Beyond Community
Inclusivity through Spatial Interventions

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Discussions around social cohesion, integration of immigrants or criticism of the multicultural model of a society are often very abstract, while simultaneously underpinned by some extreme examples of sociocultural conflicts. Interestingly, hostility to the idea of a multicultural society is more intense in places where diversity of cultures is not really present. Living together, sharing the same spaces and elements of (material and social) infrastructure may be difficult and may cause certain tensions, but it very rarely engenders hostility. In this short article we aim to discuss the notion of 'radical inclusivity' as a spatial mechanism allowing peaceful coexistence in multi-ethnic and multicultural cities. We want to propose 'urban radical inclusivity' as a conceptual bridge between discussions around hard infrastructure and 'infrastructure as people'. We see infrastructure as a 'transcendent' element to society, structures created (mostly) by society but that have existed (at least partly) beyond the direct control of society. In our view, once built or created, infrastructure becomes part of nature, as a resource that is interpreted, appropriated and interacted with by various (human and non-human) actors. This article argues against the concept of integration as the main

mechanism that allows various sociocultural groups to live together and instead proposes 'radical inclusivity' as a better, less oppressive model of a pluralistic society.

Through analytical and reflective research on the non-cohesion-based approach to integration or inclusion, this article examines the affordances and limitations of integration through various forms of spatial interventions. As an example, we will discuss the Ellesmere Green Project in Sheffield (UK) as a typical small urban regeneration executed in a highly diverse part of Sheffield. This piece aims to highlight the significance of moving beyond the community-as-cohesion model in urban politics and planning for integration.

The concept of integration has multiple meanings in practice, academia and policies, depending on the focus and context of its description. In neoliberal democracies, integration is defined as a fixed and measurable set of require-ments for attaining certain civic rights (such as citizenship). More broadly, integration consists of a set of normative assumptions, practices, policies and discourses permanently embedded in specific contexts and directed at particular groups or categories of people.[1] Integration refers to developing a feeling of belonging for immigrants within the host society, seen as a one-way process. However, it may also be perceived as a two-way process that enables immigrants and host communities to adapt to each other.[2]

In key works of the founding neoliberal intellectuals, Wendy Brown traces the ambition to replace democratic orders with ones disciplined by markets and traditional morality and democratic states with technocratic ones. She theorizes their unintentional spurring by neoliberal rationality, from its attack on the value of society and its fetish of individual freedom to its legitimation of inequality.[3] For Saskia Sassen, designing a better integration policy means abandoning an array of cherished policies and beliefs about desirable aims.[4]

The integrationist narratives are often defined at the national state level. However, as Pierre Manent argues,[5] the European model of political universalism is rooted not in the nation-state but in three other political entities: the church, the empire and the city. Therefore, we argue that universal inclusivity may be achieved not by 'integration' but by employing transcendent infrastructure (material and immaterial) used by and supporting various users. Integration is supposed to take place between various groups of people; infrastructure is an external entity, making it possible to deconstruct the community and create a new social bond through new interactions between various actors and the infrastructure. When translated into the discussion on political models, infrastructure should be seen as a spatial and material embodiment of liberalism.

Integration in its daily usage primarily serves to denote 'otherness'; however, from a broader sociopolitical perspective, it connotes a problem and process that society as a whole, as well as all of its members individually, must face. From such a perspective, no individual can ever be entirely integrated.[6] The model we propose, 'radical inclusivity' based on interactions mediated via external infrastructure, goes beyond cultures and communities. There is no 'otherness'; there are only various ways individual actors interact with the infrastructure.

In the eyes of some critical observers, the explicit use of integration as a politically and emotionally loaded concept makes it irredeemable as an analytical tool.[7] Costoiu's table of categorizing integration explains models that reflect the variations of meaning of 'integration'. These models are exclusionary, assimilationist and multicultural integration types. Each type is defined through a particular process to be carried out in mainly three domains: political, socioeconomic and cultural-religious dimensions, when integrating communities.[8]

The exclusionary integration model favours the native citizen over minorities and migrants in many socioeconomic aspects such as housing and employment. Assimilationist integration is defined as a process of the assimilation of migrants and ethnic minorities, enabling them to fully comply with the host society's culture and 'abandon' (or thoroughly conceal) their original cultures. The multiculturalism type of integration reflects a pluralism approach to integrating minorities into broader society by granting them equal access to services with the indigenous population. The state even supports minorities in preserving their cultural differences, such as in countries like the Netherlands, Australia, Canada and Britain.[9]

Nonetheless, there is a general assumption, especially within current populist, illiberal democratic tendencies, that the society could be seen as a homogenous whole. 'The people' (often defined in opposition to 'the establishment' or 'elites') always have one united voice and will. The idea of 'integration', however much older, fits perfectly to this vision of society. In the same political perspective, cities are seen as 'contaminated' spaces, where 'the people' are dominated by 'aliens', 'strangers', 'immigrants' or just 'metropolitan elites'.

Lauren Berlant emphasizes that the solidity and sense of our social and political infrastructures – whether nations, publics, labour markets or heteronormative regulations and conventions – are kept afloat by specific constellations and economies of affective investments.[10]

In our proposal of 'urban radical inclusivity' we may follow Edward Soja's discussion on spatial justice. In this sense, the city is seen as an infrastructure allowing the co-existence of individuals and various groups. As Soja puts it, spatial justice is fundamental in urban contexts where marginalized community members are perpetually 'fighting for the right to the city'.[11] Central to this idea is marginalized community members demanding 'greater control over how the spaces in which we live are socially produced'.[12] Fol-

lowingly, Judith Butler's latest book, *The Force of Non-Violence*, argues that these times, or perhaps all times, call for imagining an entirely new way for humans to live together in the world – a world of what Butler calls 'radical equality'.[13]

The inclusion of particular groups/communities (such as women of colour, refugees, undocumented immigrants and people from underrepresented communities) remains a constant challenge.[14] Infrastructure designed with inclusivity, flexibility and openness as its essential features does not need anybody to be part of any community or ask to be 'integrated'. It does not ask for a passport. Such infrastructure makes people feel connected and related to each other. It makes people part of a whole urban ecosystem. You become 'integrated' by the very fact of using the infrastructure.

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By putting forward the idea of 'radical inclusivity' in the context of urban cohesion, we aim to propose a universal ontological framework that can supersede religious, national, economic or ethnic divisions and propose a non-dialectical perspective when discussing social tensions. The aim is to test the hypothesis that the city produces a non-consensual social structure defined not by a collective identity but rather through co-dependence and co-existence.[15] The non-dialectical perspective, partly following Deleuzian thinking, assumes that for every dialectical relationship there exists a broader context that 'opens' this relationship and allows new configurations of actors and agencies to appear. As we suggest above, the built environment and the city itself allow us to understand the process of opening the dialectical relationship more clearly than any non-urban situation. Infrastructure, being external to any community, acts like a non-dialectical disrupter, forcing actors to define themselves against this external entity again and again. Their position is always individually constructed, only partly based on their own values and beliefs and mostly on their needs and living practices. This perspective aims to liberate individuals from the constraints of community.

In his seminal book *Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community*, Roberto Esposito defines the foundation of a community as an absence.[16] He does not reject the communitarian understanding of its notion as based on shared identity and values. Nevertheless, Esposito focuses his attention on a violent process of becoming a member of the community. Community imposes on us liabilities and obligations – even when belonging to the community is seen as a gift. The 'coming community' can be defined through radical change and its resistance to imminent power. In his book *The Coming Community*, Agamben emphasized that the future community finds its place in a profound present and within the potentiality of change and transformation to open up a reflection on the idea of 'radical change'.[17]

The problem with community lies in its totality and unification; the community assumes a standard set of features that distinguish community members from those outside it. Each of these features includes a minor mechanism of inclusion that allows the community to expand, preventing its total unification. This semi-transcendent mechanism enables diverse subjects to execute their agency. Our proposal of 'radical urban inclusivity' provided by the city as an infrastructure focuses on individual agency. Here we follow the concept of 'people as infrastructure' as the residents' need to generate concrete acts and contexts of social collaboration inscribed with multiple identities rather than overseeing and enforcing modulated transactions among discrete population groups.[18]

Integration Politics and Spatial Interventions
In 2015, Richard Sennett elaborated on the concept of 'porous cities', using Nehru Place, an open-air electronic market in Delhi, as an example to advocate nurturing the complexity of the identity to make more room for diversity. In Sennett's arguments, this is a genuine mixed-use of public and private functions such as schools and clinics and the inclusion of people from different nations and various religious beliefs.[19]

The particular attention to radical civic potential of activism and ephemeral forms of social engagement in open spaces allow different communities with different purposes to be together in space. This is important, if not necessarily novel – many environmental justice activists unacknowledged in this article have advocated and practised these approaches. However, achieving community inclusion is inherently problematic because it challenges society's structure (competitiveness) and organization (meritocracy).[20] Community inclusion necessitates a multifaceted tactic via a broader policy, educational media, public art and spatial interventions. If we suppose that public space assumes rules and conventions aiming to create a society as a coherent whole (coherent but pluralistic), the inclusive infrastructure allows a more liberal/individualistic approach, focusing on individual tactics and uses in urban space. It provides integration by separation in contrast to integration by unification.

As an example, we would like to discuss the Ellesmere Green Project in Sheffield. There is nothing particularly unique in this project; it could be seen as a typical small urban regeneration executed in a highly diverse part of any city.

The Ellesmere Green
Located in the Burngreave district, the most ethnically diverse part of Sheffield, this project consists of infrastructure that allowed small groups and individuals to enjoy the green space. Burngreave is situated in the north-east of Sheffield and is now home to people who immigrated over time from different regions of the world, including South Asia, the Caribbean, sub-Saharan Africa/North Africa and the Middle East. Thus, the local community is a mixture of nationalities and ethnicities that manifest their sociocultural and religious practices through various activities in the area.

The Ellesmere Green is in the heart of Burngreave. It is a green space surrounded by many mosques, churches, libraries, shops and restaurants,

where various sociocultural, religious, and economic activities take place. Each activity involves a sign of a culture or a tradition that reflects a particular group's background within the community. These activities could be as mundane as buying or consuming food, yet they are essential for sustaining residents' cultural identity. Even the green space is used differently by different community members, as some use it to wait for public transport, some as a meeting point to discuss the political situation in their home countries and others to wait for the call to prayer and sometimes even to pray, particularly during the Islamic holiday of Eid. This has allowed the local community members to get to know each other's culture by experiencing or observing these activities, promoting the spirit of commonality and co-interdependency despite diverse ethnocultural practices. What is essential in this example is the lack of pressure to become a united 'community'. The spatial and material infrastructure allows individuals and groups to do what they please. By keeping spatial and sometimes temporal distances (activities happen at a different time), the members of the various groups do not disturb each other. At the same time, the residents can see each other and sometimes overhear discussions or conversations. The way the space is designed allows them to be together, to be related to each other but not to be unified. A multiplicity of activities allowed by the Ellesmere Green Project helps to imagine radical inclusivity.

Like many other parks and green spaces, one can argue that this particular project is a passive space. It allows various activities to happen but does not 'actively' support inclusivity. But is it really the case? Local authorities led a lengthy public consultation process with the local community when redeveloping the Ellesmere Green, which included the induction of an open market, improvement of the green space and pavements, rehabilitation of shop frontages and the installation of some artworks. The main phase of community participation was carried out between 2006 and 2007 and has been summarized by Sheffield City Council in *the Ellesmere Green Proposals: Design and Access Statement (2006-2007)*. This involved a series of

surveys, consultations, meetings and interviews with business owners, community members and leaders. It is important to understand any project not only through its material outcome (building, square, park, etcetera) but also as a process, during which various actors execute their agency.

In this particular project, local officials did not take into account the ethnic, religious and cultural diversity within the local community, as they referred to all non-white community members as BAME (black and minority ethnic). In addition, most people who engaged with the proposed project were white, at 54 and 62 per cent in the second and third phase of the process,[21] while the BAME percentage in this part of the city is over 60 per cent.[22] These data show limitations and issues in designing inclusive spaces. The participatory process always tends to reproduce existing power relation-ships. People with higher cultural capital, with a stronger position (as recog-nized by authority) in the community, people who simply have more time to spare are always louder and more engaged in the process. Obviously, tech-niques are making it possible to overcome this problem in part. Still there are risks, often leading to existing social hierarchies being questioned and the process led by local leaders being rejected. However, even if these data show the limitations of the local authorities' approach in designing inclusive spaces in a multicultural setting, at the end of the day, the space itself, the Ellesmere Green, is constantly created by individual day-to-day activities. It is an inclusive space because the local authorities designed it like this, not because the participatory process has been particularly inclusive.

In this context, commitments to diversity are understood as 'non-performa-tive', meaning that they do not bring about what they name. In the book *On Being Included*, Sarah Ahmed explores the gap between symbolic commit-ments to diversity and the experience of those who embody diversity.[23]

By focusing on this particular case study, its sheer visibility and limited spatial impact (yes, we can agree that the space does not represent the

diversity of residents; there are no symbolic references to any particular minority culture; it is a rather bland, technocratic, 'global' and 'modern' green space, but this is exactly our point!), the space allows new social interactions to emerge. The space provides the platform and means for members of local communities to recognize and embrace the local diversity.

This resonates with Jacques Rancière's understanding of politics as an 'aesthetic in that it makes visible what had been excluded from a perceptual field, and in that it makes audible what used to be inaudible'.[24] The political is a space of potential; something becomes political when it challenges structural (in-) equality issues within the public sphere (which are inextricably bound up with the state and society). The political, then, is situated within dissensus rather than consensus, with the former determining the political heart of radical democracy, integration politics and inclusive praxis (such as critical thought and action).[25] Ellesmere Green is 'transcendent' to all residents and users – both as a place where they perform activities not directly shaped by their religious, ethnic or religious identities and as a place providing 'alien' symbolic references. There is no doubt that a place like Ellesmere Green could be a scene of violence and tension. However, all these potential activities – both peaceful and violent – question narrow cultural and ethnic identities and allow new social relations to be created. In that sense, we argue that Ellesmere Green provides a platform for the incoming community to appear.

Ellesmere Green does not resolve all the problems the inhabitants of these districts face. There is still a need for decent housing, quality education and workplaces. We would like to stress that all these issues are infrastructural. Only structures located beyond the communities but within the reach of the members of these communities have the power to create new, more open and more inclusive social structures. The genuinely inclusive city must be constructed as a political project, where both institutional and built infrastructure aim to achieve social cohesion.

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