal and Transport Justice: A Case for Considerations of Time Use in Urban Justice" Maria Nordström draws attention to temporal inequality as a concern for urban justice. The scarcity of time has commonly been assumed to be convertible to financial resources potentially lost during transportation times.

Also accessibility has been standardly regarded as the main metric for transport justice. Nordström argues for focusing specifically on the justice of travel time, and especially in connection to gender issues in travel patterns. An over proportionate amount of time spent in transport due to carework (e.g. bringing children to daycare) is shouldered by women, and they tend to make multiple trips with complex routes using public transport in order to accomplish as many tasks as possible; women therefore tend to be considerably time-poorer than men. Nordström concludes by comparing the advantages and disadvantages of using time as a metric for urban transport justice, and concludes with a recommendation to take time more seriously in urban planning agendas.

The next article “How Has the Pandemic Situation Changed Our Perception of Space? The Phenomenology of Space in the Light of COVID-19 Restrictions” is written by Aneta Kohoutová. She focuses on the repercussions of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic to the perception of urban space. Even though social interactions, including interactions in public spaces like parks, were reduced to a minimum, the pandemic offered the possibility for a fresh experience of urban spatiality. Kohoutová draws on the work of Henri Lefebvre, Michel de Certeau and Maurice Merleau-Ponty to analyze what she calls the “material layer” of space, namely the configuration of objects in public spaces that afford cultural and social activities. Precisely the abrupt pause to all public social and cultural activities during the pandemic provided an opportunity for the study and appreciation of spatial materiality.

Duane Allyson G. Pancho brings up an important topic in the article “Confronting the Spatiality of Women’s Fear, and Why It Matters.” The gendered nature of the use of urban public space becomes especially clear through the fear and threatening atmosphere and gestures that women experience in the urban space. The interpretation of these fears and their embodied and spatially manifested reasons is made by Pancho in relation to the writings of Gill Valentine, Leslie Kern, Iris Marion Young and Simone de Beauvoir. The mechanisms of objectification and suppression end up limiting the space that women literally take in cities. Despite many advances in equality during the past decades the different forms this spatial oppression gets is still very much a lived reality for the majority of women in contemporary cities. Pancho’s contribution gives voice to the everyday lives and experiences of women and urges philosophy of the city to take women into consideration as inhabitants with full rights to the city.

The group of architecture scholars consisting of Tordis Berstrand, Amir Djalali, Yiping Dong, Jiawen Han, Glen Wash Ivanovic, Teresa Hoskyns, Siti Balkish Roslan, and Claudia Westermann have contributed to the Topical Issue with a joint essay “A Conversation on a Paradise on Earth in Eight Frames.” The essay focuses on the

city of Suzhou, a dynamic, modern Chinese city that has maintained its aesthetic traditions of producing exquisite (silk) garments and gardens. It draws on ancient Chinese traditions of gardening, poetry and painting in order to analyze the experience of a contemporary Chinese city. The text is not classically argumentative: the authors do not make their case by means of premises and conclusions. Rather, it is dialogically essayistic in style. The form matches the content of a dialogue between the modern city and its ancient traditions, as well as with the Western gaze. The piece was presented first at the 24 hours of Philosophy of the City online conference in May 2021.

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