Queer(ing) Urban Planning and Municipal Governance

Bain, Alison L.; Podmore, Julie A.

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Editorial

Queer(ing) Urban Planning and Municipal Governance

Alison L. Bain [1,*] and Julie A. Podmore [2,3]

[1] Department of Human Geography and Spatial Planning, Utrecht University, The Netherlands
[2] Department of Geosciences, John Abbott College, Canada
[3] Department of Geography, Planning, and Environment, Concordia University, Canada

* Corresponding author (a.l.bain@uu.nl)

Abstract
To queer urban planning and municipal governance requires explicit civic engagement with sexual and gender minority inclusions, representations and needs in urban plans and policies across departmental and committee silos. This collection questions the hetero-cis-normative assumptions of urban planning and examines the integration of LGBTQ+ issues in municipal governance at the interface of community activism, bureaucratic procedures, and political intervention. The editorial summarizes the contributions to this thematic issue within a tripartite thematic framework: 1) counter-hegemonic reactions to hetero-cis-normativities; 2) queering plans and policies; and 3) governance coalitions and LGBTQ+ activisms.

Keywords
LGBTQ+; municipal governance; queer; urban planning

1. Introduction

As a technical and relational mode of state intervention into property relations, social conditions, and majority-minority interactions, urban planning is informed by national and provincial/state legislative frameworks but also by local political structures, histories, geographies, and moments of tension and collaboration (Cordes, 2019). Urban planners in their various roles as technocrats, mediators, advocates, coordinators, negotiators, and visionaries, translate knowledge into action through plans and policies (Barry et al., 2018). Nevertheless, how planning knowledge is produced, shared, and valued, makes everyday geographies possible for some people and forecloses them for others. This thematic issue focuses on one such "hard-to-reach" (Beebeejaun, 2012), invisibilized and excluded citizenry within urban planning, the LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer) population. It addresses fundamental municipal governance dynamics about sexual and gender minority exclusions, representations, needs in urban

plans and policies, and attempts at more explicit practices of LGBTQ+ inclusion.

Despite over a decade of research, LGBTQ+ urban planning issues have yet to be "mainstreamed" and evenly integrated into the everyday work of municipal governance (Cooper & Monro, 2003; Murray, 2015). The scholarly planning literature has only begun to address how planning ideology and practices reinforce hetero-cis-normativies (Castán Broto, 2021; Doan, 2011, 2015; Forsyth, 2001; Frisch, 2002). Planning scholarship on LGBTQ+ populations has attended to the regulation of sexual premises and gay bodies through bar licencing and health clinics (Brown & Knopp, 2016; Prior, 2008), the hetero-normativites embedded in municipal bylaws and housing policies (Hubbard, 2013; Oswin, 2019), but most research has focused on queer neighborhood formation with recent critical attention to neoliberal necropolitical displacements from urban spaces (Bell & Binnie, 2004; Gorman-Murray & Waitt, 2009; Haritaworn et al., 2014; Irazábal & Huerta, 2016). The decline of the "gayborhood" (Ghaziani, 2014) has stimulated urban

planning inventories of the LGBTQ+ "cultural infrastructures" of large global cities such as London (Campkin, 2023) and the creation of "best practice" manuals such as Planning Out's (2019) *LGBT+ Placemaking Toolkit*. Recognizing that municipalities need to respond to national equalities legislation and international human rights declarations, inter-municipal agencies such as the UNESCO-backed Canadian Coalition of Inclusive Municipalities (2019) are also beginning to provide civic leaders with toolkits for LGBTQ+ inclusion.

Building on this scholarly legacy and growing practitioner interest, the current collection further questions the hetero-cis-normative assumptions of urban planning while also addressing the place of LGBTQ+ inclusion within municipal governance and the role of community activism at city hall. It takes up Doan's (2015) call for a greater understanding and knowledge of LGBTQ+ citizens and the need for inclusive queer urban spaces that are joyful, equitable, and something more than sites of festivalized rainbow washing. Across three sections and via differently sized and regionally embedded urban case studies (from Mumbai to Geneva, Windhoek and Walvis Bay to Los Angeles, Brighton to Acapulco, and Ottawa to Vancouver), this thematic issue accentuates the lived disjunctures of municipal governance for sexual and gender non-normative citizens. Discussion trains on LGBTQ+ inclusion in housing and community service provision, cultural and tourism policy, participatory and radical planning practices, advisory boards and strategies.

2. Counter-Hegemonic Reactions to Hetero-Cis-Normativities

Policy, law, and municipal planning are important local forms of governmentality through which hetero-cis-normativities continue to be enforced, but they also provide the legislative frameworks through which LGBTQ+ rights can be addressed (Cooper & Monro, 2003). Urban planning, however, needs to further disrupt long-held assumptions about what makes a "good" and "just" city beyond ordering land uses and services so as to reproduce two-parent, heterosexual families within a gender binary that fortifies divisions between public/private, formal/informal, institutional/commercial, propertied/tenant (Oswin, 2019). The three contributions in this section all work to counter this gender binary and accompanying normativities by questioning assumptions about student housing, informal settlements, and the radical potential of punk music culture.

Residential space makes up a significant component of land use in cities, rendering affordable housing a key queer urban planning and governance concern. For queer residents, private rental market housing does not necessarily ensure privacy and safety. Arun-Pina's (2023) depiction of the "representational distortions" involved in housing higher education students in Mumbai, India invites urban planners to confront their regulatory role in reinforcing the "cis-heteronormative familification" of

the urban housing market that reproduces a sense of perpetual disbelonging for LGBTQ+ students. The heteronormative assumptions permeating housing policies is also the focus of Delgado et al.'s (2023) Namibian case study of housing injustices in rapidly urbanizing and economically unequal Windhoek and Walvis Bay. The ordering gaze of planners pushes LGBTIQ+ people and their communities into informal settlements that, even without services and security, afford relatively "safer" and more accommodating housing options that support alternate family structures.

In addition to housing, cultural policy can also impact upon the vitality of marginalized communities and the interstitial spaces of sociality upon which they depend. Gelbard's (2023) article on the solidarities of punk and queer refusal of displacement by creative placemaking practices in Ottawa, Canada asks urban planners to address participatory planning barriers and embrace the counter-narratives of underrepresented communities when developing cultural policies and promoting safety and inclusion. In the second section of this thematic issue, critical attention is directed to urban plans and policies that target LGBTQ+ inclusion within municipal governance.

3. Queering Plans and Policies

Within municipal governance, it is diversity committees, social planners, and cultural and recreational departments that provide key arenas for the integration of sexual and gender minorities. Progressive municipalities increasingly adopt anti-discrimination ordinances, signal inclusion through Pride proclamations and support for festivals, offer sensitivity training for municipalities (Bain & Podmore, 2021a), create LGBTQ2S advisory committees (Murray, 2015), or adapt municipal facilities to meet diverse gender needs (Patel, 2017). The process of LGBTQ+ inclusion through municipal governance, therefore, involves community leaders, enfranchised insider-activists and allied politicians and planners (Browne & Bakshi, 2016). The contributors in this section examine how networks of LGBTQ+ knowledge production circulate in and out of city hall through the actions and outcomes of individuals and groups striving for change and the conflicts, impediments, and contradictions resulting from these transformative projects.

Through a case study of Geneva, Switzerland, Duplan (2023) examines the governance–activism nexus that brings public officials charged with implementing legislated political equality agendas into fluid allyship coalitions with LGBTQ+ activists. She asserts that while the specter of pinkwashing looms large, this nexus increases the visibility of queer lives and improves access to public spaces and municipal services. Smith et al. (2023) use the concepts of "choreographing" and "non-decision making" in urban design and impact assessment to analyze how the needs of trans people and communities are articulated in municipal policy and practice in Brighton

& Hove, England's "LGBTQ capital." To address questions of justice in municipal governance, Podmore and Bain (2023) provide a case-study analysis of the tensions between contemporary planning's civic actions of LGBTQ2S recognition and its outcomes of redistribution for three adjacent peripheral municipalities in Canada's Vancouver city-region where an aestheticized rainbow-washing politics sidelines more transformative social inclusions. Moving from the periphery to Vancouver's city-centre, where the equity needs of transgender, gender diverse, and Two Spirit peoples (TGD2S) are prioritized, Muller Myrdahl (2023) examines the civic adoption of a 2016 trans-supporting policy strategy. The article questions what constitutes innovation with respect to social inclusion policies. Taken together, these four articles interrogate how LGBTQ+ policy inclusions circulate through city hall and identify the key actors and municipal arenas that bring forward or halt such policies across different national contexts. Beyond advisory committees and insider-activist advice on strategies and policies, planners have much more to learn from LGBTQ+ communities in terms of organizing and providing services, developing radical planning praxis, and understanding the impacts of policy on individuals and communities.

4. Governance Coalitions and LGBTQ+ Activisms

In the later half of the twentieth century, LGBTQ+ activists in the large metropolitan centres of liberal democracies have explicitly worked to resist municipal logics of erasure and discipline, and in the process, built community resilience through the establishment of grassroots organizations, services and support agencies and movements for human rights. Rather than simply incorporating LGBTQ+ activist coalitions into municipal governance, the articles in this section suggest that planners and civic leaders can seek transformative inspiration by way of such historical examples. There is, however, the perpetual danger of generalizing from specific and disconnected place-based examples that emerge from different political opportunity structures, resource landscapes and inter-organizational relations (Bain & Podmore, 2021b). Moreover, the hand-over of LGBTQ+ service provision to the state and its ensuing bureaucratization within urban neoliberalism reinforces activist professionalization (Browne & Bakshi, 2016) and reproduces the homo-cis-normative inequities across the acronym that compound exclusions for queer others (Haritaworn et al., 2014). Neoliberal municipal regimes of consumptive respectability that figure LGBTQ+ inclusion as central to their diversity brand, can also disempower activist coalitions creating tensions, disconnections and misrecognitions (Bain & Podmore, 2021a).

In their overview of American LGBTQ+ community service organizations (CSOs), Hess and Bitterman (2023) offer a taxonomy of community needs and analyze LGBTQ+ services provision. They document how, during the Covid-19 pandemic, CSOs adapted their historic services to meet the needs of vulnerable populations when governments could not keep pace, and, in so doing, re-established themselves as anchors for gayborhood communities. In contrast, the gay tourism destination of Acapulco, Mexico, long-exploited as a site of gay pleasure, exhibits, Payne (2023) argues, significant CSO gaps that exacerbate "territorial inequalities" between queer tourists and local residents. Despite the presence of an evolving LGBTTTI movement, queer locals continue to experience a loss of social rights, a deepening of socio-economic segregation, and an ensuing lack of political voice within the urban governance frameworks of planning and policy.

Nevertheless, the potential exists to politically leverage queer pleasure as an expression of queer joy. Analyzing the 50-year history of the Los Angeles Pride parade, Turesky and Crisman (2023) provide a historical example of intersectional and insurgent planning wherein heterogeneous queer people organized themselves and claimed agency. The event has created emphemeral spaces for queer bodies to resist policing, collectively express queer joy, and, in the process, advocate for more just cities.

5. Conclusions

The queer(ing) of urban planning and municipal governance is only partially underway in some "progressive" cities. It remains a highly localized, selective, and ad hoc process that is all too dependent on the political will of civic leaders, the knowledge of urban planners, and the resources available to local LGBTQ+ activists and residents. The most common approaches to queering municipalities involve practices of queer infrastructure preservation and rainbowization to symbolize civic recognition of gender and sexual diversity, but these are only preliminary transformative initiatives.

Planners need to continue to think "beyond queer space" (Doan, 2015, p. 257) since most LGBTQ+ populations are more diverse, dispersed, and much less visible than the more enfranchised gay male populations who have built communities in the gayborhoods of large urban centres. Despite such central-city queer infrastructure (both material and virtual), social isolation, with its accompanying experiences of depression, addiction, and suicide, remain prevalent and should be of concern to urban planners along with complex and cross-cutting issues of racism, ageism, surveillance, policing, and housing precarity. It also remains important to push beyond the discursive analysis of planning's hetero-cis-normative assumptions about how LGBTQ+ citizens live, work, travel, and socialize across metropolitan areas (Doan, 2011), and view the various realms of municipal governance as functionally intertwined rather than siloed. Without an intersectional lens, however, on the challenges facing specific groups of LGBTQ+ populations across municipal governance—implicating housing, policing, income, poverty reduction or health ser-

vice delivery—any synergistic benefits will only continue to accrue for those within the acronym who are already most visible and empowered (Irazábal & Huerta, 2016).

Acknowledgments

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

References

Arun-Pina, C. (2023). Homonegative labyrinth of representational distortions: Planning im/possibilities for higher education LGBTQ+ students in Mumbai. *Urban Planning*, *8*(2), 150–163.

Bain, A. L., & Podmore, J. A. (2021a). Linguistic ambivalence amidst suburban diversity: LGBTQ2S municipal "social inclusions" on Vancouver's periphery. *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, *39*(7), 1644–1672.

Bain, A. L., & Podmore, J. A. (2021b). Relocating queer: Comparing suburban LGBTQ2S activisms on Vancouver's periphery. *Urban Studies*, *58*(7), 1500–1519.

Barry, J., Horst, M., Inch, A., Legacy, C., Rishi, S., Rivero, J. J., Taufen, A., Zanotto, J. M., & Zitcer, A. (2018). Unsettling planning theory. *Planning Theory*, *17*(3), 418–438.

Beebeejaun, Y. (2012). Including the excluded? Changing the understandings of ethnicity in contemporary English planning. *Planning Theory & Practice*, *13*(4), 529–548.

Bell, D., & Binnie, J. (2004). Authenticating queer space: Citizenship, urbanism and governance. *Urban Studies*, *41*(9), 1807–1820.

Brown, M., & Knopp, L. (2016). Sex, drink, and state anxieties: Governance through the gay bar. *Social & Cultural Geography*, *17*(3), 335–358.

Browne, K., & Bakshi, L. (2016). *Ordinary in Brighton? LGBT, activisms and the city*. Routledge.

Campkin, B. (2023). *Queer premises: LGBTQ+ venues in London since the 1980s*. Bloomsbury.

Castán Broto, V. (2021). Queering participatory planning. *Environment and Urbanization*, *33*(2), 310–329.

Coalition of Inclusive Municipalities. (2019). *LGBTQ2+ inclusiveness: Toolkit for inclusive municipalities in Canada and beyond*. Canadian Commission for UNESCO.

Cooper, D., & Monro, S. (2003). Governing from the margins: Queering the state of local government? *Contemporary Politics*, *9*(3), 229–255.

Cordes, V. F. (2019). Planning interventions: Urban bias,

social reform and the city. *Planning Practice & Research*, *34*(1), 84–102.

Delgado, G., Castán Broto, V., & Mukesi, T. (2023). Queering housing policy: Questioning urban planning assumptions in Namibian cities. *Urban Planning*, *8*(2), 164–176.

Doan, P. L. (Ed.). (2011). *Queerying planning: Challenging heteronormative assumptions and reframing planning practice*. Ashgate.

Doan, P. L. (Ed.). (2015). *Planning and LGBTQ communities: The need for inclusive queer spaces*. Routledge.

Duplan, K. (2023). Pinkwashing policies or insider activism? Allyship in the LGBTIQ+ governance–activism nexus. *Urban Planning*, *8*(2), 187–196.

Forsyth, A. (2001). Sexuality and space: Nonconformist populations and planning practice. *Journal of Planning Literature*, *15*(3), 339–358.

Frisch, M. (2002). Planning as a heterosexist project. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, *21*(3), 254–266.

Gelbard, S. (2023). Radical solidarities in punk and queer refusals of safety and inclusion narratives in planning. *Urban Planning*, *8*(2), 177–186.

Ghaziani, A. (2014). *There goes the gayborhood?* Princeton University Press.

Gorman-Murray, A., & Waitt, G. (2009). Queer-friendly neighbourhoods: Interrogating social cohesion across sexual difference in two Australian neighbourhoods. *Environment and Planning A*, *41*(12), 2855–2873.

Haritaworn, J., Kuntsman, A., & Posocco, S. (Eds.). (2014). *Queer necropolitics*. Routledge.

Hess, D. B., & Bitterman, A. (2023). Community support organizations in gay neighborhoods: Assessing engagement during the Covid-19 pandemic. *Urban Planning*, *8*(2), 235–248.

Hubbard, P. (2013). Kissing is not a universal right: Sexuality, law and the scales of citizenship. *Geoforum*, *49*, 224–232.

Irazábal, C., & Huerta, C. (2016). Intersectionality and planning at the margins: LGBTQ youth of color in New York. *Gender, Place & Culture*, *23*(5), 714–732.

Muller Myrdahl, T. (2023). At the intersection of equity and innovation: Trans inclusion in the city of Vancouver. *Urban Planning*, *8*(2), 223–234.

Murray, C. (2015). Queering Vancouver: The work of the LGBTQ Civic Advisory Committee, 2009–14. *BC Studies*, *188*, 71–96.

Oswin, N. (2019). *Global city futures: Desire and development in Singapore*. University of Georgia Press.

Patel, N. (2017). Violent cistems: Trans experiences of bathroom space. *Agenda*, *31*(1), 51–63.

Payne, W. J. (2023). Territorial inequality driven by tourism: A queer mapping of urban space in Acapulco, Mexico. *Urban Planning*, *8*(2), 249–261.

Planning Out. (2019). *LGBT+ placemaking toolkit*. Built Environment Communications Group. https://becg.com/lgbt-placemaking-toolkit

Podmore, J. A., & Bain, A. L. (2023). Redistributing more than the LGBTQ2S acronym? Planning beyond recognition and rainbows on Vancouver's periphery. *Urban Planning*, *8*(2), 208–222.

Prior, J. (2008). Planning for sex in the city: Urban governance, planning and the placement of sex industry premises in inner Sydney. *Australian Geographer*, *39*(3), 339–352.

Smith, M. C., Gilchrist, P., & Lim, J. (2023). Planning in the "LGBTQ capital": Choreographing transgender in and out of policy. *Urban Planning*, *8*(2), 197–207.

Turesky, M., & Crisman, J. J. (2023). 50 years of Pride: Queer spatial joy as radical planning praxis. *Urban Planning*, *8*(2), 262–276.

About the Authors

Alison L. Bain is professor of the Geographies of Inclusive Cities in the Department of Geography and Spatial Planning at Utrecht University. Her research examines the spatial, infrastructural, and creative affordances of cities and their peripheries for cultural workers and LGBTQ+ populations. She is a North American managing editor for the *Urban Studies Journal*, the author of *Creative Margins: Cultural Production in Canadian Suburbs*, and co-editor of *Urbanization in a Global Context* and *The Cultural Infrastructure of Cities*.

Julie A. Podmore is a professor in the Department of Geosciences at John Abbott College and an affiliate assistant professor in the Department of Geography, Planning, and Environment at Concordia University in Montreal. Her earlier research focused on the historical geographies of Montreal's lesbian communities. Recent projects examine LGBTQ+ neighbourhood formation, suburbanisms, activisms, municipal governance, and planning and policy inclusions in Canadian cities and suburbs. She is co-editor of *Lesbian Feminisms: Essays Opposing Global Heteropatriarchies* and *The Cultural Infrastructure of Cities*.