

**Moritz Ege/Johannes Moser (Eds.)**

**Urban Ethics:** Conflicts Over the Good and Proper Life in Cities. London: Routledge, 320 P., 22 b/w Ill. ISBN 978-0367338428.

What distinguishes this volume is its explicit and, to a great extent, successful attempt at introducing a programmatic research agenda for the field of cultural urban studies involving the study of urban ethics as a situated and embodied entanglement of practices, discourses, and imaginaries. A short guide to the fundamental issues of this research program is encoded in the question: How should one live in the city? Building upon Foucault's discussions of ethics, Ege and Moser observe that whereas the "How" relates to imaginations of practices and virtues deemed good, right or proper, the "Should" points to the moral and normativity regimes informing those imaginations. "One," which in many cases involves a "we," would refer to the kind of actors and ethical subjects constituted in different fields. Finally, the supplement "in the city" would not only define the context of this question, but rather to a particular configuration that embodies specific answers to it.

The volume includes 17 articles grouped into five sections. The first programmatic section is followed by a set of historical case studies exploring the shifting ethics of the urban in different regional contexts. Sections 3–5 are dedicated to specific configurations of the ethical in contemporary cities: conflicts over housing and architecture, over the ethics and politics of urban sustainability, and the current configuration of protest movements. Despite the diversity of topics, the volume advances two important analytical and empirical propositions for the study of urban ethics.

The first and perhaps most original proposition is that urban ethics increasingly entail practices of public problematization and justification of urban projects by engaging and mobilizing moral codes and normative conventions. Urban ethics would involve an overt, public, and contested field of problematizations. It suggests paying attention to disruptive practices and situations, which are "recognizably ethical" (p. 3).

One type of recognizably ethical situations that play a central role in the book are what the editors call ethical projects: future-oriented projects – citizen initiatives, urban service providers, urban planning projects, etc. – articulated around avowed values, such as diversity, sustainability, consensus, participation, and innovation. The ethical project is a key conceptual figure that strongly resonates with the contributions to section 3 with its focus on collective housing projects in Berlin and Munich, housing movements in Budapest and Bucharest, and discussions on architecture and national values in Singapore, as well as section 4 with its focus on urban sustainability projects.

Another type of recognizably ethical situations results from the increasing *ethicization* of political language in urban conflicts and protest movements. The chapters in section 5 are explicitly dedicated to study how demands of urban change are attached to ethical propositions concerning how urban actors aspire to live together. This is particularly clear in two chapters dedicated to such social movements in Russia which study

how since the 1990s notions of common ownership of public spaces and of a right to the city have articulated these new demands. At stake here is the emergence of urban actors, such as *Gilets Jaunes* (*Susser*), as political actors constituted around specific public events. This resonates with the concept of ethical events proposed in the introduction to refer to exceptional moments of collective effervescence leading to forms of public mobilization, both shaped by articulations of solidarity and the commons, as well as by indignation or outrage.

The second key proposition is that being and dwelling in a city – a space of difference leading to constant interactions and negotiations with others – is an inherently ethics-based practice. Two conceptual contributions, the notion of ethical imagination as a capacity inherent to urban life (*Moore*) and the idea of the city as a promise (*Färber*), are crucial to exploring this ethics-based practice. In particular, the notion of ethical imagination as a site of cultural invention leading to specific ways of thinking, feeling, and experiencing the often complex self-others-relations proves central to many chapters of the book.

Historical studies in section 2 focus on specific traditions of urbanity in different regional contexts, thus exploring specific sets of conventions and dispositions defining an urban habitus or a way of living together in the city. Two good examples are the discussion of a Mediterranean urbanity that grounds a capacity of these cities to contest and resist neoliberal capitalism (*Baumeister*) and the study of *Hisba* treatises for the regulation of urban life in Arab cities as encapsulating a distinct ethic of urbanity (*Lafi*). Beyond this, the volume advances the thesis that in secular late modern societies the tension field between the self and the others is mainly framed as “debates about choices that individual subjects should make freely” (p. 4). This tension is explored, for example, in various chapters of section 3 dealing with conflicts about housing and how to infrastructure individual and collective forms of good life in the city. One of the clearest examples is the study of collective housing cooperatives striving for alternative ways of life in Munich (*Gozzer*), where many of the people joining those projects are mainly attracted by the possibility of accessing nice and affordable housing.

A critical remark stemming from our specific positioning in the field of urban studies is the lack of conversations with a whole field of studies concerned with practices of more-than-human and planetary care in urban settings. This, however, does not affect the potential this volume has to become a must-read in contemporary cultural urban studies.

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