2. Understanding conflicts in urban future-making

Arenas, negotiation, and affect

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Introduction

Research in the field of planning and urban studies has a long history of addressing conflicts. This literature has documented how conflicts are constitutive for urban societies. Cities have always served as key sites not only for conflicts but also for developing democratic institutions and formats of political deliberation (Harvey, 2012; Dikeç, 2017; Sennett, 2017). After all, the very notion of politics contains within itself the root word of *polis*. Against this backdrop, contemporary European planning practice is understood to have evolved from rational approaches centred around comprehensive planning to communicative and collaborative approaches. These are characterized by a range of participatory mechanisms that allow conflicts to be resolved by involving stakeholders and citizens (Gualini, 2015). However, the limits of institutionalized participation have also been widely recognized in the literature (Holden, 2011). Authors have highlighted the explosion of dissensus and discontent as moments of political resurgence against techno-managerial decision-making arrangements (Swyngedouw, 2018).

Most recently, agonistic approaches to planning theory have proposed a more central role for conflict as a productive force in liberal democracies (Pløger, 2017). While this has been a rich source of inspiration, at least in academic debates, important shortcomings to this argument remain: One key issue is that empirical evidence at the level of social practices remains thin, particularly in understanding the productive dimension of conflicts (Gualini, 2015). Furthermore, in the face of heightened conflicts around planning projects and interventions in urban space, recent work has questioned the

dualistic understanding of collaborative versus agonistic approaches (Kühn, 2021; Hesse and Kühn, 2023). Markus Hesse and Manfred Kühn point out how these conflicts have also challenged the notion of a linear evolution of planning towards a progressive democratization. They note – for the German context – that there is currently a regressive tendency to gradually limit participation in order to accelerate planning processes (Hesse and Kühn, 2023).

Indeed, the setting in which planners and other built environment professionals operate has seemingly become more complex: Cities serve as key sites and objects of transformation in the face of climate change and its related social, political, and economic crises. This is particularly the case for transformative measures aimed at urban spaces and settlement patterns. The result is that, in the European context, conflicts around the transformation of the built environment, including energy systems, transport infrastructure, and housing stock, have acquired enormous weight and momentum in public debates. This is connected to new constellations of actors and constantly shifting lines of conflict in debates which are often highly emotionalized and connected to larger questions of societal development and the distribution of wealth and privilege. Institutionalized planning, with its formats of deliberation and participation, is not able to establish consensus here, and conflicts are often resolved via jurisdictional ruling.

Seen more broadly, conflicts around planning, as well as transformative measures aimed at the built environment in general, can be seen as a challenge to the current functioning of Western liberal democracies (Metzger et al., 2015). Whether and how such conflicts point to a more fundamental polarization of European societies in terms of socio-economic stratification is subject to ongoing debate (Mau, Lux, and Westheuser, 2024). What is evident from the European context, however, is that heightened levels of inequality as a result of several decades of neoliberal dismantling of welfare state policies are a key factor in explaining present political dynamics. Fears connected to the loss of social status and security are very present up to the higher middle classes (Nachwey, 2018). A decisive factor in driving inequality over the past decades has been the uneven allocation of land, structured through uneven property relations. As a large part of global economic wealth is constituted by land and real estate, rising prices have had a growing influence on levels of economic inequality since the 2008–2009 economic crisis (Piketty, 2020; Savage, 2021).

In light of these developments, we argue that some of the fundamental assumptions about the role of planning in Western democracies are currently being challenged, or, to put it more broadly, normative expectations towards

disciplines dealing with the built environment are being questioned. These expectations refer to aims and strategies, institutional and regulatory frameworks, and mechanisms of decision-making. Thus, we posit that the field of action concerning the built environment, together with established professional routines and knowledge bases, is now under drastic reconfiguration, as Monika Grubbauer, Katharina Manderscheid, and Joachim Thiel argue in this volume. The central question is whether disciplines such as architecture, engineering, and planning are (still) able to contribute to solving complex problems in the interest of the public good rather than benefiting privileged groups. Professionals find themselves involved in complicated and highly emotionalized debates around planning projects and material interventions, with heightened demands for communicating and interacting with diverse publics (Iveson, 2007). Whether reflexive and responsible professional agency is possible in such contexts is an open question.

We propose to understand conflicts related to planning projects and interventions in the built environment as conflicts about 'urban future-making'. In essence, our conception of urban future-making is one of purposeful decisions and actions that impact the urban built environment in order to achieve transformative change. We suggest that this conceptual lens opens up new perspectives along three avenues: Theoretically, it prompts focusing and reflecting on the particular qualities of the built environment in shaping decisions related to the future. Empirically, it allows the actions of built environment professionals to be situated and examined within the broader field of future-making practices. Finally, in terms of practical and political relevance, it provides the opportunity to discuss the role of these professionals as agents in the larger context of key conflicts in contemporary European societies. For the purpose of this volume, we define professionals from the disciplines of architecture, engineering, and planning broadly as 'built environment professionals', i.e. agents dealing with both material and strategic aspects of urban change.

In this chapter, we first explore the kinds of conflict that can emerge within and in relation to the modern city. As a starting point for developing our argument, we draw from the recent sociological analysis of Steffen Mau, Thomas Lux, and Linus Westheuser (2024) on how conflicts in contemporary German society are enacted and play out in several distinct arenas. In each of these discursive arenas, a different dimension of inequality is negotiated. The first step in our argument is to materialize, and thus to explore, the urban referents of these key arenas of conflict. We then move on to centre the figure of the built

environment professional, viewed more precisely as 'an agent of conflict'. In the third section, we theorize three 'modes of conflict', namely, those between differing urban imaginaries, differing political frames of reference, and differing temporalities. The fourth section, finally, considers the role of affect, highlighting the way that the built environment as a constitutive element of everyday life is a crucial source of emotions in contemporary societal conflicts.

Arenas of conflict and the built environment

The arenas of conflict identified by Mau, Lux, and Westheuser (2024) address different fundamental aspects of inequality. In their typology, four arenas are proposed: The first entails conflicts around the distribution of wealth and welfare; the second deals with conflicts around migration and the challenges of integration; the third addresses questions of identity, gender, and changing social norms; and the fourth is constituted by conflicts around the costs of climate change and the strategies to counter it. The role of the built environment, or spatial relations more generally, is not explicitly addressed in their macrosociological analysis. However, we can show how the built environment enters the conflicts of each arena in distinct ways: through property relations, through practices of use, through residential patterns and transport infrastructures, and through direct costs of construction and maintenance.

In the first arena, centred on conflicts around the distribution of wealth and welfare, issues such as the uneven allocation of urban land as well as the reproduction of unequal property relations play a key role (Piketty, 2020; Savage, 2021). Although subject to policy and planning decisions, physical elements such as land, urban spaces, infrastructures, and housing stock are scarce and finite entities. As such, they are the subject of diverging claims regarding development modalities, and of frictions over the inequitable distribution of wealth and material benefits. Thus, when the transformation of the built environment is at stake, tensions arise because of conflicting values associated with land use as well as diverging societal positions regarding property (Godschalk, 2004; Haila, 2016). On a broader level, practices of land speculation, corporate-led housing, and other market-driven modes of urban development are based on criteria of space allocation that stand in contrast with alternative modalities of land use (Brenner and Theodore, 2013; Theodore, 2020). Such modalities can, for instance, be based on the collective reappropriation of land, spaces, and ur-

ban infrastructures for commoning purposes and collective uses (Eizenberg, 2012; Bresnihan and Byrne, 2015).

In both the second and third arenas, conflicts are not centred explicitly on the built environment as a target. Rather, spatial structures fundamentally shape these conflicts around migration and cultural identity in more implicit but no less profound ways. For instance, conflicts about migration, which are negotiated in the second arena, often become visible and tangible through uses of urban space. This leads to heated conflicts about cultural differences in the use of public space, or unequal rights in accessing housing, services, and citizenship. Conflicts around identity and social norms, which constitute the third arena, are also fundamentally shaped by the built environment through socio-spatial residential patterns that either allow or impede the mixing of heterogeneous social groups, or that privilege certain lifestyles and exclude others. Urban development dynamics inevitably touch upon the sphere of the everyday, including the behaviours, lifestyles, and associated value systems of different individuals and social groups, which can generate conflicts (Acuto, 2014; Castán Broto and Westman, 2020). Such practices of 'spatial othering' crystallize in precise urban geographies and material realities (Aylett, 2010; Labbaf and Norouzi, 2023). They manifest in long-lasting patterns of social differentiation across urban space, which have a symbolic dimension in specific urban forms and aesthetic registers (Neckel, 2018).

This links to the fourth arena, conflicts around climate politics, which are visibly centred on questions of the built environment. Challenges related to climate action are of central importance in the field of urban future-making, since all transformative strategies aiming for reductions in carbon emissions involve more or less far-reaching changes to built space and infrastructural systems (Long and Rice, 2018). This leads to fierce conflicts about the priorities, ethics, costs, and responsibilities, as well as time frames, for implementation. In particular, problems of greenhouse gas emissions, resource depletion, and environmental degradation require combining immediate action with long-term systemic changes to urban development. Choices and actions taken in the present will largely determine what kind of urban spaces humans will inhabit in the future. A lot of hope is connected to experimentation, described by Harriet Bulkeley as a 'paradigm-shifting break with established norms and practices' (2023: 1). Yet, a great deal of local interventions struggle to overcome a short-sighted approach. So far, local greening solutions and mobility experiments risk remaining merely project-based, contested, or linked to a particular political cycle, thus failing to engender a more structural and long-term impact

on the built environment, infrastructure systems, and behavioural patterns in cities (Torrens and von Wirth 2021; Kohler and Manderscheid, 2024; see also contributions by Günay and Manganelli in this volume).

We suggest that the conflicts around socio-economic inequality in all four arenas are fuelled, and potentially emotionalized, by the particular quality of the built environment as a resource of everyday life. A key insight of Mau, Lux, and Westheuser (2024) that lends itself to our analysis is that there are specific moments in public debates – called 'trigger points', or *Triggerpunkte* in German – which unlock strong emotions and lead to affective modes of discourse. A key moment that triggers emotion, as those authors show, is when transformative demands impose themselves onto everyday life. We argue that such dynamics are crucially bound up with the built environment as a constitutive element of everyday life that provides for basic needs, structures social practices, and forms cultural identity. Material changes to housing stock, the implementation of new technical infrastructures, and the redesign of streets and public spaces all influence daily life in multiple ways: They require the adaptation of household routines and logistics, they impact mobility patterns and housing allocation, and they transform the identification of inhabitants with particular buildings, places, and neighbourhoods. This threatens to disrupt the normality of lived routines and the autonomy of decision-making around questions of everyday life. Moreover, such transformations are also associated with gentrification and the threat of gradual expulsion from an urban neighbourhood. Thus, material changes are not only experienced on a cognitive level but are felt physically and emotionally.

Built environment professionals as agents in societal conflict

Professionals in built environment disciplines are involved in mediating and solving conflicts in the four different arenas on various levels. They have a variety of roles: Built environment professionals are engaged in planning and engineering work, either on the side of private firms or as part of public administration, and often need to implement strategies defined at the political level in ever more complex urban government arrangements (Castán Broto, 2020; McGuirk and Dowling, 2020). Architects, engineers, and planners are also sought as experts for assessing the costs and effects of specific interventions and as consultants for governments but also NGOs and social movements (da Schio and van Heur, 2022). As members of professional bodies, they influ-

ence policy-making through norms and standards, through lobbying and networking, and through contributions to public debates and media. In all of these roles, professionals not only respond to their clients' wishes and fulfil their designated tasks as public employees; they also have professional ethics and act as members of professional communities (Marcuse, 1976). In light of this multiplicity of roles, professionals act as agents in conflicts on at least three levels, as we show in the following, with reference to insights from the contributions to this volume.

The first level of action relates to the mobilization of scientific knowledge and concerns strategies and tools that allow dealing with the 'wicked problems' of the present (Rittel and Webber, 1973; Zellner and Campbell, 2015; Tutton, 2017). In particular, decisions about allocating land and material resources in order to implement physical interventions require built environment professionals to adopt calibrated strategies and act responsibly (Marcuse, 1976; Healey, 2015). In many circumstances, projects promoted under the banner of sustainable urban development and circularity end up reproducing suboptimal outcomes in terms of their long-term social and ecological effects. Examples are urban regeneration or redevelopment projects turning into 'ecological enclaves' or net-zero energy districts that give rise to unfair outcomes such as energy price increases, which severely affect low-income communities (Bulkeley and Castán Broto, 2014). In order to avoid or remedy these unwanted effects, architects, engineers, and planners are urged to weigh environmental benefits against social costs of transformative interventions (Pineda-Pinto et al., 2021).

In their contribution to this volume, Per Carlborg and Sophie-Marie Ertelt show the complexity of this task. Through the example of Positive Energy Districts, they elucidate some of the equity and justice questions accompanying a new generation of low-carbon urban solutions. In particular, they highlight how, when it comes to embedding restorative justice principles into material interventions, built environment professionals are urged to deal with key lines of conflicts and establish restorative measures to address injustices. Another layer of complexity is added by new digital technologies and the scaling of AI systems in cities. The contribution by Fabian Namberger digs deeply into the challenges faced by architects, engineers, and planners operating in a 'real-time city' (Kitchin 2014). The author shows how these professionals must attend to the uncertainties associated with the introduction of AI-driven devices into the urban fabric, weighing the potentials of new technologies against possible risks.

A second level of action for professionals relates to communication with the public and an ever-widening range of stakeholders and interest groups, both in public consultation and informal dialogue. Professionals are tasked with moderating public participation around planning and engineering projects, responding to political priorities of local governments, and engaging with residents in direct dialogue, all at the same time. In all of these activities, and because of their multiple roles and levels of engagement, professionals have to bridge and translate between scientific and lay knowledge (da Schio and van Heur, 2022). This is not new, and as one learns from urban social movements in the 1960s, this has been the daily bread of architects, planners, and (to a lesser degree) engineers. However, in the contemporary situation, and in light of the key arenas of conflict highlighted above, this translation task has become more challenging. Increasingly, built environment professionals also need to deal with arenas that connect the urban to wider governance scales, where climate adaptation or mitigation measures are discussed or publicly negotiated (Rossi and Vanolo, 2012; Tozer and Klenk, 2018).

As the contribution of Emilie D'Amico in this volume shows, the new requirements of deep urban decarbonization are negotiated in political platforms and arenas that go beyond the operational sphere of built environment professionals. Yet, these platforms and networks are relevant in influencing discourses also at the urban level. Consequently, architects, engineers, and planners are asked to rethink their roles and tasks in light of this wider governance landscape. A complementary insight is provided by Alessandro Arlati, showing how in times of climate change the future of urban greening is discussed and debated by parliamentary politicians at the national level. Likewise, Hannes Langguth's contribution sheds light on the complex and conflictual dynamics that arise when local planners are faced with the task of coordinating their visions for the future city with international and state actors.

Third, professionals engage in urban conflict as members of professional communities. Typically, built environment professionals are part of occupational groups with certain ethics and world-views; these are shaped by professional socialization during education and practice and translates into modalities of performing duties and taking responsibility for action (Grubbauer and Steets, 2014; Dimitrova et al., 2021). A strong argument is made by Mau, Lux, and Westheuser (2024) as well as other scholars (see e.g. Meloni et al., 2019) that the varied attitudes and preferences in controversial debates, particularly about climate issues, do not primarily reflect socio-economic status but rather

the world-views and mindsets of different occupational groups. Indeed, it is quite visible that due to social and political demands, as well as ethical requirements for transformative change, built environment disciplines are now increasingly urged to rethink traditional duties and value systems.

Several chapters of this volume illustrate the struggles of individuals and communities of practitioners when engaging with ethical issues. Through an analysis of greening interventions in Barcelona, Alessandra Manganelli reveals how built environment professionals need to pay heed to ethical aspects related to embedding different dimensions of justice into experimental strategies. Robbie Gilmore illustrates how greening interventions serve as a means to advance, or hinder, particular urban futures. As such, professionals act as mediators of different voices and imaginaries on what urban futures should look like, possibly favouring a plurality and diversity of perspectives. Or to use the words of Malene Freudendal-Pedersen and Sven Kesselring in this volume: While 'friction' constitutes a highly needed dynamic within the production of the future city, urban future-makers having to deal with that friction often face difficulties resolving it.

Three modes of negotiating conflict

As argued above, the urban fabric can be seen as both the source and the receptacle of conflicts concerning urban futures. Amidst the aforementioned discussions stands the figure of the built environment professional: a human being, tasked with the complex assignment to mediate within arenas of conflict. The contributions to this volume highlight how these conflicts play out and are negotiated in multiple ways and forms. In this section, we show that such conflicts can be understood in terms of three fundamental challenges and suggest that built environment professionals face a triple task of reconciliation, namely: between differing urban imaginaries; between differing political frames of reference; and between differing temporal horizons. Although every conflict around future-making is spatio-temporally unique, the elements that effectively clash lend themselves to theoretical categorization.

The first mode of conflict is between differing urban imaginaries. We define urban imaginaries as visions of desired urban futures, held by alliances of built environment professionals – including market-based entrepreneurs – concertedly working to materialize them (Healey, 2004; Savini, 2019). Urban imaginaries might thus be thought of as collective consciousnesses of what

'the good life' in the metropolis of tomorrow ought to entail. The two predominant urban imaginaries currently floating through the urban public sphere are the 'the smart city', focused on a digitally governed urban life, and the 'green city', leaning towards natural solutions for the city in times of climate change (Zeiderman and Dawson, 2022). Yet more urban imaginaries can be pointed to: The '15-minute city' (Khavarian-Garmsir et al., 2023), the 'fossil-free city' (Chatterton, 2018), and the 'compact city' (Burton, 2000) all constitute shared visions for the city of tomorrow. Such concerted visions for the future tend to emerge in the minds of individual professional actors, while subsequently becoming collective signifiers that are discursively distributed and institutionally performed. Nick Dunn (2018), for instance, distilled a taxonomy of more than 1,000 future cities, as conceived by various architects and planners since the dawn of the 20th century. Out of those individual imaginations, Dunn abstracted over 25 collectively held urban imaginaries, such as 'garden cities', 'floating cities', 'moving cities', 'layered cities', and so on.

Friction exists between differing imaginations of the future city. The urban imaginary of the smart city, an imaginary based on techno-optimistic mindsets, has been particularly opposed by collective visions of catastrophe-struck cities (Rothe, 2020; Cassegård and Thörn, 2022). Increasingly present in the urban public sphere are collective visions of 'the drowning city' (Goh, 2019), 'the empty city' (Pohl, 2022), and 'the radiant city' (Dobraszczyk, 2010). Actors adhering to catastrophic collective visions do, of course, not conceive of these visions as desirable futures. Rather, dystopic imaginaries are deployed as potential urban realities that can nevertheless still be prevented: not through 'smart' technological interventionism but rather through practices of 'urban repair' (Balaban, 2022) and 'urban tinkering' (Tate, 2012). Thus, friction exists not only between the contrasting ways the future city is imagined but also between the kinds of actions derived from those imaginations.

Arlati's contribution to this volume highlights the clash between imaginaries particularly well. Arlati discusses the dividing lines between parliamentary discourses on urban greening in Italy and Germany; his chapter shows how differing political ideologies come with particular procedural stances (on techno-optimism versus incremental change, for instance) and future imaginations ('smart', 'compact') of urban greening. Tom Hawxwell's chapter on the shifting forms of Hamburg's transport and mobility politics constitutes another example of how collective visions of the future city emerge, coexist, and clash. Tracing the historical shifts from the late 1970s to the present day, Hawxwell illustrates how the hegemony of the automobile in Hamburg's planning politics has

been both strengthened and disrupted through the clash between right-wing and left-wing political forces as well as through the influence of civil society. In both of these studies, urban imaginaries emerge as 'clusters of meaning' in which ideologies, values, world-views, and imaginations of the future city merge into coherent wholes with which, and through which, urban futures are fabricated.

Secondly, in their day-to-day practice, architects, engineers, and planners deal with different political frames of reference, both horizontally (different administrative domains) and vertically (different political levels). National systems of infrastructure provision tie in with regional and local infrastructure systems; this has led to competition between municipalities and regions as local governments tap into federal and state subsidies for large infrastructural projects and compete for private sector investment (Pagano, 1996; Koppenjan and Enserink, 2009). In turn, the local government has, at least in the German context, had a strong position through its authority over legally binding land-use plans and building permissions. Currently, however, different levels of government as well as different fractions of the state bureaucracy are increasingly in disagreement – and engaged in legal disputes – about the distribution of costs and responsibilities for the transformation of energy, transport, and building sectors (Coutard and Rutherford, 2010). Also, claims to basic resources, most importantly water, are increasingly disputed as municipalities try to secure their hold on the groundwater needed for local consumption. Frames of reference thus diverge, depending on the administrative territory and the electorate.

The picture becomes more complicated when we contrast 'institutionalized politics', where the above disputes largely play out, with the notion of 'the political'. The latter refers to citizens' power struggles for just urban futures 'outside and beyond' the regulated echelons of local, regional, and federal politics. This point has repeatedly been made by scholars with 'post-foundational' leanings (Mouffe, 2013; Rancière, 2010; Landau et al., 2021), who argue that each institutionalized (urban) political order can at any moment be disrupted by those actors that refuse to be positioned within the system's coordinates. As Jacques Rancière (2010) famously argued, political orders come with what he calls a 'partition of the sensible'. Groups of urbanites may refuse to be positioned within a system's partition of the 'sensible' in order to dispute not only a certain state of affairs but also the very frame of reference within which these issues are to be tackled. That is: not in the closed corridors of the town hall and its planning department, but on the streets and in the urban public sphere. As

agents of conflict, built environment professionals are increasingly affected by bottom-up political forces: They may engage in such initiatives as individual citizens but may also question the established political order from within.

Langguth's chapter concerning the conflicts that arise during the realization of Chinese gigafactories in Eastern Germany demonstrates how political framings intersect horizontally and vertically. On the horizontal plane, the chapter offers a rich description of the differences between German and Chinese planning cultures: differences which may give rise to conflictual expectations, false and broken promises, and mutual ignorance. On the vertical plane, Langguth encapsulates the many levels of decision-making power – state, regional, and local levels – that both merge and clash during Sino-German practices of future-making. Furthermore, the clash between institutionalized politics and bottom-up practices gains central significance in the chapters by Gilmore, Manganelli, and Melis Günay. Both Gilmore and Manganelli look at the politics of urban greening (in Belfast and Barcelona, respectively), while Günay investigates traffic experiments in the German city of Giessen. What unites these three chapters is the continued conflict between top-down levels of organized urban politics and bottom-up worlds of political activism. Günay's notion of 'doing conflict' is indicative of these chapters: When political frames of reference intersect, conflict is not something the involved parties seek to move away from but is a continual and even welcomed everyday praxis.

Third, architects, engineers, and planners need to make compromises to navigate contradictory temporal horizons, based on which projects and interventions in the built environment are argued for or against. Iddo Tavory and Nina Eliasoph (2013), in their sociology of future anticipations, distinguish between three time frames within which actors may interpret their actions: 'protentions', 'trajectories', and 'landscapes'. Protentions are moment-by-moment anticipations. Acting in a protentional way means having a 'feel' for the immediate future, constantly calibrating the next moment. Trajectories, then, go beyond the immediate future and thus constitute larger stretches of time within which actions may unfold. A fine example of a trajectory is the idea of the 'project'. When 'projecting', actors teleologically pinpoint goals and ends that determine action in the present moment. Landscapes, finally, are temporal schemes that actors experience as inevitable, such as the sequence of grades in education or the placement of public holidays throughout the year. These kinds of temporal landscapes are taken for granted so deeply that they become experienced as universal and unchangeable (which doesn't mean, of

course, that they are not perpetually produced and performed through human agency).

Discussions about urban interventions in the new climatic regime (Latour, 2018) constitute a prominent arena where built environment professionals have to juggle differing temporal horizons. As can be glimpsed through the temporal notion of a 'window of opportunity', architects, engineers, and planners will all agree that taking measures against the urban effects of the climate crisis must not be postponed. Measures targeting the built environment that are not taken now will only be increasingly difficult and costly in the future. Invoking Tavory and Eliasoph's (2013) scheme, 'protentions' for the immediate future thus constitute a guiding force when making decisions about urban climate futures. Yet, longer stretches of time are equally present. For example, despite the difficulty of assessing the ecological footprint of urban projects, built environment professionals are increasingly attracted to ideas of 'inter- and intragenerational justice' in order to deliver their work to the city's next generations in a fair and sustainable way (Manderscheid, 2012; Skillington, 2019; Vanderbeck and Worth, 2015). Lastly, while dealing with the conflicting temporalities of protentions versus (long-term) trajectories, professionals are faced with institutionalized temporal landscapes too. Often nestled within urban political administrations, the usual policy cycles of four to five years both structure and limit the scope of future-making actions that can be undertaken.

Lucas Pohl's chapter in this volume, on sea level rise and contested urban future-making in Bangkok, is indicative in this regard. As local future-makers and residents battle against the sinking of the city, protentions, trajectories, and landscapes intersect. Rising sea levels, first, can be seen as a 'temporal landscape': a temporal scheme that is experienced, by now, as inevitable. Trajectories, then, can be found in the projects set up by built environment professionals to alter, mitigate, or adapt to this temporal arrow. Pohl explains, with vivid empirical detail, how measures to mitigate sea level rise have tended to safeguard the city's central commercial areas while sacrificing its hinterlands. This means, finally, that those dwelling in 'sacrifice zones' are faced with a 'protentional' disruption of their way of life as the rising water gradually gnaws on their homes and means of subsistence; day-to-day tweaking of and engagements with a crumbling life-world become the order of the day. Pohl ultimately concludes that sea level rise exacerbates already existing inequalities while it also contains within itself the seeds of new forms of life. In other words: a perceived unfolding of time constitutes a politically potent event.

Urban future-making and affect

At first sight, professional practices of urban future-making seem guided by rationality. This, however, must not veil the multiple affective discourses that professionals are faced with (Gunder and Hillier, 2007). The built environment forms the locus in which people build their lives, care for significant others, move to desired destinations, and aspire for certain futures to materialize. The urban fabric is a site of everyday life and an object of emotional attachment. That interventions within a drastically changing built environment trigger emotional responses in those inhabiting this change is no surprise. How does affect figure in the world of urban future-making? We approach this question by assessing how affect cuts through the three types of negotiations outlined above. The key argument is this: Urban future-making also constitutes an 'affective praxis' unlocking reactive emotions, held individually or socially, among the urbanites affected by it.

Concerning the contrasting urban imaginaries, first, emotionalized debates are particularly triggered when one constellation of actors perceives itself to be disproportionally burdened vis-à-vis another constellation that keeps its own habits, ethics, and privileges unchanged. Conflicts about the financing and localization of climate change measures are fuelled by this kind of affect. The urban sphere includes discourses of anger and blame towards those who are held responsible for urban problems (waste, decay, pollution, and so on), as well as discourses of hope among those striving for a fair distribution of the costs and locations of adaptation and mitigation projects (Tozer, 2019). Regarding the second challenge, of bridging different frames of reference, affective responsiveness emerges when political decisions imposed by upper levels of government are interpreted as not respecting local needs and contexts, or vice versa, when local resistance is blocking measures and projects (Gualini, 2015). In a similar but reversed vein, one might think of groups of urbanites blocking interventions that are de facto and de jure accepted by different levels of government and their constituencies. For instance, the need for renewable energy is largely accepted by society, but the actual installation of wind turbines in a specific location is often heavily contested by local inhabitants (Eichenauer, 2023). Finally, when looking at diverging temporal horizons, debates become particularly affective when one considers the 'too-fast-too-slow continuum'. Fast change may be said to threaten people's established routines, while slow change can be perceived as undermining the living conditions of future generations (Rosa, 2003).

Urban interventions carry a potent reactivity, and affective discourses circulate throughout arenas of conflict. We suggest that one explanation for this can be found in the 'political aesthetics' of urban materiality (Harvey and Knox, 2015; Dawney, 2021). Urban materiality – the city's streets, squares, buildings, dwellings, ornaments, and supporting infrastructures – comprises not only the technical texture through which urban life unfolds but is also, and more importantly, a symbolic carrier of imagined forms of life. As Leila Dawney (2021: 408) has argued, energy, water, and transportation projects 'border, territorialize and produce imagined communities.' The nuclear power plant, for example, may be said to constitute the archetypical symbol of post-war modern progress whilst the wind turbine can be seen as the semiotic carrier of future life in the new climatic regime. Urban materiality – still the daily concern of built environment professionals – thus 'represents' the kind of spatio-temporal plot line upon which a certain community finds itself and through which pasts-presents-futures are materially narrated (Blokker et al., 2021). Intervening in a community's material substratum means intervening in the community's collective consciousness, and deciding to preserve material objects means shaping a community's collective identity (Tunbridge and Ashworth, 1996). Günay's chapter shows with great clarity how traffic experiments may lead to emotions running high among activists, civil society, and local politicians.

Kregg Hetherington (2016: 40) once argued that 'the tense of infrastructure is therefore the future perfect, an anticipatory state around which different subjects gather their promises and aspirations.' Thus, urban materialities hold a certain promise – they point beyond themselves, namely into the future – and built environment professionals can be seen as makers of those promises (Tutton, 2017; Zeiderman and Dawson, 2022). However, one may argue that within many urban landscapes, we currently find a plethora of what we may call 'material memories of lost futures' (Fisher, 2014). At the height of the post-war Fordist regime, symbols such as the automobile with a combustion engine, rectangular urban arteries, and phallic high-rise towers promised the advent of modernist urban forms – they told, in Hetherington's 'future perfect tense', how urban modernity 'will have happened'. Depending on the point of view from which these legacies of modernism are perceived, their material traces can trigger feelings of grief, melancholia, nostalgia, and anger, but also feelings of optimism, hope, bliss, and relief. Similarly, new kinds of meaningful matter in the context of the contemporary city trigger affective responses on a continuum from ecstasy to despair: the material symbols of energy futures, food futures, mobility futures, housing futures, and so on. In all, the city con-

stitutes a palimpsest of futures, around which different affective publics crystalize. This point becomes particularly clear in D'Amico's analysis in this volume of the urban climate futures that were staged by mayors of cities worldwide at COP26 in Glasgow. D'Amico detects at COP26 'an emotionally charged rhetoric of emergency, hope, and heroism, [fostering] a discursive momentum' during political negotiations concerning low-carbon urban futures.

This brings us to a final assertion, made at the intersection of professional praxis, urban matter, and affect. We argue that a new line of distinction emerges. This distinction is of a particularly temporal nature and can be linked to Mau, Lux, and Westheuser's (2024) 'today' versus 'tomorrow' as the fourth arena of conflict around climate politics. Future-oriented urban interventions are distributed unequally throughout the urban fabric. Certain areas can be perceived as already being in the future (focused on tomorrow), whereas others remain stuck in the present (focused on today). Indeed, while certain city regions cluster around narratives of greenness, cleanliness, sustainability, and so on, others remain stuck in a non-green, non-clean, non-sustainable era. From the work of sociologist Barbara Adam (1995) to that of anthropologist Johannes Fabian (1983), several scholars have shown how forms of 'othering' emerge between different temporalities: 'our time' (heading towards the future) versus 'their time' (stuck in the present and the past). Doreen Massey (2005) gave a particularly spatial outlook to this argument, criticizing the modernist idea that certain places can be 'ahead of time' compared to others. These affectivities undeniably shape interventions in specific areas, often legitimated by the assumption that inhabitants of those areas are 'out of time', unable to progress into the future (Chamberlain, 2022). Vice versa, a much-evolving dynamic is that urban communities might feel forgotten, neglected, or overlooked when water, energy or transport interventions are woven into the urban environment elsewhere. At present, built environment professionals increasingly have to navigate such discursive terrains, where legitimation for interventions is subject to affectivities and exceeds rationalities of scientific knowledge.

Conclusion

The urban built environment, we have shown throughout this chapter, constitutes the source and the receptacle of conflicts over urban futures. The city is an object of conflict and the place par excellence where conflict is fought

out. We opened our discussion by noting Mau, Lux, and Westheuser's (2024) seminal discussion of 'trigger points' leading to explicit conflict between societal groups in different discursive arenas. Whilst these trigger points concern discussions about wealth, migration, identity, and climate, we argued that each of them can be applied to urban spaces and urban materiality as well. Heated debates around property relations, migrant infrastructures, relations of belonging, and the justness of climate adaptation and mitigation measures, respectively, prove this point. Amidst these complex dossiers stands the built environment professional – in our conceptualization: the 'urban future-maker' – as an agent of conflict. Beyond the mere act of 'making' the built environment, these professionals are increasingly faced with the task of mobilizing scientific knowledge, communicating with ever-wider ranges of societal stakeholders, and navigating different value-driven groups. Lastly, we theorized three 'modes of conflict', namely between differing imaginaries, differing political frames of references, and differing temporalities; all of these are intrinsically ignited by affect and emotion among both the makers and the prospective inhabitants of urban futures, as we showed in the prior section.

Architects, engineers, and planners are variously addressed as 'heroes of our time' (Matzig, 2021) or as 'secular prophets' (Adam and Groves, 2007) capable of solving complex issues on a hitherto unimaginable scale through new forms of geoengineering. At the same time, they are also deemed responsible for failing to deliver planning projects on time or guarantee the functionality of infrastructures. It is obvious that interventions in the built environment move us; they *trigger* something. One important insight emerging from situating built environment professionals in the wider field of future-making is that their role in existing debates is not merely a matter of Habermasian rationalistic deliberation. The emotional world of the soul – anger, hope, grief – equally pervades the arenas in which conflicts over urban futures are fought out. Thus, professionals such as architects, engineers, and planners intervene not only in mere matter but also in *meaningful* matter and, by extension, in urbanites' collective consciousness concerning the kind of life they are living.

Finally, in a context of systemic and intersecting inequalities, the most profound political conflicts at present are essentially conflicts about the distribution of costs and burdens in adapting social systems to a new economic reality. The building sector has faced trouble from rising construction costs and prices for various resources and raw materials; this may indicate that the 'imperial mode of living' (Brand and Wissen 2021), which relies on unlimited appropriation of resources and constant externalization of social and ecological

costs, has reached its limits. As questions of justice now need to be recalibrated, to consider global contexts as well as future generations, it has clearly become more challenging – but also more important – to calculate, legitimate, and implement transformative action with regard to the built environment (Zellner and Campbell, 2015; Basta, 2016). Professionals in the disciplines of architecture, engineering, and planning emerge as key actors in the conflicts they face. On the one hand, they have the critical task to refrain from fuelling (conscious or unconscious) practices of 'othering' or affirming affective responses of shaming and blaming, in which some groups have the privilege of being on the 'right' temporal plot line. On the other hand, they carry a responsibility to translate technical and scientific knowledge into meaningful scenarios that allow futures to be imagined collectively. This volume aspires to explore the conflictual dynamics that emerge when taking up such responsibility.

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