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- Untitled by Peter Lyssiotis
- ‘Weather Project’ at Tate Modern, by Olafur Eliasson
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Cities everywhere are fragmenting. Differences in social, economic, and cultural identity are increasingly articulated by the built environment. In almost every city there is evidence for the emergence of an ‘archipelago society’, an urban patchwork of isolated differences. Shared spaces everywhere are under threat.

Belfast is already a city splintered into polarized territories. The stark segregation has not only been driven from within the two communities, but also reinforced through the planning of infrastructure and the distribution of land uses in the city. Citizenship in Northern Ireland has been understood almost exclusively as a politics of identity rather than also as a politics of place. As a direct result, a whole range of environmental issues of local and regional concern to both communities have remained largely un-championed. Meanwhile, structures of government have been left highly-centralized and locally-unaccountable in response to thirty years of civil conflict. The construction industry has taken advantage of both these conditions by leading the way with generic commercial developments familiar from fragmenting cities elsewhere, often indifferent to local social, spatial, and environmental contexts.

Despite the peace dividend, there appears as yet to be little movement to decommission the ‘carceral’ city and the mechanisms that produce it, or to imagine dynamic pluralist alternatives. While there have been numerous attempts at generating new ‘city visions’, much of this is premised on the denial of existing conditions in favour of idealised futures. What is at stake is the public life of the city.

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Building initiative offers a critique of development in Belfast since the peace process, demonstrates alternative models from elsewhere, and aims to open up paths of initiative for civil enterprise to resume its formative role in the built environment in Northern Ireland. By ‘civil enterprise’ we mean economic, social, and political development that creates diverse, accessible, integrated places. We propose that this requires a manifold approach:

- the refinement of institutions and instruments of governance (i.e. top-down)
- the development of inclusionary practices of citizenship to challenge ‘cultural clientelism’ (i.e. bottom-up);
- capacity-building for creative solutions in the construction industry (i.e. sideways).

Before discussing these proposals in more detail, let us first look at contemporary Belfast, at the spaces and buildings that have accompanied its recent resurgence. The perception of Belfast is in transition from that of a ‘troubled’ city to a ‘lived’ city. To what extent is this transformation real; is it simply superimposed on intractable conditions; is it only imagined?
The character of Belfast’s buildings and streets is unique. The grand scale of the city centre contrasts with the intimacy of the terraced housing that surrounds it. The grid of the centre of the city brings together buildings of very large scale to frame distant views of the hills. Networks of small streets bring together accessible and modest accommodation in a model for ‘sustainable communities’.

These are the places that make Belfast very special. Like all buildings they need periodic maintenance and upgrading as they age. In many parts of the city, however, they are instead being demolished. Along with them are lost not only buildings of individual architectural merit, but also often the streetscapes of the city and the paths of universal access from one area to another.
yellow initiatives

The yellow initiatives will try to apply some of the thinking from the case studies – in general, or specifically – in real and polemic proposals for Belfast. Each initiative is under development in collaboration or discussion with an appropriate local partner in order to address specific issues identified earlier in the analysis. This is a mechanism not only to disseminate the ideas of the project as widely as possible among built environment actors, networks, and institutions, but also to access additional knowledge, expertise, and production resources. The development of the initiatives is guided by three principles:

- incompleteness: The initiatives are an attempt to seed an idea: some will take root, others will not. The project team will develop and document each, regardless of their level of completion, for inclusion in the project outputs.

- possibility: Each initiative will draw on the case studies in general or in particular, but the intention is to extend the envelope of possibility in Belfast, rather than to impose a set of ideal models.

- resemblance: To facilitate the assembly of the project outputs, the initiatives will establish consistency through a range of recognisable common features, such as the colour yellow, certain terms such as ‘civil enterprise’, and a common process of documentation.

Recently, a new building type has emerged in Belfast in the form of large-scale city-centre apartment buildings. These offer arrangements of domestic living new to the city, and sometimes incorporate shopping and entertainment venues. In the right context, with a good mix of uses, and an appropriate scale, these can contribute hugely to the ‘liveability’ of the city, for residents and passers-by alike.

Sometimes, however, these apartment buildings are disconnected from the scale and grain of the city and sit as isolated blocks. Often they are fuelled by investment and speculation, becoming rental enclaves. They are at their most contentious when they coincide with the territorial lines of the two communities. Might there be other ways of procuring housing, other scales of development, other ways of designing that can deal with the complex spatial and social realities of Belfast?
institutions

The test of any city is the nature of its institutions, some of which have a particular presence in the built environment. They can have an important impact on the street-life and conviviality of the city. The improvements to Belfast’s courthouse, for example, have given it a more civil relationship to the spaces around it.

The recent renovation of St. George’s Market adjacent has provided a new lease of life for another key public building. In use twice weekly, the market hall offers a valuable outlet for small-scale producers and specialist retailers, demonstrating the vitality they bring to the city. Meanwhile, more established traders in the comparable North Street Arcade saw their businesses destroyed by arson, in an area under some regeneration pressure.

delivery concept

The content for the exhibition, events, and publication is composed of four strands:

1. a short introduction to contemporary urban theory, drawing on current literature from the fields of planning, human geography, urban sociology, and architecture (~10%);

2. a short analysis of the built environment in Belfast and of the way it is produced, drawing on primary research by the project team and secondary academic and policy sources (~30%);

3. a series of case studies of social and spatial projects that demonstrate ‘civil enterprise’ through alternative approaches to shaping the built environment, mainly secondary research (~20-30%);

4. a catalogue of yellow initiatives for Belfast, generated by the project team as outreach/advocacy, to raise awareness and activate enthusiasm for the possibilities of the city (~30-40%).
design concept

At the far end of the hall is a giant semi-circular form made up of hundreds of mono-frequency lamps... Generally used in street lighting, mono-frequency lamps emit light at such a narrow frequency that colours other than yellow and black are invisible, thus transforming the visual field around the sun into a vast duotone landscape.

- The weather project at Tate Modern

We aim to catch the imagination of Belfast with a bold and striking image based on the primary colour yellow. The same tone is used in all the project outputs: yellow light, yellow sunglasses, yellow paint, yellow light bulbs, yellow clothes, etc. to make yellow spaces, yellow surfaces, yellow artefacts.

The yellow table is a key instrument, a peripatetic device roaming through the city demonstrating the link between colour and consensus. The yellow room is a venue for hospitality and conviviality, but also difference and perhaps confrontation. The yellow book gathers the process together as a document and a pledge. Yellow events take place at the yellow table or in the yellow room. Their purpose is to add the final chapters to the yellow book before its dissemination.

Maysfield Leisure Centre was until recently a well-used cross-community resource. An anchor for the social, entertainment, and sporting life of the city, the buildings themselves have however not aged well, and the poor relationship of the existing buildings to the city and river leaves enormous potential for refurbishment or even rebuilding. However, rather than seizing the opportunity to renew Maysfield, in 2004 the elected City Council, under severe budgetary pressure, decided to close it. The relatively neutral and accessible location, adjacent to the central train station and bus services, makes it highly desirable as a development site, but lacking a political champion. While the future of the site remains uncertain, the social capital built up in this institution has simply been ‘cashed in’. Where in Belfast are the new institutions to continue this work? Can Belfast City Council be relied on to develop and defend them? Or might there be other starting points?
regeneration

In the context of the past decades in Belfast, the building of any new public building can only be a vote of confidence in the future of public life in the city. The construction of the Waterfront Hall is very welcome. However it is placed within a new ‘premium’ precinct, isolated by the arteries of trunk roads, railway tracks, viaducts, and the Lagan itself.

The Waterfront quarter not only repeats the segregated pattern familiar in ‘splintering urbanism’ around the world. It compounds these problems by poor urban design. Because the district is disconnected from the rest of the city, its public spaces lead nowhere and are accordingly deserted. People can’t easily get there on foot, nor get from there to anywhere else. The quayside is dead.

yellow space is planned as a series of events, round-table discussions, and actions around the city mid-2006, drawing together a range of different actors and institutions. Its aim is to bring to people’s consciousness a set of possibilities about the future of their city, a range of ideas and ways to imagine how confrontation, negotiation, and compromise might be handled. We invite them to engage with the existing realities of Belfast and generate ideas and commitments as to how to make Belfast a more open city. We see the challenges facing Belfast as particular but not unique, and could imagine the same project having equal relevance in practically any other contemporary city.

how can Belfast become more yellow?

The notion that there can be some escape into a transcendent civic or even cosmopolitan culture where values and meanings are held in common, without confronting, negotiating, and compromising over identity conflict... seems well-meaning but misplaced.

These weaknesses are repeated in the architectural design of the buildings. The office-, hotel-, apartment-, and multi-storey carpark buildings are of large scale and appear as an incoherent jumble. Their generic architectural design is placeless, to the extent that many do not even have opening windows. The proliferation of gated entries, blank walls, and ground-floor carparks makes for a demoralising experience at street level.

These are Belfast spaces segregated along newly-drawn lines of difference, and for wholly new reasons. The opportunities that come with a wonderful public building and a superb waterfront site have been squandered. Will the same mistakes be made in the further development of Laganside? What sort of urban futures does Belfast want for these areas?
Belfast has been described as the most car-oriented city in the United Kingdom. More than most cities, extensive swathes of public space are given over to traffic circulation, much of this configured as one-way multi-lane trunk arteries. These spaces are highly repellent for pedestrians and cyclists. How useful are they really?

This accordingly has a severe impact on the amount of retail and other uses that will be attracted to such streets. Multi-lane roads and flyovers make it difficult to reach certain parts of the city except by car. A tangle of road and rail infrastructure cuts off the riverside, and, when there, make it unpleasant to stay.

After the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989, the majority of the old tenement buildings in the districts of East Berlin were in very poor condition and hence sparsely populated. The houses, which had been in state ownership in the socialist period, reverted to the original owners and/or were repurchased by the city government. An enormous modernization program was required not only to bring these buildings up to habitable standard, but also to tackle the environmental and social degradation of such widespread building vacancy. Accordingly, the city government extended a programme of incentives developed to address the same problems that had arisen in the western part of the city in previous years.

Schwedterstraße 26
Berlin, Germany

Schwedter Strasse 26 is one example of the widespread and diverse outcomes of this programme. Initiated by a group of architects, the building, which dated from 1870, was collectively acquired, modernised, and extended. The project was financed through grants from the city government’s urban regeneration programme (10%), self-finance (30%), self-build ‘sweat equity’ by the architects (15%), and the remaining 45% through loans. The building was thoroughly refurbished, a café opened on the ground floor, and two extra floors provided on the roof. Sitting tenants retained their apartments, and the owners now also live in the building. As apartments are periodically vacated, any new tenants must qualify for social housing support. The project demonstrates an initiative by architects who have expanded and redefined their role and have contributed directly to the social and architectural renewal of the city.
Statue Park Museum
Budapest, Hungary

Budapest’s Statue Park Museum is a unique outdoor collection of ‘de-commissioned’ statuary, memorials, and monuments from the communist era. The original idea, which had first come from a writer, could easily have been perceived as an ironic joke, but instead led to a profound civic process. Since 1989 heated public debate had raged throughout the former Soviet bloc over what to do with these relics. In most cases, the state simply removed everything. In Budapest, however, the elected City Council proposed a process by which each district of the city would decide by referendum the fate its statues. Citizens would have one of three choices for each monument: a) keep it in place; b) have it destroyed; c) contribute it to the Statue Park Museum.

To attempt a democratic process in such a situation was not only a complex undertaking, but highly risky. The vote became a focus for diverse and divisive feelings about the fall of communism. It brought to light pain, hatred, and anger, but also unexpected allegiances and unforeseen, non-ideological, feelings of ownership. It demonstrates that there is never one single ‘collective memory’ of place, but conflicting memories and layers of history. What in the short term proved to be a deeply uncomfortable process may, in the long term, help the city to come to terms with history more profoundly than an overnight ‘erasure’. This is, however, difficult to measure. It is perhaps indicative that, while the museum was finally opened in 1993, it remains unfinished, ostensibly for financial reasons.

The ‘Westlink’ carving west of the city centre (to the right of picture)

These characteristics of infrastructure have also been used as an instrument of urban spatial control, separating and segregating different parts of the city. The construction of trunk roads surrounding the city centre facilitated its management as a separate ‘control zone’. But they also cut it off from its hinterland, leading to the loss of business, the duplication of services, and ‘building in’ the separation of communities.

The Westlink most notably was used to separate the two communities in West Belfast from the city centre. Interestingly, however, the issue of further Westlink expansion has recently brought together the two communities in united, if rather uneasy, opposition. The two halves of Roden Street cooperated in protest on environmental grounds against a wider, higher capacity ‘Westlink’. Might they take this idea further, reimagine their environment, reinvent infrastructure as connective rather than divisive?
The continuity of the pattern of streets is crucial in facilitating all sorts of social and economic linkages across the city. In Belfast this continuity is in places severely compromised by ‘peace walls’ and combined with techniques of ‘wedge planning’ (where industrial zones or infrastructural arteries are used in place of actual walls). They enforce new or disputed territorial boundaries, or simply reinforce existing ones. Living in the shadow of such artefacts must be arduous, until one considers the alternative. Local attempts continue to be made to mitigate their impact on daily life, through landscaping and other community projects. These are only a minor relief from the banality of such stark utilitarianism, but are the first steps in an important and often thankless task of community capacity-building.

Bristol Wireless is a volunteer-run co-operative committed to social development through the building of a wireless computer network. Set up by a group of under-employed IT professionals inspired by the ‘Open Source’ software movement, it takes advantage of the mounting warehouses of redundant computers being set aside by industries obsessed with upgrading. Combining free software and second-hand hardware, it has created a large wide-area "intranet" owned and managed by its participants. Freely-distributable and alterable software is promoted by providing training, support and advocacy. This enables communities to bypass the large corporations that generally manage access to the Internet and its opportunities, and purchase large amounts of bandwidth co-operatively to give their network users wider internet access.

Bristol Wireless has since grown to include community organisations, churches, local music groups, educational institutions, regeneration bodies, ethnic and cultural groups, local football teams, community health workers, Neighbourhood Watch members and many individuals. The network allows these to communicate with each other and freely access the internet; also provided are television, telephone and radio distributing locally-focused content. The equipment is primarily recycled and home-made, with many reconditioned computers being provided free. What is often thought of as ‘globalizing technology’ has been harnessed to provide an accessible and locally-focussed resource.
Little Italy Neighbourhood Developers (LIND)
San Diego, California

In 1995, a local San Diego development agency requested proposals to develop an entire block in the Little Italy district of the city. It wanted to avoid the big apartment projects typical to most inner city projects built by large developers and, instead, sought to promote a series of smaller, independent projects as a way of working with the spirit and scale of the original land use. A group of local architects formed the Little Italy Neighbourhood Developers (LIND) and made a proposal to develop the block in a way that allowed each architect to design a smaller, individual part. The block was to be divided into several different-sized sites with shared gardens and off-street parking on the interior of the block. Notable are the absence of underground parking, the combination of live/work studio spaces with more-or-less typical apartments, the spatial complexity of the interiors, and the affordability of the final product.

This project began with a proposal by the local authority, which then a combined architect/developer/builder group took forward, gave it shape, and delivered it. It shows how initiatives can emerge not just from the real estate market, but still rely on and use the market in order to be realised. A ‘community of interest’ formed around this development, based around novel ideas about specification, arrangement, and type, which the market on its own would not have found. The relationships developed through this process help to mediate the inevitable compromises needed over the management and use of the shared spaces throughout the block.

The physical presence of the peace walls, shocking as it is, masks a deeper, even more insidious phenomenon. The conflict-era planning strategy for Belfast has been called ‘the construction of emptiness’. This goes beyond the simple segregation of the two communities one from the other. The security mentality of government bodies continues to apply the long-debunked concept of ‘defensible space’ to create communities that are segregated within themselves.

The grid of Belfast’s residential streets has been replaced with a patchwork of cul-de-sacs. The cutting of the urban grain in this way means everywhere becomes impermeable, isolated, peripheral. The essence of urbanity is connectivity, accessibility, commonality, utility. How can such built form be ‘decommissioned’? How can the residential districts of Belfast be retro-fitted for city life?
Every city deals with issues of identity in different ways. Some cities become weighed down with representations, especially when these are perceived as exclusive of others. Belfast’s gable-end murals have often been perceived (and sometimes intended) in this way. Many have accordingly been ‘decommissioned’ through the peace process. This has involved their over-painting or painting-out by members of the community who initially produced them. Sometimes the underlying image remains ghosted beneath the new layer, suggesting unfinished business. Others have proved that it is possible to separate the medium from the message, and create murals that contribute new themes and generate new motifs.

The estate, in a popular district of south Berlin, was originally built in 1952/3 as basic accommodation for refugees from Eastern Europe. In the following decades the building fabric deteriorated and the area gradually became a ‘sink estate’, stigmatised as a place for antisocial and criminal behaviour. In the late 1980’s the housing association which owned the buildings planned to demolish the whole estate.

This proposal was immediately met with opposition from the residents, who organised themselves into a group and drew on the services of Baufrösche, an Architecture and Planning office with a strong record in integrated and ecological development. Baufrösche developed an alternative plan which envisaged the renovation and extension of the existing buildings by the addition of an extra storey, the relandscaping of the open spaces, and the provision of a new collective heating plant.

During the 4 years of phased construction work, residents lived for periods in temporary accommodation provided on the site, so that no-one was required to leave the site. In addition to modernizing the existing apartments, a whole range of new residences were provided, including apartments, maisonettes, lofts, as well as retail units, gardens and play areas, which attracted a broader social mix of new residents. The project successfully rehabilitated not just the built fabric, but also the perceptions of the estate and of its inhabitants, as it was they who had led the process. The area has lost its ‘bad name’ and is integrating with the neighbouring areas.
This regeneration plan for two former wharves in the eastern part of the city docklands was commissioned directly by the city government of Amsterdam. The large scale of the docks was to be exploited for water-related activities, but also to provide 2500 low-rise dwellings (a density of approximately 4 units per acre). These points of departure presented a fascinating and unique opportunity for urban experiment. Urban designers West 8 developed new types of three-storey terraced houses, unusual in that their outdoor spaces are entirely within the volume of the building. These take the form of courtyards, patios, and roof-gardens, and permit a variety of uses for the spaces of each building. A great deal of what would normally be designed as public space was instead included within the plots to be developed. The result is generous and airy living spaces that communicate directly with lively and intimate urban streets.

This basic building type is repeated in a great variety of dwelling modes (from social housing to exclusive apartments), and with maximum variation in architectural design between different buildings. The flexibility of the domestic spaces has also permitted a multiplicity of uses as small work-spaces. In this way the new quayside town reconciles the individuality and difference of the buildings and their occupants with the collective and shared urban space of the street. The concentration and enclosure of the public space has paradoxically given it an intensity which, together with the social mix of uses, have secured this district as a vital and working part of the city.

Belfast’s bonfires, whether on the Twelfth or at Hallowe’en, are another urban spectacle special to Belfast. Organised at grassroots level, demonstrating cooperation, self-administration, and ambition shared across age-groups, this has the potential to be a celebration with wider appeal. However, even apart from sectarian issues, bonfires are often associated with problems of dumping, public order, and public health. Bonfires are part of Ulster life. Might it be possible to separate this spectacle from its meanings? Might it be possible to change its meanings?
Pulross Playground occupies a wedge of land on the margin of a railway embankment in Brixton, south London. A refuge for homeless Londoners at night-time, serious problems with drug-use on the site eventually led the local authority to close the site and put it on the market for development. However, a broad and unlikely coalition of local people came together to block the sale, and claim the site as a cross-community resource. Afro-Caribbean activists brought their determination to build their community; squatters brought their skill in direct action; and recent ‘gentrifiers’ brought their expertise in negotiating with the council and securing funding.

Together they won control of the site from the council and established the Pulross Area Playground Association (PAPA) to maintain and develop the facility. PAPA now not only provides a children’s playground; but also a multi-sports court for local basketball and soccer clubs; a function-room for social events and local groups from ante-natal to continuing education; a garden well-used by local residents and lunchtime office-workers alike; and a sheltered employment scheme for people with learning disabilities.

This is no fairy-tale: tensions and differences between the different groups do exist and persist. But PAPA demonstrates is the possibilities of collective action in a common interest to overcome some of the differences. In this sense it is not a community project at all, it is a cross-community project. Or seen another way, it built a new ‘community of interest’ that crossed the existing borders of different social, economic, and ethnic groups.
KraftWerk1 is a housing co-op with a difference, which aims to fundamentally redefine urban living and working. 500-person strong, members of the co-op pool their resources to provide childcare, building maintenance, car-sharing, and even food and entertainment. Large apartments accommodate 15 to 20 people each, in suites of rooms and shared spaces. Each extended ‘household’ chooses its own members, organizational structure, standards of equipment, and is self-financing. There are numerous work-spaces configured as studios, retail spaces, and offices. Members even contribute to an internal system of social welfare – a ‘solidarity contribution’ – which reduces the rent for those residents on low incomes. The entire initiative is an explicit model addressing the crisis of a society based on waged work, where that work is increasingly scarce, and nuclear families, where even that social structure is fragmenting.

The idealism of the project has been realised only unevenly. The relative expense of living in Kraftwerk1 has deterred people of lower income. The ecological aspirations of the project are still at an early stage. Many of the residents work in the wider economy of the city and operate independently of the collective. It is perhaps most successful as a demonstration of the possibilities of collective living, which will always be an unfinished and continually evolving project.

why yellow?

... yellow taxi, yellow pages, yellow traffic sign, yellow phone box, yellow dumper truck, yellow post box, yellow traffic cone, yellow reflective workgear, double yellow lines, yellow subway train, yellow bus, yellow box road marking, yellow skip, yellow number plate, yellow reflector, yellow crane, yellow post-it...

All around the world, yellow is used as a sign for useful things, shared objects, and public goods. Yellow is the colour of consensus, utility, and universal access. Much more potent than the passive neutrality of white, yellow denotes what could be called an "active neutrality", a common ground created through usefulness.

This ‘universal yellow’ is a strong primary colour, eye-catching, optimistic, inspirational, enlivening, welcoming, communicative, radiant, cheerful, hopeful...
Urban life depends on sharing. We share spaces, we share buildings, we share facilities. We do this because we benefit from pooling all sorts of resources with others. This is not always straightforward, as individuals and groups have different priorities. However, there are many things that can only be done by a continual negotiation of these differences. This is the nature of cities.

Cities offer us a huge range of shared ‘public goods’: streets, squares, and parks; but not just spaces, also utilities such as water, electricity, and telephone/internet; and human services such as healthcare, security, and entertainment. We then make use of these in our different roles as individuals, families, communities, employees, entrepreneurs, homeowners, tenants, etc.

We string together the different parts of our lives along these infrastructural paths. We agree to maintain and develop them because they benefit everyone, and because they provide services and opportunities that often could not be provided in any other way. The more people use them the more efficient they get. So we could say that if cities had a colour, that colour would be yellow.

The aim of this project is to encourage people to look at and see the city in a different way. To see what is unique about Belfast, but also what it has in common with other cities. To perceive other colours than the usual ones. We want to demonstrate a way to understand the current developments in the city, and to propose a critical interpretation of what is happening.

Most importantly we want to show examples of where citizens have generated their own collective solutions to the problems of urban life. In the context of the acknowledged weaknesses of planning institutions in Northern Ireland, it is possible for people to exercise their ownership of the city, to direct global forces for the common good and mitigate the worst aspects of them. The alternative is to see the city fragment even further, and for segregation to be built-in to Belfast for another generation…. Why not a yellower Belfast for everyone?

Let us look closer at how cities can be more ‘yellow’. In the following pages are collected some case studies that show the links between infrastructure, buildings, space, and society. The projects range from property development to community development, and involve many different interests: individuals, private companies, local authorities, community groups, etc. What they have in common is the breakdown of boundaries between public institutions and private actors, and the construction of new networks of social and economic entrepreneurs. Together these projects constitute an empirical definition of what we mean by ‘civil enterprise’. 
If we can say that cities are yellow, we would also have to admit that cities everywhere are getting less yellow. Universal access to spaces and services is now increasingly restricted. This is especially the case in the new spaces of the city, and the new types of services, infrastructures, and technologies that are made available there. In addition, as urban populations get more diverse, many city residents themselves prefer not to share, at least not with everyone.

Much of this process is bound up with ideas of choice and quality. Many people command better quality and higher specification, and are willing to pay for it. Customised services, 'premium' buildings and developments, and cutting-edge infrastructures are designed for and marketed to demanding business interests and socio-economic groups. These features tend to accumulate in the same new and regenerated commercial and residential districts of our cities.

These areas are, however, very often subtly – or sometimes very explicitly – separate. Frequently the benefits of increasingly sophisticated urban life are ring-fenced for specific categories of people, effectively partitioning what could be the most universally 'yellow' areas. Such parts of our cities are increasingly globally connected, through transport links, information technology, and the business practices of fashion, franchising, and branding. Meanwhile they are often becoming less connected to the neighbourhoods directly adjacent. This could be thought of as the 'Balkanization' of the city.
How can universality, or yellowness, be re-engineered into cities? Is it desirable or even achievable? Conventional urban planning has rarely succeeded in creating universal access to services or economic opportunity, and in fact has contributed to the legacy of fragmented cities. Public services are no longer monopolies. Transport, health, schools, water, electricity, telephone, but also public space, urban development, and new infrastructure are increasingly privatised or market-led. In most cases the balance-sheet benefits from the efficiencies of private-sector management. However it also often dispenses with the cross-subsidies involved in providing for the ‘public good’, ‘common interest’, or ‘social overhead capital’. The consequence is the break-up of the social and infrastructural continuities of the city. Some districts and people are literally bypassed by improvements. Streets are disconnected and the grid of city streets is eroded.

These phenomena are recognised in cities the world over. Urban scholars have theorised these changes in different ways. The ‘splintering metropolis’ is a city of fragments separated by physical boundaries and differentiated by their level of access to services, infrastructure, and opportunity. ‘Tectonic multiculturalism’ describes the city of enclaves defined by group identities of class and ethnicity, whose shifting boundaries create periodic frictions and quakes. The ‘archipelago economy’ is a world of prosperous islands interlinked across a sea of economic underperformance. Each of these describes in its own way an urban patchwork of isolated differences which are rarely negotiated.

In many places, citizens are developing new strategies to overcome these new challenges. In the context of reduced control by the state, they are taking the initiative. Through social, cultural, and economic work, people are building new ‘communities of interest’ that go beyond the boundaries of their nominal identity. They are forging strategic alliances with ‘others’, not to undermine their community, but to strengthen it. It is possible to be part of a community, and be a citizen of the wider city.

Citizens are not just the passive inhabitants of the city. They are also actors in the whole range of institutions in a city. They are not only the consumers, but the clients, the entrepreneurs, the developers, the providers, the carers, the planners, the builders, the architects. Their initiatives in cities include securing public spaces for universal use, opening up information technologies for wider access, providing different types of buildings responsive to different needs, planning new areas of the city as inclusive and integrated districts. What they have in common is a type of ‘civil enterprise’ which generates more power collectively than each could individually.

Planners are catching up with the idea that planning can be ‘bottom-up’ as well as ‘top-down’. People can invent their own practices of ‘insurgent citizenship’, coming together in new ways, for new reasons, and with new results. Cities can move ‘towards cosmopolis’ – a Utopia perhaps, but one that can never be realised, and must continually be ‘in the making’. A city can transcend the urban patchwork of differences.