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EDITORIAL

Temporal Entanglements, Fragmented Spaces: Planning, Politics, and Place Rhythms

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Abstract

What does it mean for urban planners and designers to shape places *through* and *with* time? The 2020 public health restrictions highlighted the relevance of Carlos Moreno's et al. (2021) 15-minute-city concept, which outlined the need for a "chrono-urbanism" incorporating societal resilience micro-infrastructures. Notions of temporal planning, however, have deeper roots; Kevin Lynch's classic imageability (1964) and place-timing studies (1972) highlighted Planning as a temporal art, distinct from arts such as music, and his urban theorization (1984) identified three epochs of city form (the cosmic, organic, and mechanical) as successively dominant, spatiotemporal paradigms. More recently, Christopher Alexander's (2002) analyses on the "nature of order" drew attention to the importance of time and geometry for the appropriate unfolding of complexity across domains from the arts and crafts to the scales of built form. Time is implicated in Planning's capacity to effectively harness space in meeting societal needs and challenges. Given the "temporal turn" in urban planning and design, this is an appropriate juncture to reflect upon technical assumptions underlying varied approaches to place-shaping. This issue explores how currently dominant, linear-temporal modes might be influencing spatial planning and design practices, and how inclusion of diverse, forgotten, and hidden spatiotemporal narratives including from the global South could aid development of alternative theories, tools, practices, and forms. Contributions also address implications digital modes may have for education, praxis, or resilient, city visions, and what might be the contribution of temporal perspectives in addressing the slow and out-of-sight violence created by toxic geographies or urban transformations.

Keywords

design; planning; practice; slow-violence; space; theory; time; urban

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1. Introduction

Doreen Massey (1992, p. 80) famously argued that space is dynamic and interconnected with time, stating that "space is not static, nor time spaceless." Despite this influential stance, a segment of geographical literature treats space as static. Laclau (1990) exemplifies this view through his distinction between spatiality and temporality, associating each with distinct modes of social analysis.

Laclau (1990) defines space as structured repetition and coexistence, forming systems with internally consistent causal relationships. While these spatial systems may exhibit movement or internal transformations, they remain predictable and self-contained. Hence, spatiality is essentially devoid of genuine disruption or external causality. In contrast, Laclau conceptualizes temporality as inherently dislocating, characterized by disruptions that challenge existing causal structures. Such temporal disruptions constitute the essence of political possibility and freedom—elements that, according to Laclau, are inherently absent from spatiality. Therefore, his differentiation between space and time is not merely between immobility and change but between predictable internal shifts and genuine transformative potential. He distinguishes "internal" forms of cyclical or embedded time—which are essentially spatial due to their predictability—from "Grand Historical Time," representing authentic dynamism and historical change (Laclau, 1990, pp. 41, 43).

Nevertheless, Massey's (1992) conception of space significantly diverges from the static spatial framework critiqued by Laclau. Massey emphasizes space as inherently relational, constructed through the simultaneity of social interactions and networks across scales from local to global. This understanding acknowledges that all social phenomena inherently have spatial dimensions, shaped and reshaped continuously through shifting relations. Examples include community ties, corporate networks, or global debt dynamics. Such phenomena illustrate the inherently dynamic nature of spatial relations, which are continuously evolving rather than static.

From Massey's perspective, spatiality does not imply immobility; instead, it denotes the dynamic coexistence and interplay of social interactions that constitute space-time. Therefore, space is conceptualized as a product of intersecting, evolving social relationships, inherently embedded with power dynamics, symbolic meanings, consent, and conflict. Crucially, this suggests that spatial formations can influence future developments, emphasizing the emergent and unpredictable qualities of space.

2. Space-Time Connection

Integrating Massey's perspective with Laclau's reveals an intriguing theoretical intersection: spatiality, when understood relationally, may itself generate the very dislocations Laclau attributes exclusively to temporality. Spatial configurations—marked by unexpected juxtapositions and social interactions—can shape historical trajectories, positioning spatiality as a critical source of temporality and, consequently, political possibility. Rather than perceiving space and time as mutually exclusive or hierarchical, this integrated approach insists on their inseparability, advocating for a unified conceptualization of space-time. Thus, acknowledging that spatiality fundamentally influences historical and political possibilities enriches geographical scholarship. Instead of privileging temporality over spatiality or treating them as distinct, scholars must recognize their co-constitution. Such recognition highlights how geography inherently involves temporal dynamics, and conversely, how history and politics are deeply embedded within spatial structures.

This connection and co-constitution between space and time opens numerous possibilities to enrich geographical discussions across various facets of scholarship. One significant example, as Koch (2022) suggests, is colonialism. Reinhart Koselleck (1985) argues that the conception of time progressing toward an open, limitless future is fundamentally rooted in modern Western thought. This insight prompts critical reflection on the distinctly Western notions of freedom articulated by Simone de Beauvoir (1949). Koch (2022, p. 3) eloquently poses the very relevant question here: "Do our dreams of 'true' freedom echo de Beauvoir's dream of an open future—even when our freedom is built on the past and present of colonial dispossession, and liberal conceptions of time itself?"

One of the most pressing and painful contemporary contexts that foregrounds the interrelation of space, time, and power is the ongoing oppression and colonial violence in Palestine. The Israeli occupation operates not only through spatial fragmentation—checkpoints, walls, settlements—but also through temporal disruption. Palestinian lives are shaped by chronic waiting, restricted mobility, and deferred futures, reflecting a "slow violence" highlighted in this issue by Read et al. (2025, p. 18) which they acknowledge as "a concept initially intended to highlight the plight of the world's poorest and marginalised, the 'wretched of the earth' (Fanon, 2001)." Here, space and time are not merely co-constituted; they are weaponised. As Abourahme (2011) and Weizman (2007) have shown, the spatial control of land, borders, and movement is inextricably linked to a politics of temporal suspension—denying Palestinians the ability to plan, to hope, or to imagine futures beyond siege and precarity.

This temporal violence challenges Western linear notions of progress and development. In occupied Palestine, time becomes fragmented and cyclical—marked by cycles of destruction and reconstruction, hope and erasure. The present is stretched into a prolonged state of limbo, where even the rhythms of daily life are governed by occupation. The temporalities of resistance, however, emerge within these ruptures—whether in the perseverance of olive harvests, the rebuilding of homes, or the intergenerational transmission of memory and struggle. These layered experiences urge urban scholars and planners to confront how temporality is unevenly distributed and violently mediated, particularly under conditions of settler colonialism. Foregrounding Palestine in discussions of space-time deepens the call for a decolonial temporality—one that is attentive to rupture, dispossession, and resistance. It demands that we rethink temporal frameworks not only as analytical categories, but as lived registers of survival, refusal, and political imagination.

What does it mean to plan a city, design a space, or shape a place when time itself is a terrain of struggle? Across the globe, urban lives unfold in contested spatio-temporal landscapes shaped by histories of colonialism, occupation, patriarchy, and capitalism. This intertwining of space and time—so often treated separately in planning theory—is central to understanding how power operates in the urban realm. Time, like space, is not given; it is produced, controlled, and resisted. As this thematic issue argues, to challenge linear narratives of progress, attending to disrupted rhythms, and recognizing the plural, lived temporalities that shape urban experience and resistance across contexts.

Further, the informal socio-spatial structures and practices in global South cities (Watson, 2009) for example, as indicated in this issue by Zehba et al. (2025), have distinctive, temporal narratives, which are relatively underexplored in mainstream planning discourses of alternative city imaginaries that still privilege Euro-American ideals and experiences amidst emerging postcolonial studies (Porter et al., 2021).

To contribute to ongoing discussions in geography and urban studies, this thematic issue explores the concepts, practices, and implications of time, along with spatiotemporal perceptions and forms of knowledge in urban planning and design. It highlights how these temporal understandings serve as implicit frameworks that shape identities and urban forms across various historical periods—from ancient and medieval to modernist and contemporary eras—and at multiple scales and locations. The issue examines the cultural impacts of such analyses, particularly their potential to challenge dominant linear conceptions of time, support the decolonisation of indigenous knowledge, and recognize diverse temporalities within urban design and planning. Ultimately, it investigates how a deeper awareness and more deliberate inclusion of temporal dimensions can assist urban planners and designers in addressing contemporary issues, such as climate change, public health, place-shaping, and spatial justice.

3. Structure of the Thematic Issue

This issue is addressing many important subjects related to time, space, spatiality, and temporality in the urban realm. As mentioned above about unsettling Western ideas of liberalism, colonialism, or urban planning and how they travel to Southern or Peripheral cities with colonial pasts, Ren et al. (2025) are providing a very well written article on the "peri-urban turn" (Rajendran et al., 2024) within geography and urban studies. The article proposes a conceptual expansion from the well-established Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) framework to a more inclusive Historic Urban-Rural Landscape (HURL), particularly addressing the evolving and often overlooked peri-urban territories of Southern cities. Employing ethnographic fieldwork in Kathmandu, Nepal, and specifically exploring the Basantapur area's living heritage context—including transient rural rituals practiced by local communities—this study offers an urban-anthropological reading of both tangible and intangible heritage, the latter increasingly critical in Global South contexts. Ultimately, the article underscores the methodological potential of HURL to facilitate closer examinations of Southern places through time, and to articulate life-worlds that emerge from, and are embedded in, local placemaking practices beyond established Eurocentric traditions and paradigms.

Understanding the co-constitution of space and time enables scholars to approach feminist literature through a new lens as well. Massey (1992) and Ross (1988) critique the common scholarly tendency to establish a dichotomy between space and time, arguing instead that such dualisms should be overcome entirely. This argument resonates with similar points frequently made by feminist scholars regarding other dualisms. In this issue, Zehba et al. (2025) significantly advance the discussion of space, time, and gender through their analysis of spatiotemporal narratives of women's everyday mobility in Kochi, India. Urban women face disproportionate impacts from time poverty, driven by societal pressures to balance employment obligations with traditional gender roles. In urban contexts, women's allocation of time is particularly influenced by their daily mobility patterns. While there exists considerable research on time use and mobility, especially from Northern countries, gender-specific dimensions of mobility and associated time poverty in urban settings of Southern countries remain underexplored. Zehba and colleagues' research contributes substantially to this gap, deepening our understanding of gendered time allocation and the associated challenges of time poverty.

To show how time as a critical lens could contribute to investigating public policies and socio spatial justice, Sobral et al. (2025) introduce an analytical framework. Central to this analysis is understanding how time shapes power relations within the evolving contexts addressed by these policies. The framework is

developed through an extensive literature review, combined with empirical fieldwork focused on Lisbon's mobile co-policy, specifically the Bairros de Intervenção Prioritária/Zonas de Intervenção Prioritárias Strategy. The proposed framework highlights an existing analytical gap concerning the mobility of co-policies that combine spatial co-production and co-governance at the neighbourhood level.

In the same vein, Crilly and Varna's (2025) article introduces the method of "shearing layers" as a tool of analysis for public urban space by adding a temporal dimension. This framework introduces a temporal dimension, or "rate of change," to various layers of public space—including site, surface, services, spatial configuration, surroundings, signage, and amenities. Using a city centre public space as a case study, they apply an object-oriented approach to map different rates of change, from continuous or hourly adjustments up to transformations spanning decades or centuries. Better understanding the temporal cycles and adaptability of these public space layers enhances urban responsiveness to emerging challenges and opportunities.

The element of time has also been crucial to understand the profession of urban planning and national frameworks for formal urban planning. In this issue, Morato et al. (2025) focus on the element of time across planning reforms as a central dimension in their article. While academic normative debates argue in favour of faster and/or slower changes to planning as inherently good or bad, in this article, they draw on a comparative analysis of national planning reforms across three European countries (Poland, Spain, and the United Kingdom) to critically examine how time is being mobilized and with what objective. They argue that despite ambitions to make planning more responsive and participatory at the local level, planning reforms (1) reduce the influence of public participation while strengthening private property rights, (2) are used to territorialise sectoral, top-down, and long term agendas with no consideration of the timely and situated concerns and visions of residents and communities, and (3) are underpinned by a pro-growth and rapid urbanisation agenda that ignores sustainability debates.

Following these valuable contributions on time and public space and urban planning rules, Wang et al. (2025) bring the readers' focus to "non-place-networked public realm." This article hypothesizes that users interacting with digital infrastructure within non-places generate temporary non-places. A "non-place" typically lacks identity and significance; however, digital technologies impart temporary identity and meaning to these spaces. To investigate this, the article introduces an analytical method that involves quantitatively examining geo-targeted social media contributions from platforms such as X, Foursquare, and Instagram, collected within London over a specified period. Analysis of daily digital activity reveals unique temporal narratives specific to these digitally mediated non-places. Key findings indicate (1) distinct rhythms differentiate digital activities from physical activities within non-place and (2) users' digital interactions significantly shape their spatiotemporal perceptions in these settings.

Chang and Sefkatli (2025) apply rhythm-analytical approaches in their study to explore teaching and learning experiences within two socio-spatial and design-focused courses involving graduate and undergraduate students. This research is particularly significant as it illustrates the depth of contributions achievable when examining educational dynamics through a rhythm-analytical lens. These courses aim to explore how analysing rhythms-through-space compared to rhythms-in-space can lead to distinct intervention patterns. The findings highlight the necessity of integrating temporal awareness as both a conceptual and methodological focus within constructively aligned teaching activities to foster various

forms of knowledge. Central to their work is enhancing the guidance offered to students through design-oriented learning. Educationally, they investigate which conceptual structures in design-oriented teaching best support rhythm-analytical capabilities for future spatial planners and designers.

Finally, Read et al. (2025) build on the concept of *slow violence* to explore how temporal dislocation intersects with spatial precarity through the lens of housing inequality in the UK. Their article focuses on a Community Land Trust (CLT) attempting to challenge entrenched socio-spatial injustices by reconfiguring temporalities of land, ownership, and dwelling. Drawing from Lefebvre's rhythm-analysis and right-to-the-city discourse, the authors argue that conventional planning timelines—driven by short-term market cycles and long-term speculative development—often exclude the most marginalised communities. In doing so, these dominant temporal regimes perpetuate forms of housing exclusion and displacement. The CLT's efforts to reclaim slower, community-driven rhythms represent a counter-temporality that prioritises continuity, care, and the intergenerational right to remain in place. This case resonates with the earlier discussion of Palestine, where state-imposed spatial fragmentation and temporal suspension similarly operate as tools of exclusion. In both contexts, the struggle for the right to the city becomes a struggle over time itself—who controls it, who waits, and who gets to imagine a future. Read and colleagues thus foreground temporal justice as a vital dimension of spatial justice, urging planners and urban scholars to rethink time not merely as a neutral frame but as a contested and powerful tool of governance, resistance, and right-making.

4. Conclusions

Returning to the tensions earlier examined between Massey and Laclau's conceptions in this introduction, perhaps an alternative general overview could further be made in terms of the perspectives of monism and dualism—and the theories in the study of time that ascribe to these respective views. These conceptualisations range from those which deny the existence of time at a fundamental level, seeing it as reversible, to those which view time as limited, bound to spatiality or physicality (Turner, 2014), in particular Henri Bergson's (2014) positing of subjective, experiential, or lived time as a counterpoint to objective, timeless, or mechanical time.

Building on this, J. T. Fraser's hierarchical theory of time (2007) offers an emergent and nested framework for understanding the complexity and evolution of temporal experiences across different domains. Fraser's levels of time—atemporality, proto-temporality, eotemporality, bio-temporality, nootemporality, and socio-temporality—each represent distinct stages of temporal complexity, from quantum phenomena to human mind and culture (which underlies place-shaping). This multi-layered approach suggests how different aspects of time may interact and evolve, problematising accelerating drivers towards spatiotemporal uniformity. And Lee's (2012) perspective on temporal multiplicities further highlights how these diverse temporal experiences offer potential to resist the homogenising forces of global modernity, emphasizing the importance of maintaining temporal diversity in urban development and cultural practices.

Within each of the contributions that follow, the examination of spatiotemporal perceptions, and knowledges within cities, and their planning and design processes highlights such temporal multiplicities as the bases for implicit frameworks, techniques, or tools. These underlie extant and emerging expressions of local identities, heritages, lived-experiences, pedagogic possibilities, and forms of urbanism. This thematic introduction thereby raises questions about inherent rights to the city and underlying tensions between historic and ongoing spatiotemporal transformations across localities and contexts.

Consequently, this issue identifies emerging lessons and possibilities that greater awareness and more explicit treatment of the dynamic, intertwined space-time dimensions might offer cities, residents, and practitioners, professionally and culturally—enabling the critical role of multiple temporalities to be recognised and accommodated in urban planning and design as a basis for culturally-responsive place-shaping.

Conflict of Interests
The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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