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Swiss Association for Geography (ASG)

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23.1
Caring for Place in Times of Uncertainty. Residential Use for Halle-Neustadt’s district center?

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With crises such as the current global pandemic, short distances to supply facilities, but also the quality of one’s neighborhood become more important and even existential for vulnerable groups. Residential use was a central feature in socialist city centers (Dellenbaugh-Losse, 2020, p. 104). Thus, the high-rises Hochhausscheiben A-E in the district center of East German Halle-Neustadt were not only intended to provide a vertical frame to the otherwise rather flat functional buildings and facilities, but also to create a concentration by combining living and working (Bach, 1993:29-30).

The buildings, planned and designed as dormitories for i.a. single workers of the local chemical industries and students, ‘lost their function’ after privatization during the 1990s and four out of five buildings remained empty for more than 20 years by 2020.

Drawing on the example of the Hochhausscheiben A-E, this paper follows unrealized potentialities and traces controversies focusing on renewed residential use as a possible future for the high-rises. It shows how questions of care became predominant in urban planning in Halle (Saale) after 1990 and how the challenging questions of “resposibility in what spaces, places, times and for which people?” (Metzger, 2014, p. 1007) have been enacted.

The relevance of the concept of ‘care’ in relation to issues of site and place has long been debated in human geography, urging for geographers and planners to think about their responsibilities and the consequences of their actions (Lawson, 2007). The article shows for Halle-Neustadt that (not) caring for the non-human is inseparable form the (not) caring for the human while the questions of “how to care?” is not easily answerable in times of uncertainty.
23.2
Abstract for the 18th Swiss Geoscience Meeting – Panel: urban planning and policy-making with/without/against national states

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Policies in and of the urban everyday

In this paper, we examine housing policies situated in and directed towards the urban everyday. We understand them as an urban form of policy building and contrast them to state form of policy making. This requires a fundamental shift in understandings of the agents, processes and institutional processes through which policy is made, even if the substantive objectives of these two policy types might be the same. Rather than focusing on governments and formal institutions we turn to activists (housing cooperative movements, squatters and insurgent planners) in European and US cities. What these activists do is an attempt to re-shape urban space and processes. These practices, we contend, share the generic features of a policy: intervention in socio-spatial practices, collective actions containing explicit goals and the means to achieve them. Through a close reading of urban housing policies we will delineate a particularly urban way of making policies. First, state and governmental actors and institutions (on different levels) do not lie at the center of these policy actions. Rather urban policy making often takes place in an “institutional void” (Hajer 2003) where the polity is emergent rather than fixed in advance. Second, the knowledge produced and used in these policies and the rules through which knowledge turns into action is grounded in the urban everyday and not based on scientific and/or political expertise. This means that knowledge and rules are developed in a circuit of formal and informal negotiations encompassing different actors and actions rather than implemented as a result of expert/political recommendations. Third, the interventions of urban policies target processes and outcomes of urbanization and not (parts of the) society as such. Urban policies, conceived here are socio-spatial and have a -radical – democratic intent to make urbanization self-governable. We conclude by discussing the scope and range of this understanding of urban policy in both practical and analytical terms.
The vicious circle of familism in housing during Covid-19 in Greece.

The COVID-19 crisis already marked a pre- and post-era for economy and society worldwide. The pandemic and the related state actions impacted all aspects of personal and work life through the measures implemented nationally and internationally. Home was in the centre of official and informal campaigns that recommended strongly or ordered people to ‘stay home’ in order to stay safe. However, housing distress and overcrowding was already present in Greece which suffered more than a decade of severe financial crisis. As a new crisis is piling up to the already precarious financial reality, housing situation will deteriorate and people will rely once again to the only persistent welfare agent, the family. However, the family support comes “with strings attached” and power relations that impact the wellbeing of all the members involved. This dependence reproduces also conservative notions of family and relations as older generations are usually “in charge” of an ‘assemblage of support’. For how long can and should the family act as a shock-absorber that solidifies intergenerational hierarchies and dependencies?
23.4
Accessibility, affordability, adequacy: A co-operative response to address the chronic urban emergency of housing

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The Coronavirus pandemic is laying bare one of the most prevalent challenges within the urban sphere: the lack of access to affordable and adequate housing. This scarcity is naturally exposed through instantaneous disasters – such as the current COVID-19 crisis, natural disasters, or military conflicts, etc. However, the crisis also magnifies the ‘housing question’ – to put it in Engels’ words – in much more general terms, as it reveals many challenges of an underlying, long-lasting and chronic emergency of housing provision all around the globe. Being an essential pillar of our current economic system, many housing policies are intentionally designed to support the paradigm of perpetual economic growth and its speculative markets by mainly determining housing as a commodity. The proposed paper will address the chronic state of emergency produced by this system by outlining a fundamental shift in how housing – and land – could be valued, owned and managed in more inclusive, democratic and sustainable ways. Deriving from recently conducted research on collective forms of housing, the paper will focus on the potentials (and challenges) of the co-operative model to provide long-term accessibility, affordability and adequacy for housing production. While the co-operative model provides a global aspiration of building an economy on democratic and speculative-free enterprises, it is, simultaneously, a deeply contextual undertaking that has to be locally adapted through bottom-up processes in respective communities on the one hand, and ultimately supported at a policy level on and the other hand. The co-operative model therefore not only allows for envisioning alternative urban policies to alleviate social, economic and health-related crises on a general level, but also provides strategies for how – in this example through housing – local communities can become both more resilient to imminent emergencies, and be more directly included in how to address long-term challenges.
23.5
Abstract for the submission to

The panel “At home: the domestic city in times of crisis” at the 18th Swiss Geoscience Meeting
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Geographies of Age – Older people’s access to housing and to urban life

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Not only the home itself, but also access to urban life plays a central role if ‘aging in place’ is to succeed, according to WHO policies (WHO 2007). In recent studies we show that the residential area is of great importance as the centre of life in old age and that informal encounters in various public and semi-public spaces from the entrance area to the local pub play a very important role for mental and physical well-being in late life (Christensen and Glaser, 2019; Althaus and Birrer, 2019). Taken on their own, the many spontaneous encounters in the immediate living environment and in the neighbourhood may seem insignificant, but it is precisely in the sum total that they unfold their potential. Accordingly, the possibility of participating in social urban life should be given high priority and guaranteed by low-threshold offers and barrier-free access in financial, physical and social terms. If spaces of encounter, but also social measures to promote neighborhood networking are missing, loneliness can potentially become the downside of self-determined living. Due to the lockdown and quarantine conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic older people’s access to urban life has been severely challenged, in some cases leading to precarious circumstances. The situation of many elderly people has worsened, and their social isolation has increased. We look into the impact of the crisis on the effectively lived everyday experiences in late life and discuss the necessary action strategies to improve the situation.
23.6
Relational cities as city-state formations: challenges for policy & planning

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This paper explores urban governance against the background of small-but-global urbanisation processes, an economic transformation that has gained increasing importance recently. In this context, cities and city states have emerged that are of relatively limited size but became hot spots of the world economy, and of big politics. They function as financial market-places (some also as tax havens), political brokers, logistics hubs, or corporate headquarters and centres of the services industries, resulting from a dedicated path of internationalisation. Following Olds & Yeung, the ability of these places and their actors to extract "streams of profit from extraterritorial terrain" is essential for the successful practice of relationality (Olds & Yeung, 2004, 492).

The paper draws upon empirical evidence obtained from case studies in Geneva, Switzerland, Luxembourg City, Luxembourg, and Singapore (Hesse & Wong 2020). Despite significant differences in their historical trajectories, all three have some important features in common. Particularly, they share certain political-economic attitudes to governance: they became successful by combining a sort of extraverted economic orientation with practices of introverted urban governance. The paper will discuss some of the key characteristics and outcomes of these governance practices. Firstly, relational cities make particular use of the inflow of capital and workforce that are necessarily attracted from 'out there', while the governing capacity is mainly provided by and for the idiosyncratic milieu of decision makers. Secondly, they practice an unusual combination of state power and local politics which seems important to understand not only their economic success, but also the supporting policy frameworks. We interpret this model as a 'city-state formation', which appears as a variant of the developmental state (Hwang 2016).

Thirdly, and this will be the main focus of the paper, this governance practice brings specific challenges to urban development and policy. These challenges emerge from the mismatch between economic power, small size and partly limited governance capacity. While the provision of office space and related infrastructure for international services corporations was the main determination of political institutions (which may also explain the economic success of the three places), land use conflicts and particularly housing issues were not equally taken into account, at least in two of the three cases (Geneva and Luxembourg). This has caused major shortcomings in the urban settings of the two cases, where rocketing house prices render these places either increasingly inattractive for international staff, or create ever rising demand for cross-border commuting. The related consequence for policy and planning would be to pursue a more balanced development trajectory, both in sectoral and in spatial terms. However, this seems difficult to implement under the conditions of the cities' economic policy focus and the primacy of the urban centres. Therefore, these problems pose a big challenge to the sustainability of the relational cities' development model.

REFERENCES
23.7

Housing in the Margins: Negotiating Urban Formalities in Berlin’s Allotment Gardens

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Critical shortages of affordable housing force people into housing precarity across the globe. Drawing from my forthcoming book, Housing in the Margins (Hilbrandt 2020), this presentation explores unruly housing practices and their regulation in the context of the German housing crisis. Through ethnographic research on the ways in which Berliners dwell in allotment gardens despite a law that prohibits housing at these sites, it illustrates how these gardeners negotiate the possibilities of residency with the local bureaucracy, gardening associations and amongst themselves. I pursue this project with empirical and theoretical objectives: studying empirically how people negotiate ways of staying put in allotment gardens and how boundaries around their dwelling practices are drawn, I aim at understanding the production and governance of housing precarity in a relatively rich European city. In theorizing these processes of governance, I seek to unveil the possibilities of conceptualizing informal housing in the context of bureaucracies that are commonly understood to regulate thoroughly, coherently, and according to fixed rules. This analysis highlights the contested terrain of enacting regulations and the exclusions that these negotiations entail. Building on postcolonial theory, anthropology of the state and critical legal geography, the presentation draws attention to the power of negotiations in the governance of urban space.
“What do you mean by planning?” When urban planning in the refugee camp is rendered invisible

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How does a refugee camp urbanize? Up to now, camps have been considered as either urban assemblages made by dwellers’ improvised tactics or spaces governed by disjointed urban planning policies. I demonstrate that there is another side to the urbanism of the refugee camp. A form of coherent institutional urban planning exists as well. It takes the shape of an improvised dispositif. One of its main effects is to render the very process of urban planning invisible. I investigate this type of urbanism on the basis of fieldwork conducted in the Al-Hussein Palestinian refugee camp located within the city of Amman in Jordan. This improvised dispositif of urban planning is an ensemble made of the interventions of several levels of government, i.e. the municipality of Amman (local level), the Jordanian state (national level) and a UN agency (international level). This urbanism is the result of a balancing act that ensures the temporary character of the camp, while allowing the implementation of a form of urban development that leads toward a material homogenization between the camp and the surrounding urban space. It does this by rendering its own processes invisible and being officially referred to as mere ‘improvement’. In this paper, I show the way the municipality of Amman, the Jordanian State and a UN agency have improvised away from more conventional urban planning.
23.9
Promoting cycling with/without/against the state:
A strategic-relational perspective on innovation in urban transport planning and policymaking

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The proposed article presents an analysis of an empirical case study of the ongoing process of re-establishing utility cycling as a mainstream transport mode within the London transport system against the backdrop of local, national and supranational policymaking and planning.

Informed by the literatures on socio-technical innovation and transition studies (Geels, 2010), and cultural political economy (Sum & Jessop, 2013) the case study disentangles

• the different actors involved in the governance of transport policy and planning across multiple scales and levels, and
• their varying ability to exercise agency in the planning and policy-making processes that govern transport at the local level in London with/without/against the state, as well as dynamics and processes at scales below and beyond the state.

In doing so, the article illustrates an example of how analysis of urban planning and policymaking can go beyond reified notions of ‘city’ and ‘state’ to draw out the multiplicities that constitute ‘the city’, ‘the state’, and their interwoven nature. The article does this by taking in the perspective of various actors and institutions from government, professional practice, civil society and social movements (via empirical data from 40 semi-structured interviews and the study of documents) to reconstruct how their actions and interactions at certain moments in time contrast, connect, combine and/or cancel out to produce what may at a distance come to be perceived as ‘the city’ variously acting with/without/against ‘the state’.

This type of granular study does much to draw out spatio-temporal particularities of urban planning and policymaking, emphasising the dynamic and ambivalent nature of these processes. Despite this, it offers also a promising starting point for cross-case comparative study of urban policymaking and planning vis-à-vis the state within and across cities, as the paper argues.

REFERENCES
23.10
Homes of refugees: a human-landscape relationship

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Every year floods, earthquakes, climate conditions, and wars force millions of people to leave their homes. During the 2000s, migrations have been increasing year by year worldwide. Today, the field of emergency management is a crucial aspect of the professional and ethical scenario of architects and designers. The emergency nature of these situations has a significant impact on the individual’s social and psychological attitudes, bringing forth irreversible life consequences and diseases. Migration is often related to the loss of a home, and the objects and territories migrants are familiar with. This psychological stress invades all the aspects of their lives: family, friends, memories. After migration, the social environment and urban context they are immersed in is determinant for the development of a new life.

Starting from the underlying meaning of the term «home» intended as «someone’s or something’s place of origin, or the place where a person feels they belong» (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020) we can understand the intrinsic connection of the word «home» with a personal feeling and sense of belonging. The research explores the role and significance of the concept of home in the context of migrations by analysing emergency scenarios and situations in different countries. Through interviews and data collection, a series of elements are catalogued as a result of the relationship human-home. This investigation aims to highlight the role of the natural landscape and urban context as a significant part of the integration process of migrants.
COVID-19 Response in Self-Built Urban Communities: Lessons from the Global South

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The origins of informal settlements across the globe can be traced to patterns of exclusion that force households into inadequate dwellings, usually on account of socio-economic needs. Initially conceived as a temporary state of exception, low-income informal dwelling, or slum dwelling, has become a permanent feature in the urban scene. Research shows that these patterns of exclusion become exacerbated in times of emergency or crisis, with profound socio-spatial impacts that (re)shape our city. Too frequently, international recommendations to face such challenges are disconnected with realities on the ground, and Government agencies, already struggling to provide basic services, face an added strain to generate responses in an adequate and timely manner. Their failure to do so, in turn, exacerbates existing urban inequality. The impact of COVID-19 on informal settlements provides a clear example. Lack of basic sanitation services, high-density living quarters, and economic insecurity make informal settlements especially vulnerable to COVID-19, turning some into hotspots. International guidelines for mitigating the spread of the virus include several actions, such as frequent handwashing and physical distancing, that are often not possible in these contexts. Through a trans-disciplinary approach, our work focuses on the politics and governance of the COVID-19 pandemic in informal settlements. It explores the gaps between top-down guidelines – from international organizations, National Governments, and Academia, and grassroots organizing in informal settlements. Through three case studies - namely Buenos Aires (Argentina), Freetown (Sierra Leone), and Ahmedabad (India) - we explore the tensions in the urban interfaces of the COVID-19 pandemic and the responses it engenders.
23.12
‘God Knows His Children’: How Ghanaian Migrants in Italy are Sensing COVID-19, Mediating Rituals and Sociospatial Urban Practices

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Abstract: This paper attempts to broadly evaluate the threats entangled with migrancy, and pointedly interrogate how Ghanaian migrants in Italy are making sense of COVID-19 associated uncertainties by dwelling on configurations of social mediation through re-activated faith-based practices aided by social media. Centrally, this essay intends to intersect some recent scholarly reflections about the politics and precarity of COVID-19 that draw on migrant ‘hotspots’ located along southern European border-scapes with theoretical insights by urbanists. At its core, this study dwells on lived experiences beyond ‘hotspots.’ Unpacked in two parts, the first thread reflections by Bilgin Ayata and Kenny Cupers, and adapts the analytical frame offered by AbdouMaliq Simone and Michele Lancione (i.e., ‘danger’ and ‘emergency’) to examine how layered and uneven degrees of danger (immanent and potential threats naturally associated with migrancy, and presently evoked by COVID-19) is being mediated while urban mobility is restricted by quarantine regulations in Italian cities. The second part adds empirical evidence to the preceding scholarly debates outlined, in order to make a twofold claim: (a) that while the danger of uncertain conditions faced in migrancy is not fully known, it is often rationally estimated by migrants; (b) that dangers associated with COVID-19 and its accompanying state of ‘emergency’ imposed by European governments (focus on Italy) may have restricted physical bodily movement, yet have engendered media spaces that extend the spatial ‘prison’ into which migrants (focus on Ghanaians in Italy) remain quarantined by reactivating (spi)ritual beliefs to mediate social relations and order the chaos surrounding them.

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Keywords: COVID-19, Ghanaian migrants, Italy, danger, emergency, social mediation, ritual practices.