

RGS-IBG Annual International Conference 2011

The Geographical Imagination

Session proposal form

Please fill in all the details below and return to AC2011@rgs.org by **25 February 2011**.

Session summary	
Session Title:	Collective Life and Urban Space
Research Group sponsor (if applicable):	Urban Geography Research Group
Session Convenor(s):	Andrew Barnfield (University College London) Regan Koch (University College London)
Session Convenor(s) Email:	a.barnfield@ucl.ac.uk; r.koch@ucl.ac.uk
Session Abstract:	Cities have a remarkable capacity for generating a tremendous range of social relations, solidarities and new ways of living with or amongst others. Drawing on ontologies that press toward a greater appreciation of the materialities, rhythms, practices and processes that give urbanity its texture (cf. Lefebvre 1991; Massey, Allen and Pile 1999; Graham and Marvin 2001; Amin and Thrift 2002; Latham and McCormack 2004; Schatzki 2006), this session aims to explore emerging relations between collective life and urban space. We deploy the term collective life broadly to include a range of social bonds however ephemeral or fragile: publics, communities, friendships, social networks, clubs, interest groups, gatherings and shared spaces. The intention is to open up a set of discussions within which collective urban life--however mundane, pleasurable, problematic, improvisatory or adaptive—can be explored. Underpinning this call is the goal of highlighting the variety, richness and specificity of collective life in cities around the world—and to explore how these arrangements and practices become assembled, enhanced or obstructed and thus emerge in the lived reality of the everyday and the eventful.
Keywords (max 5):	collective life; urban space; sociality

Session Requirements		
Number of timeslots required in the conference programme	2	Session slots will be approximately 1hr 40minutes long, which accommodates 5 papers of 20min each including questions, or 7-10 shorter papers depending on format.
Type of session proposed e.g. papers, papers with discussant, posters, panel discussion, workshop...	papers	The session organisers welcome innovative session formats. If you'd like to discuss a session format, please contact the organisers at AC2011@rgs.org .
Special audio visual requirements	none	Laptop with audio speakers, data projector and screen will be provided in each room. Most rooms should also have internet access (either wired or wireless). Speakers should bring their own laser pointers etc.
Any other special requests to be considered	none	e.g. mobility requirements, room request, timetabling request.

Session details	
Session 1	Collective Life and Urban Space (1): Theorising Spaces of Sociality and Connection
Session 1 Chair	Regan Koch (University College London)

Session 1 Chair email	r.koch@ucl.ac.uk
Paper 1 Title:	Collective Life: Playground encounters and the multicultural city
Paper 1 Abstract:	<p>The school playground is a site of continuous intermingling – a key and often overlooked site of urban sociality where differences are interwoven and negotiated on the smallest of scales. As parents daily collect or drop-off their children, they gather, converse or pass-by (Noble 2009). Yet whilst the school playground is a site where common needs and life-stage experiences of parenting are shared, and where friendships and subtle gestures of familiarity are formed, it is also a site of ‘panoptic force’; an intimate space of encounter that is often entangled with accounts of segregation and reiterated spatial norms and differences, where ongoing conflicts over faith schooling, class, religious dress and competing interpretations of morality are played out and reinforced. This paper focuses upon an ethnographic account of an urban multicultural primary school and its playground in Birmingham UK, to examine the notion of banal multiculturalism and the pragmatic negotiation of difference, to argue that the playground, as a prosaic space of urban encounter, can open up a new set of discussions around the everyday (dis)assemblies of collective life. Focusing upon the development of a voluntary ‘families group’ that brings together parents from different backgrounds to address and negotiate the everyday challenges of living with difference, the paper details the fragile associations and networks that develop within the prosaic spaces of the playground to (re)position it as a site of productive sociality and ongoing negotiation.</p>
Paper 1 Author(s):	Helen Wilson (Durham University/University of Hull)
Paper 1 Presenter(s):	Helen Wilson (Durham University/University of Hull)
Paper 1 Author(s) email address:	H.F.WILSON@durham.ac.uk
Paper 2 Title:	Students as Infrastructure: Re-Conceptualizing the University City
Paper 2 Abstract:	<p>A growing recognition of the fluid qualities of urban space, and the diverse and sometime heterodox forms of individual and collective life that inhabit it, challenges many of the foundational conceits of urban geography whose tendency historically has been to devise models and explanatory vehicles ‘...promising vision from everywhere and nowhere equally and fully’ (Haraway, 1999). New attention to the cross-cutting social and spatial topologies of urban life, and the possibilities of novel assemblages of friendship, co-operation and interaction offer new perspective from which to interrogate the nature of urban discourses, many of which remain locked into traditional unitary narratives and urban imaginaries. In this light, through an exploration of lived experience and collective activities of students, this paper critiques the ways in which knowledge-based activities and tertiary education have recently emerged as central to urban research agendas internationally. Universities globally are increasingly viewed as actors in urban development and local economic growth through the attraction of private investment aimed at research and development, making them key contributors to knowledge economies and urban regeneration (see Chatterton 2010). In part related to the rise of knowledge-based economies, higher education institutions have experienced considerable growth in student numbers over the last ten years leading to the emergence of large student populations within urban areas – the creation of ‘university cities’. A critical yet underexplored element of this emergent research field is the place and the diverse collective forms of the ever-growing student populations within the city (Russo and Tatjer, 2007). As universities and knowledge-based activities increasingly redevelop and redefine the urban landscape it is important to consider the possible impacts of these activities on the social and collective life of cities. Drawing on research in Cork, Ireland – a University City – this paper highlights the ways in which the</p>

	<p>everyday life of students has created new social and spatial relationships in the city, adopting and creating new kinds of 'infrastructure' to represent themselves and shape their urban experience. In particular we argue that two mutually constituted forms of collective life are increasingly found in university cities – that of the 'formal' educational institutions and that of the 'informal' student population who flow through the city creating new and different networks and relationships. In this paper, we examine the contrasts and contradictions between these two versions of the urban public found in university cities, whereby the 'formality' of the educational institutions, and the urban discourses they represent are renegotiated and disrupted by the fluid and sometimes disruptive identities and practices of the student collective.</p>
Paper 2 Author(s):	<p>Therese Kenna (University College Cork, Ireland) Denis Linehan (University College Cork, Ireland)</p>
Paper 2 Presenter(s):	<p>Therese Kenna (University College Cork, Ireland) Denis Linehan (University College Cork, Ireland)</p>
Paper 2 Author(s) email address:	<p>T.Kenna@ucc.ie; d.linehan@ucc.ie</p>
Paper 3 Title:	<p>Families and cities</p>
Paper 3 Abstract:	<p>Urban theorists since Wirth have thought about the city as a place of social atomization and consequentially examined the manifold ways in which disparate individuals encounter each other. However, recent and emerging research has begun to examine the ways in which urban space is not simply a milieu of difference, but also home to, and constituted by a whole host of intimate and proximate entanglements. This paper contributes to such research by focusing on one form of urban association, the family, to explore the contemporary geographies of collective life in the Palestinian city of Ramallah. I focus on how the changing geographies of intimacy in this context have been wrapped up in changing topographies of the city, as recent migrants move from 'horizontal' family houses in their places of origin to the 'vertical' apartment buildings that have been built in Ramallah in the last fifteen years. I explore how these spatial transformations simultaneously recast the individual, the familial and the city.</p>
Paper 3 Author(s):	<p>Christopher Harker (Durham University)</p>
Paper 3 Presenter(s):	<p>Christopher Harker (Durham University)</p>
Paper 3 Author(s) email address:	<p>Christopher.Harker@durham.ac.uk</p>
Paper 4 Title:	<p>Public urban space as conveyor of urban diversity: Approaches to diversity and the ordinary as heritage qualities with examples from Strømsø/Drammen, Norway</p>
Paper 4 Abstract:	<p>This paper discuss the assumption that public space and meeting points can play an important role in safeguarding diversity and thereby legitimize the quality conveyed by these spaces as urban cultural heritage. Through approaches as As Found and heritage defined by appropriation, the relationship between heritage and public spaces in the multiethnic neighborhood of Strømsø in Drammen is discussed to show how such approaches can turn out with a different and supplementary result to a formal protection approach. By focusing on how use and appropriation identifies the appreciated places and sites, not acknowledged qualities might be uncovered and make possible an inclusion of a larger amount of historical footprints</p>

	essential for constituting the sense of place characterizing fragmented urban areas. The methods used in the study are qualitative interviews with local tradesmen, observations of use and appropriation of various types of public spaces, and involvement of 6 th grade schoolchildren documenting their neighborhood by photos and descriptions. The tradesmen are asked to describe their neighborhood and define which qualities are fundamental and important for their localization at Strømsø while the schoolchildren are asked to describe their most appreciated places. The qualities and places depicted cover a wide range of topics, but most of them have a common denominator being of public character as an accessible public space or a public service. Qualities associated with public life traditionally inherent to public space seem to play a vital role in defining which spaces are appropriated and valued.
Paper 4 Author(s):	Sveinung Krokann Berg (Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage Research) Grete Swensen (Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage Research) Johanne Sognnæs (Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage Research)
Paper 4 Presenter(s):	Sveinung Krokann Berg (Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage Research) Grete Swensen (Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage Research) Johanne Sognnæs (Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage Research)
Paper 4 Author(s) email address:	skb@niku.no
Paper 5 Title:	The politics of the social in the city
Paper 5 Abstract:	This paper will explore the political challenge of mobility in the city today. Using the example of London, it will look at the extraordinary rates of population movement and diversity and highlight the implications this has for political organising. The paper will position itself in relation to recent debates about the city as a site for the fleeting, temporary encounter before going on to explore the possibilities for forging social connections. I will draw on the example of the work of London Citizens to look at the way this organisation responds to contemporary mobility by finding and connecting islands of solidarity and sociability. I argue this form of politics depends upon creating territorial networks across anchor institutions - and their adherents - in the city today.
Paper 5 Author(s):	Jane Wills (Queen Mary University, London)
Paper 5 Presenter(s):	Jane Wills (Queen Mary University, London)
Paper 5 Author(s) email address:	j.wills@qmul.ac.uk
Session details	
Session 2	Collective Life and Urban Space (2): Exploring Materialities and Practices
Session 1 Chair	Andrew Barnfield (University College London)
Session 1 Chair email	a.barnfield@ucl.ac.uk
Paper 1 Title:	Friends of space: mobile children and urban togetherness

Paper 1 Abstract:	Seeking to bring out the considerable repositories of hope, care and resilience that hold cities together, recent geographical thinking has traced the affective involvement of persons in the materials and spaces mediating urban life and association. This paper explores in empirical detail how such a widened notion of urban togetherness is expressed in the fleeting friendship practices on the daily school journeys of 7-12-year-old children in Helsinki, Finland. Employing visual footage produced by moving children, the paper demonstrates that children often gather with their friends and siblings into mobile collectives of varying forms and sizes, all along playing with bodily attachments to urban environments, from pavements and bus stops to found objects and dogs in the park. Exploring the implications of such shared experimentation for the conviviality of cities, the paper argues that children offer us insight into a series of bodily and ethical sensibilities that enhance the caring and enchanting potential of daily urban encounters. To draw out these sensibilities, the paper elaborates a more open-ended notion of “friendship” as an ongoing experimentation with more empathetic and playful ways of sharing urban spaces with other persons and materials.
Paper 1 Author(s):	Kim Kullman (University of Helsinki)
Paper 1 Presenter(s):	Kim Kullman (University of Helsinki)
Paper 1 Author(s) email address:	Kim.Kullman@helsinki.fi
Paper 2 Title:	Constructing sites of conviviality: reflections from the emerging practices of ‘pay-what-you-want’ restaurants
Paper 2 Abstract:	This paper explores ways in which seemingly minor-key alterations to established sites of urban social practice can significantly alter the dynamics of inhabitation, sociability and collective culture. It does so by drawing on interviews and ethnographic fieldwork in six ‘pay-what-you-want’ restaurants or ‘community kitchens’ in the U.S. These relatively novel urban spaces have developed from an experiment in one café in 2003 to a current network of twelve restaurants in ten cities. Although existing kitchens operate independently and according to their own unique context, they share a general concept that deploys informal, flexible and relational material-practices that seek to nurture social and community relations while addressing a broad range of ethico-political concerns. Drawing on conceptions of posthumanist ‘politics of conviviality’ (Hinchliffe and Whatmore 2006; Amin 2008), the paper details how participants in community kitchens are actively involved in the experimental and uncertain assembling of mundane intermediaries in an attempt to meet their aims. It is argued that greater attention to the performative outcomes of material-practical configurations can help to locate and amplify opportunities for more inclusive, generous and ethical forms of collective life.
Paper 2 Author(s):	Regan Koch (University College London)
Paper 2 Presenter(s):	Regan Koch (University College London)
Paper 2 Author(s) email address:	r.koch@ucl.ac.uk
Paper 3 Title:	Negotiating Collective Life in Siston Hill: Affective Materialities and Emergent Everyday Practices in a Suburban Newbuild

Paper 3 Abstract:	<p>This paper examines Siston Hill – a suburban development built over 2007-11 on the outskirts of The City of Bristol, England. I explore how the residents' negotiations across space, and time, help develop an understanding of the possibilities and formations of collective life across contemporary suburban materialities. As the conference call suggests, the more banal and everyday spaces of the city are often overlooked.</p> <p>My argument is developed in three parts, each underpinned by the notion of the affective materialities (Lorimer 2005, Thrift 2008, Anderson 2006) of architectural spaces (Lees 2001, Kraftl & Adey 2008) to examine suburban spaces as spaces of embodied and reflexive engagement across both the material and immaterial. I begin with the contestations, and negotiations, between the local council, developers, and residents to indicate a complex, sticky, and ongoing space of 'development' that is continually and unevenly unfolding. Second, I draw upon the residents' everyday lived experiences to expose competing, and contradictory, logics and rationales that shape how disparate imaginations of collective life are performed. Personal and routine experiences of the domestic illustrate the subtle, at times invisible, affective materialities of the development.</p> <p>Finally, I conclude by suggesting that whilst the materialities of contemporary suburban development pre-configure, limit, and engender particular effects and affects, in turn enabling and constraining everyday practices, focusing on lived realities reveals a picture of emergent practices which are heterogeneous in their dynamics, thus offering insights into everyday negotiations of collective life in contemporary British suburban housing developments.</p>
Paper 3 Author(s):	Nick Soucek (University of Bristol)
Paper 3 Presenter(s):	Nick Soucek (University of Bristol)
Paper 3 Author(s) email address:	nick.soucek@bristol.ac.uk
Paper 4 Title:	Cultivating a social space in the southern city: Open-space urban farms in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania
Paper 4 Abstract:	<p>This paper directly engages with the call to see cities in the global south not as scenes of alienation and disorder, but of as urban in their own right. Using a case study of open-space farmers in Dar es Salaam, the largest city in Tanzania, I will address how the social relationships that constitute urban farming create a distinct social and physical urban landscape that disrupts the 'proper' use of space in cities. This paper will provide a break from the standard approach to the analysis of urban farms in Sub-Saharan Africa. Most studies on urban farming in the region focus on the economics and demographics of farming, a utilitarian approach that reflects economic ways of viewing cities in the global south. These studies often romanticize the practice of urban agriculture as resistance to state policies or economic marginalization. Utilizing an ethnographic approach, this paper will illustrate how open-space farms in Dar es Salaam, and the very practice of agriculture in the city, produce unique urban spaces that, however mundane, generate important collective places in daily urban life. This project employed interviews, mental mapping, participant observation and photo voice to examine creativity, expression and daily social practices that constitute farms as lived, urban spaces. Rather than romanticizing urban farming in Dar es Salaam as a form of resistance or a 'sustainable' practice I will highlight the difficult and fulfilling practices that underpin daily work and social interaction.</p>
Paper 4 Author(s):	Leslie McLees (University of Oregon)
Paper 4 Presenter(s):	Leslie McLees (University of Oregon)

Paper 4 Author(s) email address:	lmcl@uoregon.edu
Paper 5 Title:	Materiality, spatial media, and collective urban life
Paper 5 Abstract:	<p>How do location-based technologies rematerialise urban space? Alongside the relative uptake of location-based services (LBS) and the related, recent rush of venture capital into LBS industries, we note a rather ordinary (and limiting) geographical imagination of collective life in the use of these technologies. The growth in particular of LBS such as Foursquare and Gowalla prompt questions around the specific forms of geospatially-codifying social activities and to whom such codifications are of value. How does one practice LBS? What are the generative affects of engaging with these practices in the urban? How do these practices integrate and/or cut against extant practices of everyday urban life? And, how do LBS curate means and forms of political economic attention to technologised urban living? Within this paper we discuss our enactments of these technologies, illustrated by audio-visual media, in our home cities of the UK and the US. Building on our empirical accounts, we will offer a preliminary address to the questions we have posed above, in an attempt to broaden the current research agenda around the study of spatial media (and its various materialisations: volunteered geographic information, neogeography, the geoweb, LBS, etc.). In conclusion, we trace the contours of this broader approach to critically engage with the emerging affective and political issues LBS raise for the study of collective urban life.</p>
Paper 5 Author(s):	Matthew W. Wilson (University of Kentucky) Sam Kinsley (University of the West of England, Bristol)
Paper 5 Presenter(s):	Matthew W. Wilson (University of Kentucky) Sam Kinsley (University of the West of England, Bristol)
Paper 5 Author(s) email address:	matthew.w.wilson@uky.ed ; sam.kinsley@uwe.ac.uk