




Article

Citizen Engagement in Spatial Planning, Shaping Places Together

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Abstract: This paper explores the roles and practices of collective citizen engagement in spatial planning. Drawing on a selection of core articles in planning scholarship, it investigates how citizens (re-)shape urban places by responding to perceived flaws in how spatial planning addresses societal challenges. Formal planning interventions are often spatially and socially selective, ineffective, or even non-existent due to a lack of institutional capacities and resources. Consequently, citizens take on roles that they consider as missing, underperformed or ineffective. The paper shows that this results in a variety of practices complementary to, independent from, or opposing formal planning actors and interventions. Five dilemmas citizens face are identified, highlighting the tensions that surface on exclusion, participation, and governmental responsibilities when citizens claim their role in urban governance.

Keywords: citizen initiatives; engagement; collective action; governance; spatial planning; social inclusion



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1. Introduction

During the first half of the 20th century, spatial planning became a field dominated by public activity within the wider context of urban governance. Inspired by modernism, technocratic decision-making and welfare state principles, public authorities took the lead in designing and managing spatial change at different administrative scales. Inevitably, this prominent role of spatial planning has reflected and shaped both dominant conceptions of what places are and should be like, and how they should be governed. At least two developments of the past decades challenge this traditional dominance. A neo-liberal and enabling state intentionally pulls back from developing top-down planning solutions and from leading roles in implementing them [1–4]. This takes place in the context of a dynamic transformation of urban settlements and life worlds. Citizens are confronted with a multitude of challenges and uncertainties such as climate change, sustainability problems, escalating housing prices and unequal accessibility to urban services. As substantial parts of the urban population still have no equal say when it comes to reconfiguring “their” city, issues of spatial planning and social inclusion are becoming increasingly important elements of an urban governance that seeks a balance between actions of governments and citizens. This underpins the need to understand and acknowledge urban residents as citizens who are able to shape their living environments and address social vulnerabilities.

During the last decades, the emergence of collective citizen engagement can be witnessed, taking matters in their own hands and shaping their places according to their own needs, wishes and ideas [5]. Citizens actively pursue taking over public planning tasks in order to independently organize their common spaces, though their practices vary greatly in different institutional and political contexts. They are regularly responding to neo-liberal market ideologies and draw inspiration from sustainability or post-growth ambitions or from “just city” and “right-to-the-city” debates. They may act more or less

autonomously or are engaged in public-private-people partnerships (4P) [6,7] Though increasingly acknowledged in the academic literature, notions of citizen engagement and how they might respond to or influence spatial planning are ambivalent and deserve more scholarly attention as a part of urban governance.

Citizen initiatives are, amongst other motives, inspired by progressive sustainability ambitions [8,9] or emerge as a response to failing public action by local governments [10,11]. As a result of both developments, more and more place-shaping activity gets done by non-public actors [5,12,13]. The rise of these non-planners can be perceived as a risk by public planners who may lose steering options and control [11]. At the same time, civic initiatives offer public planners an opportunity to keep up with, and adapt to, emergent realities in a diverse, dynamic, fluid and fast-changing society [5].

To realize their own needs and desires when facing global crises or local frictions, these citizen initiatives take their responsibility and act. Collectively, they (co-)shape places in their immediate communities and beyond. The key question addressed here is: how do citizen initiatives disrupt and enrich the planning arena by taking on spatial planning roles? These actors have (individual and shared) intentions, develop and discuss spatial ideas, and (try to) implement them, thereby transforming and shaping urban spaces, while contesting urban policies, addressing social vulnerabilities and including marginalized citizens. What are the key features, commonalities, and consequences of their actions? And how do these tie in with the public domain of spatial planning? While many scholars have addressed these questions based on studying (and comparing) single or multiple case studies [2,14,15], overarching studies are still rare. To develop such an understanding and to grasp the diversity of approaches and practices, we have structured our literature analysis of selected core articles in planning scholarship around five questions: (1) Who are these citizens that aim to (co-)shape urban spaces? (2) Where do they act? (3) What do they want to achieve? (4) How do they act and intervene in space? (5) By which roles do they collectively organize?

This paper aims to explore how citizens engage in urban spatial planning practices. It uses key examples from spatial planning literature to illustrate how these non-governmental actors aim to intervene in planning processes. We also identify the dilemmas they face to inform the wider debate on citizen engagement and urban governance. The paper is structured as follows. The next section outlines the emergence of citizen engagement as discussed in the planning literature. The method section introduces five key elements of spatial planning linked to the guiding questions listed above as a lens to analyze the selected literature. The result section points out how citizen engagement, their practices, perceptions of space, intentions and interventions disrupt and enrich the spatial planning arena. Building upon these results, we identify five dilemmas these citizens face which provide anchor points for the development of a more citizen-oriented and inclusive urban governance.

2. The Emerging Role of Citizens (Co-)Shaping Urban Spaces

Traditional conceptions of spatial planning are based on the deliberative intentions of (urban) governments to act upon spatial issues of significant societal problems such as public health, housing, energy supply, sustainability and climate change. During the past decades, in line with a wider shift in urban governance, the organization of public spatial planning shifted towards decentralization [2], participative planning [16] and co-creation [17,18]. The shift from government to governance [19] in the last decades acknowledges that actors have limited capability of realizing their ambitions independently and need diverse perspectives on social problems. Governance resulted in a shifting of rules and roles and increased collaboration between private, public and civic actors. Also, public planners increasingly aim to facilitate and collaborate with non-governmental actors. However, they often struggle in taking an enabling and facilitative role towards informal and civic based action. This is not surprising, as spatial planning has become an interactive

and complicated process, where clear societal agreements and expectations on how social groups can manage their collective affairs are rare [20].

An increasing number of articles point at the active role of citizens in spatial planning practices, transforming and (co-)shaping urban spaces, using a variety of terms. Some emphasize the relative independence of their actions from the state, using terms such as ‘citizen initiatives’ [12,20,21], ‘local sustainability initiatives’ [22], ‘informal actors’ or ‘non-planned’ planners’ [1], ‘self-governance’ and ‘self-organization’ [23,24], ‘do-it-yourself urban design’ [10], ‘do-it-yourself urbanism’ [25], ‘grassroots innovation’ [8], and ‘intentional communities’ [26]. Mens et al. [27] argue that actors involved in bottom-up urban developments have a hybrid origin, indicating that they are mixing characteristics of state, market and civil society. Others stress the specific nature of their actions, distinguishing ‘civic enterprises’ [28], ‘transition towns’ [9] and ‘creative engagement’ [29]. Furthermore, some authors focus on how civic action reconfigures (urban) governance arrangements and society at large, introducing terms like the ‘do-democracy’ [30], ‘energetic society’ [31], ‘urban commons’ [32], ‘urban social movements’ [11], sustainable place-shaping [33] or the ‘participative society’ [34]. Scholars have also mentioned several explanations for the rise of civic collective action, such as a renewed interest in community, place and local identity, the re-emergence of the social economy, the privatization of public services, and tensions between empowered ‘bottom-up’ initiatives and the changing role of the state [2,5,11].

The aftermath of the last financial crisis in Europe (after 2008) has accelerated the rise of non-state action in spatial planning scholarship. Taking aside normative judgements, this crisis opened a window for the setting of the groundwork to enable the grasping of the role of new (urban) actors in planning discussions and actions [1,8]. We hypothesize that these practices of citizen actors interfere with established (traditional) roles of professional spatial planners. Two patterns arise: citizen engagement as a complementary support of public action in the context of the participative society or as an independent people-centered approach [35]. Examples range from collective initiatives such as intentional communities, urban commons or transition towns to more radical opposition (connected to debates such as the right to the city or linked to urban social movements). Whereas the latter has a longer tradition in urban theory and research [25], the turn towards more independent place-shaping actors (blinded ref author) is the most recent one. It remains under-researched in spatial planning, while place-shaping actions unveil multiple starting points within and outside of urban governments.

3. Methods and Key Elements

The design of this study is inspired by similar work such as by Cozzolino et al. [36] on urban design, Igalla et al. [12] on citizen initiatives, and Frantzeskaki et al. [37] on changing roles of civil society in urban sustainability transitions. Our study contributes to a further conceptualization of urban place-shaping by collective citizen initiatives by quarrying through a selection of core readings. The aim is not to draft a systematic literature review but to explore the variety of citizens’ responses to urban challenges, drawing key examples from the literature to show how citizens engage in urban spaces and intervene in spatial planning. Following a brief discussion of the characteristics of spatial planning, we will describe five of its key elements which provide a conceptual lens to analyze the selected literature.

3.1. Spatial Planning

“Spatial planning” is a term that resonates throughout many planning systems across the globe [38]. It is being used as a label to describe (pan-)national, regional and aspects of local planning processes, and is used alongside other terms such as “town and country planning” and “land use planning”. A range of institutions such as the state, professional groups and academic commentators use it to describe the processes of planning reform, modernization, policy integration and strategic governance that are required to make planning fit for purpose in the twenty-first century [39]. According to Faludi [40] (p. 4),

the term “spatial planning” itself is ambiguous and an alien concept to North American and British planners immersed in town and country planning, particularly as it originated within German and Dutch planning ideologies. Healey [41] has situated spatial planning at the juncture of official state policy-making and as a requirement for joined-up government, characterized by a “fluidity, openness and multiple time–space relations of ‘relational complexity’ ideas”. In turn, Tewdwr-Jones [39] (p. 593) refers to planning practices as “providing proactive possibilities for the management of change, involving policy-making, policy integration, community participation, agency stake holding and development management”.

We define spatial planning here as the coordination of policies and practices regarding the organization of space, which is firmly embedded in (urban) governance as such [42]. Over the past decades, spatial planning literature has evolved from a more technocratic and top-down perspective towards notions such as collaborative planning [20], relational approaches [43] and evolutionary governance theory [42]. This emphasizes the engagement of varied actors in shaping places. Other scholars have referred to wider urban governance debates on for example co-production, actor-networks and public-private partnerships. Without attempting to cover the full range of the debate, we identify five key elements of spatial planning which we use as a lens to analyze a selection of key articles in depth.

(1) Actors: Who are these citizens that individually and collectively aim to (co-)shape urban spaces? This question refers to civic society actors and their performance of agency, understood as capacity to act. Their agency is intentional and individually or collectively expressed. Our assumption is that citizens negotiate their engagement and are capable of transforming places to their needs, ideas and values [44]. We explore the diversity, capacities and networks and collaborations in which citizens engage.

(2) Types of Space: Where do they act? We look here at the use, size, scale and time aspects of space and place. Space is the result of multiple conditions, relations and stories that materialize in specific locations [43]. Two perspectives informed our analysis. First, the conditions and relations existing in a specific moment of time. Second, the evolution of the conditions and relations over a period of time. As planning is essentially a multi-scalar activity of organizing a particular space that results in specific forms of design and use, we analyze where articles position citizen engagement in terms of scale, space and place.

(3) Intentions: What do they want to achieve? Planning addresses the key questions of what places are, could and should be. The transformative dynamic in planning is the search for ways of attaining a better quality of life [45] and of transforming the socio-spatial and institutional dimensions of how we live [46]. We look at planning endeavors from the perspective of change, though the theory of change which is used might differ. We analyze which ambitions are identified with regard to changing spaces.

(4) Interventions: How do they act and intervene in space? Purposeful interventions are key to spatial planning in order to transform space and place from their current state into how they should be in the future [47]. Seen from this perspective, the interventions of citizen initiatives can relate to and impact the spatial environment (the material world and its spatial and social characteristics) as well as the institutional environment (the domain of planning, policy and decision-making) [48]. We focus on the kinds of interventions in both the spatial and the institutional domain.

(5) Roles: By which roles do they collectively organize? A role is a set of behavioral patterns or actions that acts “as temporary stabilizations that overlap, complement—and sometimes even contradict each other” [49] (p. 200). Citizens organize by enacting a diversity of roles to manage expectations and to gain stability, and ultimately to perform their agency. Such role configurations change constantly and this process clarifies the meaning of planning in comparison to other activities [42]. With the term roles, we look for patterns of actions, rules in operation, methods or tools for collective interaction and changing relations to society and urban government.

3.2. Literature Review

The interest in how citizens challenge established planning arenas forms the starting point of the following literature review. We explored a long list of articles to discover relevant perspectives and approaches. We searched in literature databases using the keywords: citizenship, collective action, activism, participation, self-governance, self-organization, communities, civil society initiatives and engagement. We acknowledged different background conditions and contexts (such as the legal framework, cultural differences, and different systems of government and spatial planning) and focused on commonalities beyond such case-based differences. Furthermore, we limited the search to Anglo-American perspectives to maintain operability. The search was enriched by questions and talks to colleagues. The articles were checked for relevance by the number of direct references to these articles in Google Scholar and Web of Science.

We selected 15 key articles published rather recently (between 2005–2019) for an in-depth analysis. An article was selected when it takes our understanding of one of the described planning elements forward, but also contributes to an understanding of the other elements, thus covering all five key elements of spatial planning. Furthermore, the selection illustrates the wide variety of citizen engagement responding to or engaging in spatial planning via their own practices while addressing the needs of marginalized or socially vulnerable citizens. We went through iterative steps of discussing and narrowing down, opening again and adding papers, developing layers and typologies to make sense of the field to finally condensing to the set of 15 core articles (see Table 1).

Table 1. Theoretical perspective in the selected articles.

	Key Focus	Theoretical Perspective
Barr & Pollard (2017) [9]	Intentions	transition research, community resilience
Boonstra & Boelens (2011) [23]	Interventions	complex systems theory, actor-network theory, post-structuralism
Douglas (2014) [10]	Space	urban design, tactical urbanism
Eizenberg (2012) [32]	Space	urban commons, space
Groth & Corijn (2005) [1]	Interventions	urbanity, post-Fordism
Healey (2015) [2]	Actors	urban governance
Horelli et al. (2015) [15]	Actors	urban governance, co-governance
Iveson (2013) [25]	Interventions	right to the city
Kaika (2017) [50]	Intentions	resilience, sustainability
Novy & Colomb (2013) [11]	Space	creative economy
Pesch et al. (2019) [22]	Roles	socio-technical innovations
Sager (2018) [4]	Intentions	activist planning
Seyfang & Smith (2007) [8]	Actors	grassroots innovation
Van Assche & Verschraegen (2008) [42]	Roles	systems theory
Wittmayer et al. (2017) [51]	Roles	transition research, governance

Although enlightening, this chosen research strategy has some limitations. First, the selection is interest-based, starting from the perspective of planning scholars with the aim in mind to enhance the understanding of an enlarged spatial planning arena within the wider context of urban governance. While the articles led to a sufficient overview for our five key elements, we acknowledge that the selection is not exclusive. By including five scholars in our group of authors with a different expertise and interest (geography, spatial planning, design, transition studies, creative methods), we aimed to prevent an individual bias. The following sections further use the five key elements listed above to show commonalities and differences.

4. Results

4.1. Actors

Citizen engagement is either an individual endeavor or it takes place by forming collectives. Such collectives of citizens vary from networks [8], civil society enterprises [2], citizen initiatives [22], theme-based groups like urban gardeners [32], collectives of artists [1], and local communities [9,26,50], to forms of self-organization [15,23]. Literature that discusses do-it-yourself (DIY) urbanism reflects the individual actions of urban residents who are appropriating urban spaces [25], or are involved in greening or streetscaping [10]. Details on who exactly engages in these activities are often absent. Douglas [10], however, provides more information on the DIY-urban designers, noting that the vast majority qualify as members of the so-called “creative class”. Groth and Corijn [1], on the other hand, note that “the involvement of ‘informal’ actors is characterized by the formation of fluid platforms of ‘defense’ that are composed of participants from across different segments of society” (p. 522). The involved civil society stakeholders are defined by their tangible action rather than by a coherent identity or by personal characteristics.

Citizens use distinct social skills to accomplish their goals and to transfer individual intentions to collective actions. In many cases, they have a high level of social capital, a large and wide network, and skills in organization, communication, lobbying or mobilization. The capacity to engage others is crucial for collective action [1,11,26,32]. Design skills are relevant for DIY practices that are described as small-scale and creative, unauthorized yet intentionally and functional, and consist of civic-minded contributions or improvements to urban spaces in forms inspired by official infrastructure [10]. Kaika [50] further recognizes civic movements capable of professionalizing citizens by turning them “from indebted powerless objects into powerful decision makers who can reclaim their commons by producing alternative means of allocating and managing resources” (p. 97).

Citizens taking action can be summarized under broader labels such as intentional communities [26], transition town initiatives, or civil society initiatives [1,2,22,50]. They regularly organize themselves in multi-scale civic networks such as the transition town movement [9]. Boonstra and Boelens [23] refer to self-organizing initiatives as assemblages of actors fully in control of the actions they initiate, while also implying that actors do not control the dynamics that occur after an action has been initiated. Coalitions are formed to collaborate with others or to upscale. These include homogeneous ones like neighborhood coalitions of gardeners [32], more heterogeneous coalitions which are internally diverse [11], and “constellations of defense” against urban agenda and politics [1]. Compositions of actor groups also change over time, often starting with a small group of initiators and gradually expanding by inviting others to participate.

4.2. Types of Space

The literature shows the heterogeneity of actions taken by citizens while (co-)shaping places, and how they perceive space. First, they are engaged in physical urban locations that are indistinctly private or public property [22]. Actions such as co-housing and time banks [8] as well as new development areas in inner cities [11] and rural areas [2] are analyzed. However, part of the literature goes beyond physical space and discusses the role that digital spaces and platforms (e.g., Facebook, digital or real-time info-boards) play in both the recruitment of actors and the organization of action, as well as for the self-management of groups and their relation to urban government. Horelli et al. [15], for example, highlight how digital media have a role in self-organization and “in providing connections between the self-organized activities and the official actors and processes” (p. 289).

Second, the scale of action is considered. Many actions take place within specific neighborhoods or districts of cities [1,10,11,15,23,52]. At the same time, other initiatives are spread around several places in the same city, with different adaptations depending on the context [15,25,32,51]. Barr and Pollard [9] highlight how citizens are “acting at a range of scales, where visions of transition can be cast between groups, within places and

within management structures" (p. 60), creating narratives of complex and inter-connected relations in and through space, scale, and time.

The third characteristic is the size of the considered spaces. A contraposition between micro and macro levels highlights how small urban interventions and participatory city-making can contribute to systemic change beyond the boundaries of their individual locale [53]. Examples refer to small-scale civil society initiatives [2], bottom-up spaces [15], graffiti and advertising campaigns [25], and private houses [22]. Larger interventions and investments in urban areas function as catalysts for cultural and economic developments [54]. For example, Novy and Colomb [11] (p. 1824) focus on the macro level and "the largest urban development projects currently planned in Berlin . . . selling off numerous plots of city-owned land". Boonstra and Boelens [23] (p. 202) refer to "large vacant and undeveloped plots", reappropriated by citizens on the micro level.

Fourth, the articles show a large variety of places where non-planners act. They refer to 'invited spaces' such as community centers [52] where citizens meet, and to spaces which provide services or have specific functions [8,22] such as 'community gardens' [32], 'creative spaces' [11], places for 'common activities' [26] and repair cafés [22]. In antithesis to such spaces, other articles highlight how the actions of non-planners focus on non-productive spaces, vacant or abandoned spaces, or single vacant buildings [2,11,25,50].

Fifth, space is considered as a trigger to act within urban environments. It is an entity that stimulates collective action that often stems from the meaning that non-planners give to a specific space as being open to reinterpretation [10]. The trigger can be related to a sense of urgency [2,50], the relative proximity to the home or workplace [10,52,55], the aim to become part of a broader movement [32], or the urgency to act on a strategic area for the city in order to stimulate transformations [9,11,25,26].

4.3. Intentions

The literature describes the intentions of citizens, the practices which they spark and the underlying motivations for them. Descriptions often focus on their activist or progressive ambitions, aiming to directly improve local situations and/or to challenge existing policies and ways in which a particular place is organized. Seyfang and Smith [8], for example, refer to grassroots innovations as networks of activists and organizations generating novel bottom-up solutions for sustainable development. Citizens also organize to reclaim the city by including "the voices of the excluded and oppressed" [56] (p. 543), by reviving suppressed cultural practices [32] (p. 773), by recognizing "those who have no part" [25] (p. 946) in the urban realm, by (re)appropriating urban space, and by allowing a more open use of the city via artistic experimentation. Their intentions result in the politicizing of spatial issues. For example, DIY urbanists in the cities of Sydney, New York and Madrid staged a disagreement, pleading to link urban practices with an urban politics of the inhabitant [25]. However, citizen engagement can also take a political position by deliberately choosing not to be included in existing policy frameworks [50].

The described intentions spur specific actions and practices, which cover the following: producing goods, facilities and (access to) services [2,8,22], promoting new ways of doing things, 'fixing' a spatial issue, or making improvements to the city [1,10,25], promoting and providing alternatives to dominant practices or current regimes in the contexts of fields such as food or housing [22,26,32,50,51], or remedying some neglect or proposal that has aroused community protest [11,15]. Other intentions refer to the contestation of wider urban trends. Citizens form 'constellations of defense', as a protest against homogenization and commodification of urban space [1] (p. 1821). Intentions and practices are rooted in underlying motives categorized by Sager [26] as loyalty to a group or a community (e.g., advocacy planning community-based activists), commitment to a strategic cause, pursuing the goal of changing social structures in specific ways (e.g., radical planning and critical-alternative initiatives), commitment to a relational cause, aiming to improve the relationship between social groups or interests (e.g., intermediate activist planning).

Many actions are inherently intentional, as illustrated above, rooted in discontent with urban policies or with the prevailing spatial and economic order. However, intentions can also be implicit, not or only partly focused on outspoken ambitions. As Douglas [10] and Iveson [25] mention, immediate actions can look spontaneous and non-intentional at first sight, but reveal an implicit intention at a second look. These interventions can be a response to wider urban structuring processes such as “state disinvestment, commodification, gentrification, and a general intensification of uneven development” [10] (p. 10). Self-organization is sometimes considered as a spontaneous process and not focused on predetermined grand ideas or ambitions, such as the democratic promise of empowerment or political renewal [23]. However, Horelli et al. [15] respond by claiming that self-organization can also be seen as a new form of citizen activism and citizen participation, complementing formal top-down processes.

Finally, Van Assche and Verschraegen [42] remind us of the limits of planning in getting an overview of all available intentions and their expressions in communication or action: “As modern society involves a far greater differentiation than earlier societies [. . .] the multiplicity of observation sites (in planning, for instance) leads to a mutual (and necessary) blindness for each other’s observations, to ‘blind spots’” (pp. 268–270). They claim that intentional steering of oneself is much more likely to succeed than intentionally steering the actions of others. Like self-organizing societies, citizens create their own institutions and policies to organize space, creating their own roles of planners and trying to solve self-created and self-defined coordination problems.

4.4. Interventions

Citizens perceive their engagement as a right to intervene in space and act accordingly [10,25]. They do so in varied ways, with some of their interventions relating to and impacting the spatial environment and others to the institutional environment, and in some cases both. With regard to the spatial environment, three types of interventions stand out. The first involves, doing direct informal spatial adjustments. Here, Douglas [10] makes a distinction between guerilla greening (e.g., throwing seed bombs), spontaneous streetscaping (e.g., placing additional public street furniture) and aspirational urbanism (e.g., putting up ‘coming soon’ signs for hoped-for public parks). Second, citizens strategically develop alternative uses of space with the aim to challenge dominant orders. For instance, Eizenberg [32] describes community garden initiatives in which cultivating the land of abandoned and dismantled urban lots was “part of a wider phenomenon of urban contestation by which space is utilized to voice and fight for alternative socio-political arrangements” (p. 767). An alternative use of space can also be of a much shorter or more cyclic nature, such as the temporary reappropriation and animation of ‘indeterminate’ spaces [1] or the ‘Zwischennutzung’ in Berlin [11] and be used to prevent instead of to stimulate certain developments [25]. Third, citizens take up the production of goods, facilities or services. Healey [2], for example, pointed to the Bell View Resource Centre in the UK, which started in response to the closure of a local care home facility and provides health and social care services.

In the institutional environment, citizen engagement influences policy and decision-making through agenda-setting, coalition-building and even producing alternative plans. Interventions can take place as a form of protest against unwanted developments, including filing legal complaints or running petitions to enforce public referenda [1]. In some cases, activists manage to enforce a non-binding public referendum, which “put tremendous pressure on district politicians to modify the existing plans for the area” [11]. Instead of reacting to unwanted developments, citizens also undertake interventions from a proactive stance. Kaika [50], for example, refers to a citizens’ collective in Thessaloniki that fought the privatization of the municipal water company. The collective “instituted the practices and means for citizens to buy up the water company and make it a citizen’s collective when it came up for privatization” (p. 97). Sager [26] explains how residents of an intentional community in Trondheim made their own development plans and critically

replied to government reports, and thus “used planning strategically to mobilize and build external support, to frame the cooperation with the municipality and to establish a legal underpinning of the community” (p. 1). Other authors referred to cases in which non-planners produced alternative plans for the future development and management of certain spaces [1,11].

Next to conventional forms, interventions in space are also based on playful and creative means. Activism, as Novy and Colomb [11] (p. 1831) rightfully remarked, “does not have to mean dry speeches, tedious chants and worn-out slogans. It can involve theatre, music, playful and ironic subversion of media and place-marketing discourses”. Playful, creative and experimental forms of intervention can help to gain wide media coverage and gain a public stance [1], and they are able to bridge the gap between activists and the wider audience, including those who are not receptive to conventional routines of protest [11]. In this regard, Iveson [25] notes that employing multiple forms of ‘public address’ helps activists to publicize their actions and agenda and to establish themselves as a serious collective.

4.5. Roles

Roles of citizens emerge from actions. They are often enacted way before public administration turns a view towards them [2], but remain in a constant social production and reproduction through recognizable activities [51]. In these processes, citizens take roles that are not taken by other actors and tend to work in niches that are unpopular among public and political actors. Kaika [50] points to radical practices of citizens’ self-empowerment towards decision-makers in the water movement of Thessaloniki. Such citizen engagement shows a deep awareness of a broader urban picture [1,10,11]. By enacting their own action-oriented roles, established roles about who controls, designs, pays and makes get challenged. Citizens mobilize energy and resources from within their own spheres. They are motivated by a ‘can-do’ attitude [2] and through ‘do-it-yourself’ practices [25].

Regarding tactual roles, citizens operate with a distinctive set of rules which might be perceived by others as not conventional [1] and with a functional character to produce or to deliver what is otherwise not available or achievable [55]. Roles sit at different positions between a market and a social economy and stress niche innovations for social purposes [8,22]. In intentional communities, citizens organize around solidarity and collectivity and plan accordingly to “create frameworks for alternative ways of living” [26] (pp. 452–455). Transition towns go further and also combine activist roles with individual spiritual development [9]. In the lack of a legally or economically powerful position, important roles of citizens are creating consensus, supporting their community and democratizing processes in flat hierarchies [22,26].

Citizen engagement can be understood as a spatial organization with a specific set of tools. They interact by means of imagining, visioning and immediately practicing against the background of global socio-environmental inequality [50]. They transform spaces while themselves being in transformation [9] and take bottom-up actions as colonizers of urban space [1]. Organizational forms fitting to these purposes are the commons [32,50] and non-private forms of ownership [11], including the temporary or lasting illegal appropriation of spaces [1,10,25]. On a cautionary note, Novy and Colomb [11] warn of the danger of ‘militant particularism’ and argue for constructive co-production with public authorities.

Beyond themselves, collective citizen initiatives can take a role by politicizing small-scale actions. Eizenberg [32] observes that community garden initiatives in New York City were even on the way to becoming like planners with a distinct set of knowledge, coalitions and agendas. A precondition for such initiatives is a fundamental acknowledgement of diversity [23] and a radical pluralism [1] that confronts a variety of public steering ambitions and steering problems [42]. Citizens also act as builders of coalitions, opening up public debates or influencing political processes [1], for instance, by altering positions and commitments of other actors through engaging in and learning from grassroots innovation

and learning [8]. It is for these reasons that some argue to move beyond a fixed definition of spatial planning and fixed roles of planners [42] and to open the perspective for a loose network around actions [9].

5. Discussion

The analysis above points at the variety in actors, spaces, intentions, interventions and roles that configure citizens actions in urban spaces, allowing the identification of five central dilemmas of citizen engagement linked to urban governance. These dilemmas reflect continuums along which initiatives position themselves which might provide an anchor point for governments where support is needed to facilitate successful collective citizen initiatives. While the notion of governance implies building relations between governmental and non-governmental actors, our analysis can inform discourses on urban governance so they become more inclusive, hopefully enriching the existing public planning repertoire (Table 2).

Table 2. Dilemmas of citizen initiatives engaging in spatial planning.

Elements of Planning	Dilemmas
Intentions and roles	Ideological ↔ Pragmatic
Relation to public planning	Autonomy ↔ Dependency
Shaping urban spaces	Implicit ↔ Explicit
Time dimension	Short-term ↔ Long-term
Type of intervention	Re-constructing space ↔ Shaping something new

The first dilemma deals with the choice citizens face between ideological versus more pragmatic intentions and roles. Citizen initiatives challenge urban development agendas and underlying political and/or economic systems, explicitly aiming to open a public forum (or literally public space) for democratic discussion of alternative urban futures [1,9,11]. For example, in Berlin citizens protested against the masterplan for the waterfront, illustrating dissatisfaction with the massive scale and nature of privatization, gentrification, displacement of community networks and destruction of Berlin's alternative cultures [11] (p. 1827). Dissatisfaction or disillusion with the prevailing order rebalances power towards greater equity between institutional actors [56]. Citizens draw on their own ideology to develop their own 'city within the city' [25], 'world within a world' [8] or 'world in a confined space' [26]. Meanwhile, a great deal of pragmatism is displayed in building coalitions and raising awareness, staging a confrontation of alternatives, getting access to services and building capacities for change [8]. Ideological intentions and pragmatic actions can coincide if there is an openness for dissent, radical imaginaries and practices while also achieving tangible results. In these situations, civic-led activities come close to the realm of public spatial planning and urban governments.

Second, participation and activism raise dilemmas between autonomy and dependency, spanning the second continuum. Whether an initiative needs others in order to realize its goals becomes visible in varying degrees of resistance to and cooperation with public authorities. Iveson [25] observes that citizen initiatives are exploiters of gaps in urban systems and stage a productive confrontation of 'two cities', one that currently is and one that should be. The fundamental tension they face is to change the system while working within exactly this system [9]. While citizen initiatives usually start from a perspective of autonomy, over time, they often form coalitions to collaborate with others or upscale their activities to achieve goals by activating public resources [2]. Sager [26] provides the example of a conflict within intentional communities which runs between anti-authoritarian activists and those who believe in cooperation with government. Protest is the likely strategy of the hard-liners while the collaborative wing is more apt to go for a mixed protest-and-planning strategy ... some members give priority to the ideological

core while others see resistance against eviction and other immediate threats to the community as the most pressing concern. The intentional community also has to balance the fight for political ideals with members' needs to pursue their creative, artistic or musical projects [26] (p. 456). Thus, while the rise of citizen engagement in spatial planning is part of a shift in urban governance in which individuals and collectives claim or are invited to take over the responsibility of professionals [12], this comes with risks for internal group cohesion as well as marginalization or co-optation by public authorities or private actors.

The intentions of citizens vary between implicitly and explicitly designing and managing spatial change, which makes up a third dilemma. Although a collective initiative might have a joint goal, the level to which intentions of its members are aligned can vary [14]). Explicit collective intentions cover protest, contestation, creating alternative spaces and setting up communities around certain beliefs or values. Spontaneous immediate actions can look non-intentional at first sight, but reveal an implicit intention at a second look [10,25]. Motivations driving citizen actions can be based on geographical connections [22,52], discontent caused by what is going on there [15,50], and the symbolic nature of the space where they act [10,11]. The analyzed articles portray varied strategies and tactics of intentional steering additional to or even replacing those of public spatial planners. While the latter have found ways to build partnerships with civic actions based on explicitly shared interactions, the challenge remains to establish productive relationships with more implicit and spontaneous civic actions (blinded ref author).

The fourth dilemma spans practices oriented towards short-term and long-term impact. The interest in short-term actions and improvements can be simply given by the motivation to fix a thing [10], or by occupying an underused space in a spontaneous bottom-up action [1]. Citizens differ, however, in their perspectives on establishing long-term organizations or structures that can have an enduring impact. For instance, urban commons are one of many different ways of collectively organizing space, supporting knowledge development and exchanging and securing a diversity of perspectives, needs and desires [32]. The rise of civic action urges, where appropriate, for a reconceptualization of spatial planning that appreciates the often small, here and now-based contributions to spatial changes, developing the structures conditional for pursuing longer term impact.

The fifth and final dilemma deals with the question of what should be shaped: something new or re-constructing existing spaces and buildings. Groth and Corijn [1], for example, describe how informal actors aimed to influence the planning agenda by means of temporary reappropriation and animation of 'indeterminate' spaces in Helsinki, Berlin and Brussels. The case of Berlin shows how an urban wasteland near the river Spree was re-appropriated by pioneers providing free space for the establishment of cultural and social projects on the secluded site. More than "a mere artist's colony and a cultural incubator", the site became an important venue for political debate and several Berlin-based grassroots initiatives [1]. Citizens deliberately intervene in space, especially in those cases where they perceive a great need for this or in the opportunities of 'obsolete spaces' [1]. By acting, they show their "right to make known their ideas on the space and time of their activities in the urban area" [57] (p. 34). They also apply this right to rebuild and reconstruct the city in a completely different image [58]. They (un)intentionally develop and shape places. By using their agency, they put more weight on the part of spatial planning that goes beyond regulating and maintaining places, into the realm of creating more livable, sustainable and inclusive spaces for the future.

6. Conclusions

Systematically discussing citizen engagement in spatial planning helps to better understand the different actors, types of spaces, intentions, interventions and roles involved, and how this can disrupt and enrich the planning arena and inform the wider debate on a more inclusive urban governance. This paper considers spatial planning as crucially embedded in urban governance, aiming to include non-governmental actors in strategic decision making, in the development of spatial policies and plans, but likewise in acting and in shaping

urban spaces. The examples derived from the literature show a diversity of perspectives describing a variety of citizen practices in urban contexts. This allowed for proposing an overarching analysis of five dilemmas which citizens face while engaging in (re)shaping places. These dilemmas can inform urban governance debates by considering citizens as 'spatial planners', thus reconceptualizing the scope and meaning of spatial planning.

Through their actions, citizens interfere with (traditional) roles of public spatial planners. By taking responsibility, they engage in the complicating and enduring juggling of balancing ideological intentions and pragmatic possibilities. In advancing their immediate (spatial) environment, they act as activists, producers of public goods, raisers of political awareness, facilitators of debates and missionaries, envisioning radically different urban futures and addressing vulnerabilities of the excluded and marginalized in communities. Through their actions and interventions, they also force public spatial planning and urban governments to open up to more spontaneous transformation.

The selected articles make regular use of the term community. However, we speak instead of citizens and collectives of citizens because the use of the term community differs widely. The notion of community is often used nonspecifically and sometimes follows overly positive interpretations to frame practical attempts to mitigate vulnerability and inequity, which can be harmful [35]. Both community and community-based are applied extensively, highlighting what is believed to be a people-centered, participatory, or grassroots-level approach.

Spatial planners increasingly use several planning tools and strategies to include citizens. These vary from established consultation and participatory formats to neighborhood dialogue, serious games, living labs, art-based interventions, and public online debates [59,60]. Such possibilities for participation are mediated by the wider context including the cultural setting, institutional characteristics, legal systems and bureaucratic procedures. While our findings are restricted to the domain of spatial planning, they have implications for wider academic debates on urban governance. Demands for inclusiveness and political representation cannot be met by spatial planning alone. Inspired by the five dilemmas, we plea for an urban governance approach which (1) goes beyond regulating and maintaining places and into the realm of creating more livable, sustainable and inclusive spaces for the future; (2) focuses less on incremental, short-term change but instead develops the structures conditional for pursuing a longer term impact; (3) includes citizens pro-actively and earlier in the first stages of visioning and policy-making, instead of merely in the implementation phase; and (4) explores new tools for (political) representation, such as citizen assemblies [61] and food policy councils [62].

Meanwhile, a citizen-oriented perspective on urban governance also evokes concerns. Citizen actions hold the danger of elitist practices. The reviewed examples only touch upon fundamental questions of inclusion and exclusion. Although many practices emerge from a feeling of exclusion or negligence, initiatives themselves may exclude others by focusing on their own actions. Resource conflicts over money, buildings and land, but also conflicts on participation and decision-making may shift instead of being resolved. While this leads to the inclusion of some, it simultaneously is susceptible to the exclusion of others. Moreover, if civic action takes on tasks which can be considered as a governmental responsibility, it may put significant pressure on volunteering non-professionals [63,64]. In this sense, it is important that urban governments and the state keep their role as "a 'space of oversight' of the landscape of civil society initiatives" [2] (p. 116), making visible and preventing such risks.

More research is needed on how urban governance can support and facilitate inclusive citizen engagement in dealing with the identified dilemmas in different institutional and cultural contexts. We call for a practical investigation on selected urban areas around the world to see the actual fit of the findings in this paper. We would also welcome more large-scale international comparisons between cases as well as quantitative studies, contributing to a broader body of knowledge on the practices of citizen initiatives and how these impact the spatial planning arena. Such an endeavor can be especially fruitful when covering

further geographical contexts and theories from the Global South and Global East. With this paper we hope to stimulate the wider debate on how citizen engagement can support the dynamic transformation of urban settlements, and how the growing influence of citizens raises questions, such as what spatial planning is and what it is not, and, ultimately, what it might become.

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