Untamed Urbanisms

One of the major challenges of urban development has been reconciling the way cities develop with the mounting evidence of resource depletion and the negative environmental impacts of predominantly urban-based modes of production and consumption. The book aims to re-politicize the relationship between urban development, sustainability and justice, and to explore the tensions emerging under real circumstances, as well as their potential for transformative change.

For some, cities are the root of all that is unsustainable, while for others cities provide unique opportunities for sustainability-oriented innovations that address equity and ecological challenges. This book is rooted in the latter category, but recognizes that if cities continue to evolve along current trajectories they will be where the large bulk of the most unsustainable and inequitable human activities are concentrated. Drawing on a range of case studies from both the global South and global North, this book is unique in its aim to develop an integrated socio-ecological perspective on the challenge of sustainable urban development.

Through the interdisciplinary and original research of a new generation of urban researchers across the global South and global North, this book addresses old debates in new ways and raises new questions about sustainable urban development that will be of interest to researchers, city managers and a wide range of policy actors in government, civil society and the private sector.

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Untamed Urbanisms

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In March 2013, 22 social scientists from all over the world and from a wide range of academic disciplines found themselves in Quito, Ecuador, at the invitation of the International Social Science Council (ISSC). They were brought together by a shared desire to push forward the limits of knowledge on cities and their future. And push forward they did, as I hope you will find as you read this book that reflects some of the thinking started at the seminar.

This gathering of researchers was the first seminar in the ISSC’s World Social Science Fellows Programme. With this programme, generously supported by the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida), we hope to help build a network of future social science leaders who will work together to help address some of the most pressing global challenges of our time, with particular relevance for developing countries. Sustainable urbanization is one such challenge, calling on the joint insights and contributions of scholars from different disciplines and different parts of the world.

Working with us on the first seminar in the programme, and critical to its results, were the former International Human Dimensions Programme on Global Environmental Change (IHDP, now part of Future Earth) and the Comparative Research Programme on Poverty (CROP), as well as our generous host, the Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar, Quito, Ecuador, Area de Estudios Sociales y Globales.

The greatest factor in making the seminar a success, however, was the 19 competitively selected early career scientists and three senior scientists who came committed to developing new, multidimensional perspectives on transitions to a more sustainable future in urban areas. With a lot of hard work, a necessary sense of humour and the use of a surprising number of sticky notes, they developed a compelling sense of urbanities as spaces shaped by practices, experiences and imaginaries that are much richer and more complex than mainstream models of urban development have it. It is this ‘untamed urbanism’ that the Fellows and senior scientists explore in this book. As they say, ‘what matters is how we comprehend and work with both taming and untaming urban dynamics’.

And that it matters is clear. The world is faced with a number of converging crises (of climate, inequality, food, water, finance and social discontent) at a time when the majority of its population lives in cities. The challenge is on to find
effective, socially just and sustainable solutions. In seeking ‘productive disruptions’ in our understanding of the issues at hand, the authors of this book boldly confront that challenge.

Alberto Martinelli
ISSC President
Acknowledgements

This book has been produced as a truly collective endeavour and a great debt is owed to the team who made this possible. Sincere thanks are due to the International Social Science Council (ISSC), which supported and financed both the initial seminar from which the book took off in Quito in March 2013, a writing workshop held in Montreal a few months after and the process that followed. Within the ISSC we are particularly grateful to its executive director Heide Hackmann, and to Laura van Veenendaal, Mathieu Denis and Charles Ebikeme, for backing the whole process and for their dedication and support in bringing together a widely geographically distributed team of urban researchers from all over the world. To Sharon Verwoerd goes one of our biggest acknowledgments for her incredible endurance in pulling us together throughout the different stages of the book production and for her highly professional editing management. To Susan Curran goes our gratitude for the quality of her language editing and for her flexibility and responsiveness to endless adjustments to many of the chapters in this book. We are also grateful to Robert Langham from Routledge for his flexibility in all the contractual aspects underpinning the production of this book and for giving this project the chance to reach urban researchers and practitioners from all over the world.

A very warm thanks is reserved to the four coordinators – Ferne Edwards, John Harris, Philip Lawton and Dominik Reusser – who generously supported the early stages of drafting of each part of the book and who actively contributed to shaping its overall structure and narrative. Philip Lawton deserves a special mention for his significant contribution in the coordination and editing of Part III and for his sharp and thorough feedback to earlier versions of the introduction to this book. Finally, for their invaluable contributions and untamed thinking we would like to thank all the authors: Mauricio Dominguez Aguilar, Ferne Edwards, John Harris, Maarten A. Hajer, Gareth Haysom, Manase Kudzai Chiweshe, Taibat Lawanson, Philip Lawton, Moises Lino e Silva, Elvira Mateos, Chipo Plaxedes Mubaya , Jenia Mukherjee, Patience Mutopo, Mzime Ndebele-Murisa, Franklin Obeng-Odoom, Jorge Pacheco Castro, Jose Palma, Dominik Reusser, Natalie Rosales, Diego Rybski, Diana Sanchez Betancourt, Irene Sotiropoulou, Jorge Sequera, Anna-Lena Winz and Mintesnot Woldeamanuel.
Last but not least, our gratitude goes to our colleagues and students in Bogota, London and Stellenbosch for listening to our rants about untaming and untamed urbanisms over the last 18 months and to our partners and children for enduring the many weekends, holiday periods and long hours dedicated to this book, but above all for making life fun and instilling the feeling that untaming projects might be worthwhile, in any form they take.

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Introduction

Why Untamed Urbanisms?

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Cities can be understood as the product of multiple taming practices and strategies, ranging from the techno-infrastructural domestication of nature to secure key resources, to the sociopolitical disciplining of the relational and organizational structures and behaviours that shape everyday life in cities. But cities are also profoundly untameable because they are a complex and often unintelligible web of institutional and everyday practices that produce them in fundamentally political ways, whether intentionally or unintentionally.

The notion of ‘untamed urbanisms’ is a subtle theme that pervades many recent contributions to urban theory. It resonates with Harvey’s (2012) reading of the untameability of capitalist urbanization; Brenner, Marcuse and Mayer’s (2011) call to recentre critical urban theory on the production of cities for people, not for profit; Brenner’s most recent Lefebvrian reading of the uneven implosions and explosions of planetary urbanization (2013); Edensor and Jayne’s invitation to challenge the universal application of theories of Western cities to a world of cities (2012); Robinson’s call to examine the heterogeneity of practices that make cities and urban life (2006); McFarlane’s exploration of urban learning as a political and practical, yet neglected, domain and how different environments facilitate or inhibit learning (2011); and Tonkiss, who argues that the social life of cities is shaped by ‘actors [who] engage creatively in the logistics and politics of urban life in ways that go beyond the masterplan, the design commission and the competition entry, and which confuse any easy distinction between the expert and the ordinary, the technical and the amateur, the formal and the informal’ (2013: 10).

Building upon the aforementioned work and other recent trends in the urban studies literature (Bayat 2000; Inam 2014; McFarlane 2011; Myers 2011; Pieterse and Simone 2013; Pieterse 2008; Roy 2009; Watson 2009; Whittaker-Ferreira 2007) and some contributions to the Routledge Handbook on Cities in the Global South (Parnell and Oldfield 2014), this book invites readers to explore how ordinary citizens and planners seek to change the city, or perhaps more precisely the urban spaces in which they exist, live and work.

Following the acknowledgement that we now live in a fast-urbanizing world, cities and urban life have also become the central locus of developmental planning narratives and interventions, where undesirable trajectories of socio-economic and environmental change are to be addressed, though often under new guises that
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perpetuate and reproduce what is deemed as ‘undesirable’ in the first place. Yet, against all odds, cities continue to be untamed. That is, they are produced in ways that challenge the ‘taming practices’ associated most clearly with the dynamics of capitalist consumption and the domesticating practices of mainstream urban planning and governance, which so often prioritize the ongoing viability of capitalist property markets. Our intention throughout this book is not limited to an examination of what makes that possible, but rather to explore the untamed and the act of untaming as forms of producing the urban that are rarely acknowledged or recognized as productive pathways to rethink what makes and could make cities conduits of social and environmental justice.

Born out of the encounter of a group of urban researchers from many different parts of the world in Quito, Ecuador, in 2013, this book offers a heuristic platform to interrogate how ordinary citizens and planners make sense of the city, by either confronting or engaging critically with hegemonic narratives of what a city or being an urbanite should be. Our central contention is that, all too often, such hegemonic narratives and practices embody taming processes that reduce complexity, homogenize and exclude in the name of progress and over-riding imperatives, while quietening other ways of producing and learning the city. Our focus is therefore on a diversity of urban practices, experiences and imaginaries that either thrive within the interstices of domesticated and controlled urban development processes or are hardly tractable, and difficult to manage, assimilate and mould.

In this enterprise, the contributors to this book are not bounded geographically, thematically, theoretically or by discipline, but rather by a shared intellectual discomfort with contemporary grand narratives and normative prescriptions that often obscure, marginalize or foreclose other possibilities to experience and imagine ways of being in the city and of producing it. The authors are also united by a common approach to their interrogation of the city, from a perspective that is conversational and also explicit about our personal positionality. Together, the different chapters take the reader through an exploratory journey to discover, explain and evaluate critically the potential of taming and untaming accounts of contemporary urbanisms, what and who drives them, and why and with what consequences. Our ultimate hope is that this book contributes to the generation of productive disruptions in the way we approach and interrogate urban change, away from a concern to control and subordinate the ‘other’, whether such other is nature, certain kinds of spaces, women, the urban poor, or those who culturally and behaviourally are deemed not to fit into tamed or disciplined ways of being urban.

Throughout the following two sections, we offer a number of further reflections on what this enterprise involves and why it is needed. Adopting a systems theory perspective, we start by examining the long-term trajectories that help us to contextualize the advent of the ‘Urban Antropocene’ – literally the urbanized ‘age of human-induced evolutionary change’ – as the context in which different and often competing contentions coexist about the role of cities in shaping wider socio-technical transitions and supporting different speculations on what type of urban change is required. We then return to the notion of ‘untamed urbanisms’
to discuss what the act of untaming might tender as a heuristic device to provoke new reflections on the way we read and seek to change current and future urban trajectories, and finally offer an overview of the structure and content of the book.

**Re-ordering the urban Anthropocene?**

There is growing acceptance across a wide range of publics that ‘modern society’ is currently facing historically unprecedented challenges at precisely the moment when the majority of the world’s population is living in cities. The advent of an urbanized ‘Anthropocene’ comes with an all-pervasive sense that global change pressures such as climate change, resource depletion, ecosystem breakdown and persistent poverty threaten the conditions of existence of human life as we know it (Crutzen 2002). The onset of the global economic crisis in 2007/08 has resulted in a realization that we may have come to the end of the post-Second World War long-term development cycle (Gore 2010), and there is little understanding of what will come next. The result is an interregnum that Edgar Morin has called the ‘polycrisis’ (Morin 1999: 73), in which the task of ‘re-ordering’ a world full of things such as trees, pipes, water, and of course cities and urban lifestyles, appears to be the central subject of new unfolding narratives. It then becomes useful to borrow from systems theory to understand the historical cycles of order and crisis produced through contemporary contentions of how such things should hang together (Pieterse, 2008; Hodson and Marvin 2010a).

Following Gore and Perez (Gore 2010; Perez 2013; Perez 2002; Perez 2007), the economic history of the industrial era can be understood as a succession of five overlapping socio-technical revolutions, with each lasting around 40 to 60 years (Swilling 2013). Each wave has followed a recognizable trajectory of inception, innovation, crisis and then mature deployment of specific transformative clusters of coupled socio-technical innovations in the major infrastructure sectors, in particular energy, mobility and communications. Given that cities are the spatial manifestation of the constellations of power expressed in particular socio-technical systems in specific geographical contexts, it follows that these waves of socio-economic transformation have corresponded to the radical restructuring of the space-economy of each nation’s hierarchy of cities and towns (Swilling and Annecke 2012; see also Chapter 5 in this volume). This certainly applies to the current urban polycrisis (Hodson and Marvin 2010b).

The above account of contemporary overlapping socio-technical revolutions shows that each successive age was characterized by a major economic crisis at its mid-point. Each subsequent long wave has been driven by innovation incentivized by finance capital (seeking capital gains) that has tended to over-invest in promising spatially configured fashionable energy, mobility and communication technologies, thus creating speculative financial bubbles (Harvey 2012). As economies and cities crashed when these bubbles burst, the governance of ordering/taming projects became renewed – specifically, by states’ interventions to reorganize society around a new set of institutions appropriate to the emerging over-invested technologies (such as oil, electrification, highways and suburban sprawl
after the 1929 crash). In the process, every ordering project attempted to impose new cultural norms on urban society, discipline the more pernicious excesses of finance capital, and prepare the way for productive (dividend-seeking) capital to take over as the primary investor in the ‘proven’ socio-technical innovations and the myriad goods and services that these new infrastructures made possible. As Harvey (2012) argued, cities were always the contested terrains of creative destruction that lay at the centre of these dramatic historical transformations, though their role in taming the global crises of capitalism is perhaps more pronounced today than ever before in modern history.

There are strong ecological, social and economic arguments to support a transition away from business as usual towards a more sustainable inclusive economy, but the force and speed of current trajectories tend to overload the strategic capacities for action at global and national levels, and vested interests remain in control of powerful information flows. These mask the looming threats of polluting, greenhouse gas-emitting, resource-intensive technologies and the systems of economic accumulation and socio-environmental subordination that reproduce them. As homes for the majority of the world’s population and in light of the enormous complexities that paralyse the governance of global challenges, cities are currently being re-interpreted as potentially crucial spaces for sustainability-oriented innovations that could coalesce into alternative socio-technical regimes in future. As in previous socio-technical revolutions when global geographical and intra-urban spaces were restructured by the dynamics of particular patterns of accumulation (Harvey 2012; Swilling 2011), the focus now shifts to the forces shaping the urban Anthropocene and how they may be shaping the next long-term development cycle. On a parallel basis and outside the spotlight of international development conferences and summits, cities are also increasingly the crucial nodes where, backed by local institutions and actors, complex systems of global wealth accumulation and concentration produce brutal expulsions (Sassen 2014). Cities obviously do not exist in a vacuum or outside wider social, economic and environmental projects, but acknowledging this is different from approaching them as mere sites or instruments of wider transitions and transformations. The drivers and sources of urban change require in our view a more dialectical examination that consciously resists the construction of new essentialisms, whether these endorse the notion that cities are the new re-ordering sites of global problems and therefore of global solutions or of unconstrained agency. This book seeks to offer a simultaneous interrogation of the structuring discursive and material effects of the urban polycrisis described above and to track the pathways that materialize and challenge the consolidation of old and new ordering projects across grounded material practices and discourses on the past, present and future of cities.

On taming and untaming the city

As argued at the beginning, taming is a process that can take many forms across a rich diversity of urban contexts. It is, however, recognizable as a set of attempts by urban intermediaries to use visioning, planning, discourse-building, coalitioning
and funding strategies to impose a certain order, logic and coherence on complex
dynamics which are deemed to be too opaque, too seemingly directionless and
therefore too uncontrollable to provide the basis for purposive outcomes aligned
with the requirements of accumulation, rational urban planning, urban consump-
tion and appropriate modes of cultural behaviour. Siemens, for example, recently
published a report entitled Investor Ready Cities: How Cities can Create and
Deliver Infrastructure Value, which explicitly argues that those cities that suc-
cessfully tame these complex dynamics using the new ICTs will become the most
attractive to investors (Siemens et al 2014).

Transforming cities into tamed domains of information-based accumulation
will depend to a large extent on whether it will, in practice, be possible to simplify
or reduce complexity in the name of ‘progress’. In this book we seek to resist the
‘taming’ of urbanism by emphasizing the ‘untameability’ of the city in its various
manifestations in the global North and South. The most lively and rich examples
of urbanism tend in reality to be too complex, too diverse, too incompressible,
too ever-changing to be so easily tamed. However, what really matters above all
is what could (possibly unintentionally) be suppressed or even annihilated by the
process of taming. Critically, it could be argued that attempts to tame the city
could overthrow what drives the energy, entrepreneurialism, innovations, assem-
blages, networking, heterotopias, passions and dreams that ensure the survival of
rich, creative, alive and open-ended urbanisms. In our view, the cognitive fusions
and reformations that emerge from the frictions, struggles and contestations made
possible by the messy unpredictable agglomerations and assimilations of the city
need to be recognized and protected from the sanitized urban utopias currently
punted by some powerful actors – in particular the global technology companies –
who recognize the strategic significance of the city.

However, for us this is not a ‘dualism’; it is not about a simplistic counterposi-
tion of the ‘tamed’ and the ‘untamed’. These are interlocked processes that feed
off and can potentially co-produce each other, with threats that lie at the extremes:
from the sanitized lines of the overly ‘tamed’ technotopias being marketed today
by some technology corporations, through to the endlessly messy assemblages of
the seemingly directionless ‘untamed’ (which some like to romanticize). Instead,
our central argument is that by examining the dialectical dynamics of taming and
untaming we can recognize how the ‘urban Anthropocene’ is being made and
unmade at multiple levels as diverse actors co-opt, reformulate and fuse together
one or another rendition of their understanding of urbanism, the information age,
economic crisis and environmental breakdown.

The bids to tame the city can take many forms, each expressed as a ‘project’
at the popular level and often underpinned by a particular body of scholarship
and theory. A non-exhaustive list of globally constituted ‘projects’ of the city
that reflect a wide range of perspectives include the re-emergence of a faith in
‘big planning’ underpinned by the science of modelling, as championed by the
former Arup chief executive Peter Head’s initiative ‘The Urban Sequestration
Trust’, among others; the increasingly influential ‘Resilience Perspective’ – now
adopted by the Rockefeller Foundation, with links to the Stockholm Resilience
Centre (SRC) and the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI); UN-HABITAT’s ‘Urban patterns for a green economy’ initiative (UN Habitat 2013); the UN Environment Programme’s (UNEP’s) Global Initiative for Resource Efficient Cities; the World Bank’s Sustainable Infrastructure group focus on material flow analysis, socio-technical systems change, and the Eco2Cities initiative (Hoornweg and Freire 2013); the C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group’s emphasis on the opportunities offered by the world’s megacities to create resilient places for the business world to tackle climate risks and greenhouse emissions (CPD 2014); the Green Building movement and the rapidly growing ‘Smart Cities’ agenda (Komninos 2009; Townsend 2013) and associated calls for massive investments required to make cities smarter, among others.

The examples above are part of a rapidly solidifying global urbanism that approaches the urban Anthropocene as one world, while actively normalizing the production and reproduction of ‘differential sustainability’; that is, the possibility of adjusting thresholds to meet the needs and wants of certain privileged social groups and territories at the expense of others’ (Allen 2014: 523). At the same time, the ‘polycrisis’ is expressed most clearly in the widening of the range of a large number of globally produced but locally experienced risks. The legalization of the security state to provide a safe space for economic activity in the face of risk (Greenhouse, 2010) has implied at the local level the securitization of space and a peculiar type of bio-control over people and places. This entails detailed strategies to plan, monitor, securitize, protect and push – when needed – those actors, communities and processes that cannot be easily tamed or domesticated in zones of both social and physical exclusion.

By contrast, those that share a perspective that values the untameability of the city are on quite a wide continuum that encompasses multiple sites of social insurgency, everyday urbanism and engagement with urban governance. On one end you might find Shack Dwellers International (supported by organizations such as the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), London; the Bartlett Development Planning Unit (DPU), London; the African Centre for Cities ( AAC), Cape Town; and the Sustainability Institute (SI) Stellenbosch, among others), who valorize the untamed collective agency of the poor in building the urban, while seeking to bridge their efforts with the transformations required to co-produce more just and sustainable urban trajectories with other urban actors (Allen 2012; Maricato 2009; Mitlin 2008; Mitlin and Satterthwaite 2013; Swilling et al. 2013). These perspectives run right through to, at the other end, the work of Mike Davis (2005), Malik Simone (2010) and Asef Bayat (2000), who read the production of cities as a permanent struggle against tameability. In an attempt to bridge the gap between everyday urbanism, resistance and engagement, a number of writers have explored the interactive and relational dynamics that transform urban systems. These thinkers include Marcuse et al. (2009), Guy et al. (2011), McFarlane (2011), (the new) Castells (2012), Parnell and Oldfield (2014), Allen et al. (forthcoming) and Swilling (forthcoming), among others. By recognizing that urban change cannot simply be derived from structural economic changes at the national and global levels or from grand planning frameworks, these writers
insist on the importance of tracing the profound role played by specific configurations of urban actors who actively engage prevailing power relations to realize a wide range of future urban visions.

The contributions to this book engage these various traditions as articulated across both global North and global South contexts. Our message is clear: because cities do not provide a clean slate, we must all be careful about what we assume is actually going on or what is possible. What matters is how we comprehend and work with both taming and untaming dynamics. Undoubtedly, actions are necessary, but they must be informed by a nuanced understanding of these complex dynamics that may be conceptually distinct but in practice always manifest in relation to one another. Seeking action without critical reflection on the dialectics at play between taming and untaming runs the risk of producing and re-producing old and new unjust urban utopias. But equally, theorizing urban change without an axiological discussion of what type of action might be possible or desirable can be purposeless, confining our understanding to multiple readings of complexity while overwhelming any sense of what transformative change might mean or entail. This is, for example, the danger of the conceptually cluttered urban resilience framework.

Departing from the notion of a polycrisis unfolding under the urban Anthropocene could be read by many as yet another attempt at creating a single grand narrative. Throughout this book, however, we approach this diagnosis rather differently: navigating through this polycrisis opens in our view multiple sites of untamed speculation and action, as well as new opportunities to discuss strategic visions of transformative urban futures. In other words, departing from a critical and grounded reading of the urban polycrisis opens up the poly-reframing of contemporary urban trajectories, which in turn rejects the formulation of single-issue or single geography grand theories of change. As such, the concept of ‘untamed urbanisms’ is posed here to provoke new epistemological engagements not just with a diagnosis of the urban polycrisis but rather with the way in which actions to readdress such manifestations suggests the need for new framings of what is wrong in the first place. Such ‘actions’ range from those effected at the individual and household level to those institutionalized through planning framings.

Indeed, this might imply something deeply disturbing and problematic about the notion of the urban Anthropocene itself. If the notion of the Anthropocene is intended to suggest that humans have become the dominant geo-physical drivers of evolution, then the notion of the ‘urban Anthropocene’ implies that it is ‘urban-based humans’ in particular that have become this driver – a leitmotif that is now reflected in the frequently used notion of ‘planetary urbanism’ and in the notion that we therefore need ‘Smart Cities’ that are low carbon and resource efficient. The proliferation of modelling as a dominant research practice in sustainability science tends to reinforce this way of thinking. In effect, this suggests that cities have tamed global evolutionary dynamics in ways that endow these formations with a moral responsibility for ensuring the future survival of the entire web of life. At precisely the moment when the extra-ordinary powers of science and technology make possible the taming of natural evolution, these
powers also effectively fail to provide the much longed-for panacea because of a tendency to rely on complex modelling tools that virtually without exception assume the rational – and therefore tameable – individual as the primary building block of the analysis. These models cannot come to terms with what is effectively ‘unmodellable’ – the compulsion of the untamed dynamics of the everyday urbanism of the world’s most dynamic cities and the unfolding logics of long-term structural transitions beyond the direct control of human agency or ‘management’.

In other words, by invoking the notion of a dialectic between taming and untaming dynamics, we are also raising questions about the kind of knowledge needed to address not only the internal nature of our cities, but also the relations between our cities and the ecosystem services produced by the non-urban hinterlands and waterbodies that are consumed within cities (with urban elites consuming the lion’s share). Undoubtedly models have their uses, but the qualitative analyses that pervade many of the chapters in this book help surface realities that escape the modes of analysis that have hitherto informed recent narratives about anthropogenically determined outcomes. As a result we face the prospect that models will emerge that inform policy choices for ‘managing’ urban transitions that neglect a broad swathe of urban realities that cannot be tamed by increasingly sophisticated quantitative modelling tools aimed at validating huge expenditures on a wide range of technofixes.

This book engages with the politics of urban transitions, exploring the tensions and dialogues between hegemonic and non-hegemonic framings, and seeks productive disruptions in our understanding and capacity for radical pragmatism. As argued by Inam, ‘[t]he most fundamental shifts in transforming cities do not happen by tinkering around the edges, but by fundamentally rethinking processes, methods, and outcomes of urbanism’ (2014: 18). At the same time we are mindful to avoid the dualism often found in urban studies between a normative, prescriptive or standardized pathway for urban development, and the much preferred desire to enjoy the city ironically through deconstruction and relativism. Thus, we are more interested in the interactive actions of taming and untaming as a way of knowing and acting upon the city, rather than the creation of another taxonomic system (the tamed and the untamed) to apprehend urban change.

Overview of the book

The rest of the book is structured in four parts, which are outlined below. Part I explores the wider socio-environmental transitions within which taming and untaming urbanisms operate, simultaneously examining how such transitions are either neglected or used to legitimize different courses of action and non-action. Part II digs critically into the plurality of experiences and everyday urbanisms that are often misrecognized forms of production of the city. Part III examines the capture of planning by mainstream narratives, and explores planning as a possible act of untaming, in an attempt to reframe its practice in a time of disciplinary crisis. Finally, Part IV works through the transformative potential and limits of
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different practices that consciously and unconsciously open new alternatives and bring to life suppressed imaginaries of cities – and what being in cities means – for a diverse range of actors that rarely become the focus of analysis. We conclude with a set of provocations that have implications for future research trajectories and transformative urban practices.

Part I: Trajectories of change in the urban Anthropocene

Cities are the emergent outcome of long historical cycles of seemingly interrelated socio-economic, spatial, institutional and ecological dynamics. How precisely these dynamics are connected depends on the conceptual lens used to comprehend them, with each lens phasing out of sight some of these key dynamics in favour of a particular dominant concern or interest. Long cycles of economic development transform the ecological systems within which they are embedded at local, regional and global scales. These long cycles and multiple scales interact in context-specific ways. Over the past century and a half, paradigms for reducing the complexity of the urban phenomenon have come and gone, but what remains is the irrepressibility and irreducibility of context. It is now time to find ways of grasping from different angles what it means to think about the trajectories of urban-ecological change in the era of the urban Anthropocene.

A world of cities disconnected from (real) natural systems was imagined in the nineteenth century and built in the twentieth century. Now that we know the negative consequences of this for all humanity and the wider web of life, we are confronted with the far from small task of fundamentally rethinking what urbanism would mean if the twenty-first century is to culminate in 6 billion living in cities by 2050 in a world of 9.5 billion without destroying the planet we inhabit. The chapters in Part I explore this challenge, while offering thought-provoking ways of reframing the way in which sustainable and just urban trajectories might be imagined and pursued.

Part II: The untamed everyday

The ‘untamed everyday’ section is framed by three major debates, all traditionally cast in the metaphorical scene of urban development polarities. The first one concerns the opposition between agency and structure (Giddens 1984). Albeit in different ways, all chapters place themselves within a tradition that focuses on the reflexive character of human conduct. To take this stand implies challenging the idea that human conduct is purely shaped by forces and actors that people neither govern nor comprehend. Thus the first key argument running through this section is that human agency interacts with the broader forces and pressures discussed in Part I, both playing a fundamental role in shaping them and providing a reason to think about their transformation.

Discourse is part of the dynamics of everyday life, as much as it is constitutive of development at large, and specific urban processes of a different kind and span. Thus, a second key theme is that through the political and cultural construction of
discourses, language is not only spoken but also makes possible in different ways the exercise of power (Foucault 2002). This results in dominant discourses that are capable of excluding or including with terrible strength, at times supported by appalling violence, such as those on rational planning, urban growth and competitiveness, the smart city, the informal city, the slum city and so forth. This is also true of binary discourses such as formal/informal and poor/non-poor which often provide political, legal and policy justification for those who have the authority and capacity to rule over others. These discursive devices are needed not only by urban administrations but also, paradoxically, by those who claim ownership of the direction that urban transformation should be taking in order to save the urban from ecological collapse.

The third key argument running through the chapters challenges the fashionable idea that cities and people will inevitably adapt in fairly predictable ways to conditions of increasing socio-environmental uncertainty. Spanning a high degree of diversity – in terms of geographies, cultures and processes – all the chapters use case studies to challenge evolutionist readings of social change. Thus, to think of socio-environmental change, development and justice as an irreversible sequence of stages – while uncritically adopting concepts that originated in the natural sciences, such as adaptation and resilience – produces short-sighted and most often tautological explanations. The everyday is untamed inasmuch as the diverse pathways to greater social justice in the city reflect the range of interests and actors at play, regardless of different ways of thinking and building forms of urban living across geographies. However, it would also be incorrect to think that there is no connection at all among the dynamics of everyday life. In fact, as a repeating fractal across geographies, hegemonic models of market-driven cities have brought about a common pattern that apparently differs from place to place but, at the same time, preserves an unchanging pattern that repeats itself: this is the new role carved for the agency of individuals as self-protecting actors within the logic of commodification and securitization of private life often reinforced by a wider human rights discourse. Part II of the book argues that these emerging patterns raise questions about the discourses on the future city that claim that urban politics needs to look not only at macro-structures, but also at the processes that crystallise daily into social practices and inequalities that reinforce and ultimately shape the unfolding and ever-changing nature of these structures.

**Part III: Disrupting hegemonic planning**

Urban planning encompasses a set of processes that are often seen as engaging all elements of urban life while at the same time being treated as something that can be separated from the everyday activities taking place in the city. While this may seem a contradictory endeavour, it highlights the key issues regarding the urban question for the coming years: how can urban planning serve to influence the wide array of factors deemed necessary for a sustainable urban future? This part of the book invites an examination of what planning *is*, and what planning *does and could do* to become a truly democratic and inclusive process.
In the context of historical development, urban planning can to a large extent be seen as an ‘ultimate taming’ project and set of mechanisms. Discourses of planning are so bound up with hegemonic power structures that the power at work often becomes hidden or naturalized. In this regard, planning, with its mantra of ‘common sense’, is particularly suited to the neoliberal age. At its most extreme, this is evidenced in the ease with which large corporate entities have become embedded in public policy through the ‘smart city’ agenda or in the emergence of risk as an overarching organizing concept, for both private and public sector management of neuralgic spaces and resources often found within or administered from actors strategically positioned inside the city itself. At the other end, it can be witnessed through ‘creative’ projects, such as pop-up shops, meanwhile spaces and temporary parks, which have emerged with particular resonance since the economic crisis of 2008. When taken at face value, these give an indication that urban planning is a loose and open-ended process that manifests in context-specific ways. Yet these projects themselves are often at the mercy of wider structural factors, such as cycles of investment and disinvestment, thus limiting the possibility of significant shifts in urban planning practice.

In attempting to analyse the various processes at work, each of the chapters in Part III connects planning to the wider political and economic contexts in which they are embedded. The authors seek to get beyond the notion that planning is inherently ‘tamed’ and by definition always at the mercy of wider power structures. In a critical manner, they point towards the potential for alternative forms of planning practice. Each of the chapters is guided by a desire to re-infuse everyday practice with theoretical insights drawn from a range of sources, including the re-emphasis on engagement from the community and neighbourhood level to the level of supranational organizations such as UN-HABITAT.

The argument is reinforced by a plea for greater levels of control over public resources that have a direct impact on the ability of planning to become a more open and democratic process with respect, in particular, to the allocation of housing and land resources. When taken together, these chapters search with great urgency for urban planning to become less about technical fixes and more about promoting cities as more ‘just’ spaces where spatially embedded citizen interaction becomes a core element of urban planning practices that recognize the wider ecological and economic context of urban development processes.

**Part IV: Liberating alternatives**

This part on ‘liberating alternatives’ explores people’s narratives of living and thus creating cities within and beyond the limits of the contemporary disciplining practices that produce the urban. Recognizing that alternatives exist in a variety of forms on many levels, the chapters in Part IV step away from social movement theory to investigate socio-environmental change in the urban everyday, depicting emerging narratives that challenge marginalization and re-invoke citizens’ rights to the city while creating new spaces and tensions to bring about transformative change.
The central questions explored within this section are: How can we understand urban life and everyday practices beyond needs? What factors or qualities make practices ‘alternatives’ or ‘untamed’ from the perspective of the mainstream? What is the destabilizing capacity of such practices? What fractures emerge in the friction between everyday practices and social regulation? To what extent are ‘alternatives’ transformative? In exploring the answer to these questions, the concept of freedom is problematized to unveil the limits of both formal distributive norms and obligations, and people’s individual choices and preferences. The authors examine instead how freedom is dialectically constructed in the city, by whom, under what circumstances and with what consequences. Here a thread connecting parts II and IV is the search for a narrative other than the hopeless one so poignantly described by Greenhouse (2010) and others in *Ethnographies of Neoliberalism* (Makhulu, 2010; Miyazakim, 2010). In this sense, to talk about untamed urbanisms means referring to the tensions produced by the encounter between the new grand narratives and the alternatives emanating from those being pushed towards the social and/or physical margins of the city. The latter is an untaming process that reveals those acts of exclusion as not just resistances but powerful lenses to disrupt the narrowing logic of the marketization and commodification of urban life.

Untaming here takes place through subtle readings of undisciplined everyday practices that are often subversive at an ontological and axiological level. However, the authors in this part refrain from offering a romanticized view of quotidian practices, and instead invite the reader to explore critically the freeing potential of alternative ways of learning and making the urban. Based on primary research conducted into lived, everyday experiences of ‘the city’ from around the world, the six chapters included in Part IV explore the richness, diversity and plethora of understandings and practices that challenge conventional, regulated governance approaches. They revisit the notion of freedom through themes such as food, work, money, bodies and public space.

**Note to the Reader**

*Untamed Urbanisms* offers a critical exploration of different strands in the production of the city, focusing in particular on those that celebrate diversity and progressive processes, fostering critical dreaming and strategic action. By drawing largely on original research by a new generation of urban researchers located in institutions and debating and planning circles across the global South and North, this book sheds new light on old debates and aims to stimulate and provoke fresh interrogations about sustainable urban development. The book has been entitled *Untamed Urbanisms* precisely because the chapters are linked by a shared concern to repoliticize the relationship between urban development, sustainability and justice, and to explore the tensions emerging under real circumstances, as well as their potential for transformative change. Furthermore, the contributors have the kinds of interdisciplinary backgrounds and working contexts that enable them to drift away from traditional disciplinary constraints and trajectories.
A distinctive appeal of the book, together with the cultural, disciplinary and geographical diversity of the contributors, is the variation of discursive rhythms. Not unlike the fusion style in jazz, the move from one chapter or major part to what follows is never flat, but provides continuously shifting planes and perspectives. From the global (Parts I and III) to more locally specific cases and reflections (Parts II and IV), and at the same time from the global South to the global North, the book itself cannot be constrained into a single style, line of argument or disciplinary logic.

As editors of this volume, we have passionately wrestled for decades with the challenging task of engaging with cities and urban change through our research, pedagogical approaches and engagement with action planning and political activism. As such, we are, like this book, equally troubled and inspired by the need for both more aspirational planning practice and actionable theory.

Like a triad of musical conductors, we have sought to produce music but not without dissonance. Dissonance might be perceived as unstable sound or noise interrupting the flow of melody and harmony. But dissonance is in fact the complement of consonance, the building up and releasing of tensions that contributes to what listeners perceive as beauty, emotion and expressiveness in music. In the same way, Untamed Urbanisms pulls the reader in various directions, but without dissonance, and recreated consonance there would not be music, just monotony.

In the concluding chapter we offer a cross-reading of the different contributions included in this volume and an evaluation of the epistemological, methodological and axiological consequences of such an enterprise. Meanwhile, we invite the reader to listen and enjoy the sound of the different chapters while embracing every dissonance encountered in the journey as a potential productive disruption to hegemonic thinking and action that aims to tame the untameable.

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