

Urban Conflicts and Peace: Everyday Politics of Commons

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Conflict as constitutive of cities

Urban space and everyday life are permeated with visible, sensed, and often unperceived conflicts across multiple scales: from political oppression and struggles over the right to social and cultural difference, to health, ecological, and economic predicaments shaped by geopolitical rivalries and extractive economies, extending into the unsettled intimacies of domestic space marked by precarity, care burdens, and violence, including the persistent reality of femicide. Conflict is not merely episodic or disruptive. It is woven into the fabric of urban life, unfolding through antagonisms that are material, symbolic, and relational, and that persist even in the periods of perceived relative peace. As the feminist body of thought reminds, seemingly harmonious spaces of everyday life often rest on exclusions and discomforts that are displaced or rendered invisible (Ahmed, 2008). From this perspective, conflict can be understood as a relational force that shapes how cities are inhabited, produced, and contested.

Drawing on Lefebvre's (2014 [1946]) theory, which applies Marxist notions of production to the city, the city is conceived as an arena of conflict where contradictions are embedded in its very making, and everyday life is where alienation is most entrenched, hierarchies are reproduced, and contradictions are lived. It is underpinned by the contingency of plural struggles to participate in and shape the core aspects of the city's social, cultural, and political life, rather than being relegated to the periphery or marginalized (see Roskamm, this issue). Lefebvre (2014 [1946]) conceptualizes both conflict and the city as multiple and relational, forwarding the notion that conflict underpins the temporal horizon of never-finished production of urban space. This means that the city is structured by overlapping social, political, and spatial tensions continuously producing fractures that shape how the city is inhabited, appropriated, and contested. Political theory extends Lefebvre's notion of conflict beyond material inequalities to encompass meanings and identities (Laclau,

2007 [1996]), suggesting that antagonisms are foundational to the formation of social identities and political orders. Conflict thus exposes the contingency of social arrangements, opening space for negotiation and agency. What appears settled is never fully grounded. It is always contingent and subject to alternative claims. Conflict thus becomes a structural feature of urban space.

Rather than seeking to erase the frictions inherent in urban life, we invite a reading of the city as the site where multiple, irreconcilable positions continuously collide, exposing injustices and renegotiating meanings and actions (Ragozino *et al.*, 2018; Ragozino and Varriale, 2018). Athanassiou (this issue) exemplifies this by analysing contested waterfronts in Thessaloniki, where development pressures under the banner of ecological modernization reimagine nature as devoid of social dimensions, thus colliding with practices of everyday life reclaiming the coast as a common good. This tension underscores how conflicts in urban space are never solely about physical development but about competing ways of imagining and inhabiting the city. In this sense, conflict is not merely a disruption of social order but it's a very condition of possibility, opening horizons of possibility through new configurations of meanings, identities, and material conditions. However, this constitutive role of conflict also manifests in the mundane frictions and quiet appropriations of everyday life, subtly unsettling established spatial orders through informal, often invisible acts of presence and use by ordinary people (Bayat, 2013). Practices of everyday life, regardless whether premediated or routinized, constitute political relations between subjects, or between subjects and things including nature, but also to oneself including the body, motivations, and emotions (Reckwitz, 2002). It is in streets, squares, and parks where exclusions are enacted and challenged in daily encounters (Watson, 2006). Conflict permeates the rhythms of urban life, embedding hierarchies and contestations into habitual rhythms of urban life.

Peace as aspiration and regulatory ideal

Peace is frequently invoked as a normative ideal, a universal aspiration suggesting the absence of violence or the harmonious

coexistence of differences. Yet peace is deeply ambivalent. It is produced through uneven practices and institutional processes directed at building social relations that can mitigate violence, while often obscuring underlying tensions. Cockburn (2010) highlights how peace is produced in the interstices of everyday life within contexts already shaped by conflict. She points to the gendered labour required to sustain fragile negotiations across difference towards social justice, arguing that peace remains incomplete and unstable so long as militarised structures of power endure. More broadly, perspectives on everyday peace draw attention to how people in specific places actively shape and sustain coexistence, grounded in their tacit knowledge of how these processes evolve over time and space (Elfversson *et al.*, 2023). Fatigati and Pisa (this issue) illustrate this by tracing how educational initiatives in Naples, like the CISV Dialogues on Peace Education, navigate complex social and material conditions through practices that make the fragile work of coexistence tangible. These 'peace geographies' are centred on ordinary people whose practices of coexistence build interpersonal connections across conflict lines, thus subtly disrupting violence and embedding peace in daily life. Rather than emerging from formal agreements, such fragile spatial formations are enacted through situated routines and often improvised adjustments that make living together possible despite enduring fractures (Elfversson *et al.*, 2023). This is closely tied to what Amin and Thrift (2002) describe as 'urban conviviality', where mundane acts of sharing space or fleeting encounters (with difference) help to maintain a precarious social fabric. Even in cities marked by deep structural inequalities or past violence, these small acts provisionally keep open the possibility of coexistence. Peace is hence not an abstract condition but a relational process embedded in everyday spatial and affective negotiations.

Because peace is woven into the textures of everyday life, it also becomes instituted as a regulatory ideal often used to stabilise hierarchies under the guise of consensus. Places are often targeted by imposed policies and urban strategies shaped by globalised standards of order, security, and market-driven redevelopment on the notion that new built environments can overwrite unsettling memories, as in the post-conflict

transformation of Belfast's city centre and waterfront (Esposito De Vita, 2013). Such strategies exemplify what critical perspectives on peace highlight. They show how peace can function as a regulatory ideal that legitimizes and masks systemic violence and oppression by avoiding confrontation with underlying injustices (Žižek, 2008). Seen through this prism, attempts to resolve conflict through technocratic means or superficial agreements can obscure the fundamental antagonisms that structure social and political life, thus risking depoliticising the very tensions that make transformation possible (Mouffe, 2005). Dissent and discomfort are under the banner of universal harmony, frequently silenced in the name of cohesion (*Ibidem*). Through her concept of 'agonistic pluralism', rather than seeing peace as the elimination of conflict, Mouffe (2005) argues that conflict is an inevitable part of pluralistic societies. Peace is not the absence of disagreement but the transformation of antagonistic relationships, where others are seen as enemies to be destroyed, into agonistic ones between adversaries. This perspective reclaims conflict as integral to democratic life, cautioning against any notion of peace that simply smooths over the tensions that sustain politics. Elites in power often seek to replace contestation with technocratic solutions and broad consensus (Wilson and Swyngedouw, 2014). Understanding these fragile forms of peace is critical, as they shape not just present coexistence but also the futures cities are able to imagine.

Relational tension of conflict and peace

Our explorative engagement with conflict and peace began in Naples, a city whose urban landscapes are formed through a continual interplay of continuity and disruption. The layering of visible and sensed dimensions of its urban space reveals multiple temporalities, where permanence meets transformation, repetition intersects with rupture, and inheritance blends with reinvention. In October 2023, a student excursion jointly organised by Brandenburgische Technische Universität Cottbus-Senftenberg - BTU and National Research Council, Institute for Research on Innovation and Services for Development - CNR-IRISS examined how change runs through Naples. The change pulses through the rhythms of street life and dense urban fabric,

through habitual routines that sediment collective memory, but also through fractures shaped by moments of violence, political rupture, and social upheaval that leave enduring marks on lived space (see Portfolio «Naples: Continuity and Disruption», this issue). The persistence of change, carried by both the vibrancy of urban life and its disruptions, is material, symbolic, and affective (see Strip Of «Continuity and Disruption: Through Lived Space and Representation», this issue). This sense of unsettledness gave rise to the international conference *Urban Conflicts and Peace: Everyday Politics of Commons*. Organised under the AESOP Thematic Group Public Spaces and Urban Cultures by the CNR-IRISS, BTU Cottbus-Senftenberg, and the University of Florence – LAPEI, and hosted by the Department of Architecture at the University Federico II of Naples, in October 2023. The conference brought together diverse perspectives on how urban societies navigate fragmentation and fragile forms of coexistence. Building on these exchanges, this special issue moves beyond binaries of conflict and peace to explore how their relational tension is inscribed in everyday urban life and the contested making of shared futures.

With both conflict and peace revealed to be deeply ambivalent in their political and material implications, we outline the proposition that they are not binary opposites but relational and co-constitutive. Any framing of peace as the absence of conflict is not only unattainable but also conceptually misleading and politically suspect. Urban space and everyday life are imbued with struggles and imbalances, because settlement is tied to endeavors for instituting control, entitlements, and privileges through the construction of distinctive social, cultural, and symbolic spaces (see Wolfe, 2006). Conflict in this sense can be understood as a condition that also creates the opportunity for productive unsettlement, through which the contingency of social arrangements becomes tangible, allowing spaces for renegotiation and alternative futures (Viderman *et al.*, this issue). Collective life is thus sustained in a delicate tension between conflict and peace, reproduced through tacit knowledge and unfolding in the form of repeated, unpremeditated practices and pre-reflective behaviours (Seamon, 2015) that simultaneously reinforce hierarchies and keep possibilities of transformation

alive. These habitual patterns are deeply political. Amin and Thrift (2002) remind us that mundane urban practices can reinforce existing hierarchies but also create subtle openings where established boundaries are tested or transgressed. It is often through such ordinary practices, awkward encounters, or small affective dissonances that conflict becomes perceptible and negotiated (*Ibidem*). Space is not only materially organised but also imbued with affects, meaning that bodies and atmospheres register discomforts, anticipations, and fleeting solidarities. This gives the relational tension of conflict and peace a visceral, lived quality (Viderman and Knierbein, 2020). As cities are composed of intertwined habitual patterns and affective currents, this tension circulates through spaces and bodies, either sustaining or unsettling coexistence.

Insights from contested territories show how the relational tension of conflict and peace is anchored in place, both practically and symbolically, as explored by Esposito De Vita (2018) in her work on territories 'imprisoned' by organized crime and by Wolfe (2006) in his analysis of settler colonialism. This tension is associated with material, experienced, or sensed ruptures in habitual ways of living, belonging, and identification. While conflict is deeply embedded in struggles over territory and everyday life, peace is never simply the absence of violence. It often emerges through embracing agonistic struggles that unsettle entrenched powers, enabling more just forms of coexistence. Esposito, Ragozino, Esposito De Vita, and Landri (this issue) explore this dynamic in their study of Caivano, where attempts to rebuild peace after violence and stigma involve intertwined transformations of social and physical spaces, dependent on local participation even amid deep erosion of trust.

Commons as sites to negotiate the tension of conflict and peace in everyday life

To understand how the tension between conflict and peace shapes the horizon of possibility, we ground it in urban space and situate it in relation to the everyday politics of commons. The commons, in this sense, are not merely alternative modes of managing resources but relational practices that actively negotiate the tension between conflict and peace. They are sites

where this tension unfolds as situated practice, close to everyday life, experienced, negotiated, and lived. We interpret commons as fragile grounds where this tension is actively worked through, showing what kinds of peace societies have pursued, how forms of coexistence have been negotiated, and what kind of futures they might ultimately arrive at.

In 1993, the Zapatistas occupied the Zócalo in San Cristóbal de las Casas, Mexico, evolving into a self-governed autonomous territory that established local assemblies, health services, and cooperatives rooted in collective decision-making (Stavrides, 2022b; Zibechi, 2012). Similar grassroots practices have emerged elsewhere. In Chile, *comedores populares* (community kitchens) were organized by neighbourhoods during the military regime of Pinochet to feed the unemployed and resist social fragmentation. Other examples include the Cochabamba Water Wars in Bolivia against privatization, Indigenous struggles across the Americas, the protection of local fishing grounds in Maine, the long history of communal land use in England, the urban gardening movements in U.S. cities, and civic practices of collective use and management in Naples (Federici, 2021; Sciarelli, 2024). As the austerity policies in the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis eroded welfare systems (Adisson and Artioli, 2020; Gatta and Montesano, 2024; Turnbull, 2023), commons gained momentum internationally. Movements from Occupy Wall Street in the United States and the 15M movement in Spain to cultural workers' occupations of theatres and vacant buildings in Italy (Cirillo, 2014) challenged austerity by reclaiming spaces for collective use and experimenting with forms of self-organization. Together, these cases highlight diverse efforts to organize life around cooperation and shared resources outside dominant market and state logics.

The idea of the commons has long evolved beyond managing shared resources or resisting enclosure across plural domains of life, from natural resources over material goods to digital data (Gatta and Montesano, 2024; Ricoveri, 2005). While Ostrom's seminal work (1990) challenged the notion that only markets or states could effectively govern common resources, opening the debate to alternative institutional arrangements, the focus

has increasingly shifted to the relational, affective, and political dimensions of commons (Dardot and Laval, 2015; Giardini, 2010). In this perspective, commons are not simply things to be administered beyond state and market control (Zibechi, 2012) but situated ways of organising life collectively, which are entangled with specific territories and histories (Belingardi, 2014). This allows us to move beyond Ostrom's focus on people who develop shared rules to manage common resources, drawing on Butler's critique of the 'bounded selves' to highlight how mutual vulnerability and relational ties shape practices of commoning. They open possibilities for new institutions, shared norms, models of solidarity economy, and various forms of justice through the bonds of reciprocity and care (De Angelis and Harvie, 2014; Fournier, 2013; Mandalaki and Fotaki, 2020).

In the range from civic institutions and mutual aid structures (Capone, 2022; Vittoria *et al.*, 2023) to informal networks that emerge in fractures of everyday life, commons surface where regulatory frameworks or market pressures exacerbate social needs, embodying distinct political logics (De Tullio and Sciarelli, this issue). They can contest exploitative capitalist accumulation (Caffentzis and Federici, 2014; Federici, 2021; Linebaugh, 2009) or advance feminist engagements that link care, interdependence, and the politics of reproduction in embodied space (Butler, 2015; Levy and Belingardi, 2025; Velicu and García-López, 2018) with the intent to broaden the theory of the commons by discussing it as a relational politics. However, commons can also be absorbed into regulatory frameworks, where they are often stripped of their political dimension and critical potency. Drawing on the legal and normative traditions of European welfare states, in this context they are associated with the idea of the common good, often rendered abstract and politically inert (Bianchi, 2018). The conflicting vision of commons is illustrated by Sabatini (this issue), drawing on the case of H.O.Me., an occupation of an empty building in Bologna that provides housing for precarious workers and migrants. This example shows how different logics of political self-organisation centred on everyday needs, depoliticized notions of the common good, and economic valorization by property-based governance structures intersect and compete.

This centring of interest on the practices of commoning is reflected in the conversation with Metzger and Stavrides (this issue), which explores commoning as a relational and transformative practice shaping urban life. Stavrides (2016; 2022a) conceptualises urban commons as porous spaces that enable new subjectivities and collective agency, forming shared grounds across differences within the interstices of dominant systems. Metzger (2015; 2016) extends the consideration of commons to assemblages of heterogeneous relations made up of humans and non-humans, shaped by mutual enhancement rather than extraction. His story of "The wolf in the city" illustrates how imaginaries of society as separate from nature sustain exclusions (Metzger, 2015: 23-25). For Metzger, cultivating ecological awareness, aligned with ecofeminist perspectives, becomes essential for imagining strategies of survival. This perspective extends the analysis of commons beyond tangible materialities into affective atmospheres, shared urban experiences, and the textures of collective life. In Federici's words, commoning is set of practices

«by which we share in an egalitarian way the resources we produce, but (they) are a commitment to create a collective subject or multiple collective subjects, a commitment to promote the common interest in every aspect of our lives, and therefore a commitment to reject all hierarchy and inequality and every principle of constructing the other according to criteria of exclusion» (Federici, 2021: 183).

Examples from this special issue, including Palumbo's work on practices of re-domestication of public spaces in Paris, Brussels, and Rome, make visible how commons involve relational labour, shared temporalities, and emotional investments that navigate fragile negotiations toward coexistence. They show that commons are not stable solutions but unsettled terrains where conflict and peace are continuously explored, held together, and reshaped in everyday urban life.

Toward an everyday politics of commons

Commons are not only spaces where collective agency is cultivated and negotiated (Leitheiser *et al.*, 2022). They also represent what Chatterton calls a «complex organism and a network of interrelations» (Chatterton, 2016: 407), generating micropolitical dynamics that spread through swarming,

networking, and subtle infiltration, gradually eroding dominant systems from within. Viewed through this lens, commons become fragile yet generative grounds where differences and antagonisms are not eliminated but rather given form and place, allowing tensions to be inhabited without foreclosing them. This resonates with Lefebvre's dialectic of everyday life (2014 [1946]), where routines that often reproduce alienation also carry seeds of possibility, unsettling established boundaries and opening room for contestation. In this light, commons appear as political sites embedded in everyday life. They involve relational labour, emotional investments, and shared temporalities that do not resolve conflict but sustain spaces of careful disagreement. Polat (this issue) illustrates this dynamic through an example from Mardin, Turkey, where the arrival of numerous people in the aftermath of the Kahramanmaraş earthquake gave rise to self-organised micro-communities to address urgent vulnerabilities. Through weaving new bonds and fostering collective agency in unsettled urban spaces, such practices extend the horizon of possibility, cultivating spaces where futures can be reimaged (Viderman *et al.*, 2023; review by Bosone, this issue).

Feminist perspectives extend the consideration of political notions of commons by foregrounding interdependencies – between people, between people and places, between human and more-than-human entanglements, and between subjects and the meanings they produce. By emphasising these interdependencies, feminist perspectives position care and social reproduction as fundamental to sustaining both societies and ecologies (Chatzidakis *et al.*, 2020). This relational view comprehends environment as inseparable from human life, as in Gago's concept of the «body-territory», (Gago, 2022), thus incorporating in the politics of commons the inseparability of producing goods and services from sustaining social life (Bhattacharya, 2017; Daskalaki *et al.*, 2021; Federici, 2012; Fraser, 2016; Miraftab, 2021) and from producing urban space (McDowell, 1982; Peake and Pratt, 2017). Federici (2004) notably frames such practices not as spontaneous habits or mere tradition, but as inherently political acts with a collective purpose. Practices of care thus become emblematic of broader resistances to neglect and urban violence (Gabauer *et al.*, 2022;

Katsikana, 2021). Because they are affectively charged, they have produced countervailing power in both domestic and urban spheres, fostering self-valorisation and self-determination (Podlashuc, 2009).

The orientation toward interdependence, care, and collective agency directly shapes how we understand the everyday politics of commons as deeply entangled with the tension between conflict and peace. Rather than smoothing over contradictions, these practices create spaces where fragile negotiations unfold and where the unsettled character of urban life becomes a resource for exploring more just ways of living together. The everyday politics of commons thus revolves around affective and spatial practices that nurture bonds, sustain disagreement, and hold open the horizon of possibility. Similar dynamics appear in Barrera Agudelo's account (this issue) of Monguì, Colombia, where care and interdependence become acts of resistance materialised through collective territorial restoration and networks of mutualism. Here, care is framed not as an individual duty in an atomised society but as a public responsibility, creating conditions that sustain life through the collective management of local and traditional resources. Far from being pacified, care is understood as deeply ethical and political, raising questions of justice and coexistence among humans and more-than-human life (Puig de La Bellacasa, 2017; review by Pappalardo, this issue). As Fragnito and Tola (2021) remind us, care can also generate conflicts, especially in societies marked by systemic neglect, yet it opens paths for alternative responses to shared needs (Chatzidakis *et al.*, 2020). Politicising the body through the conceptual prism of care underscores that acting together is not just about shared agency but also about recognising differences and vulnerabilities (Geagea and De Tullio, 2024). It demands conditions of interdependence that inevitably raise questions of justice, responsibility, and the burdens of collective labour. This is critical, since acting together is never exempt from conflicts over who does what and how these divisions reflect ingrained gendered and social inequalities (Kern, 2021).

Toward Horizons of Possibility

This contribution has sought to capture the density and ambivalence that shape the relations between conflict and peace

in the contemporary city. It offers a reading that is not binary but relational, grounded in the rhythms of everyday life and in the constitutive tensions of urban space. It places commons and commoning practice at the heart of this endeavour, proposing them as generative grounds where such tensions take form and gain presence. From this perspective, several directions open for further inquiry.

First, the tension between conflict and peace should be treated as an analytical category in its own right, not merely as a backdrop to urban processes. It acts as a structuring force that shapes how people inhabit, relate to, and imagine space. This calls for methods that can trace what moves below the surface of institutional discourse, including affects, atmospheres, underrepresented practices, and micropolitics of dissent. It also requires attention to subjectivities, to patterns of privilege and exclusion, and to the power relations that shape who can inhabit urban futures and in what ways.

Second, commons emerge not only as an object of study but as a critical lens on the contingency of urban space, which is continuously shaped through the tension between conflict and peace. Commons show how societies navigate this tension and negotiate their futures. This invites exploration of commoning as an agonistic, situated, and transformative practice that holds tensions without claiming to resolve them. A further level of complexity concerns the more-than-human dimensions of urban life, extending the analysis to assemblages of heterogeneous relations and their tangible and intangible implications, with particular attention to absences and exclusions. Rethinking the commons from this angle means embracing a relational ethics that connects urban coexistence to ontological justice across multiple forms of life.

Third, engaging with the pedagogical and mutualistic aspects of the politics of commons, as they respond to immediate needs close to everyday life, generates tacit knowledge that connects the intimate scale of everyday relations with broader structural transformations. Commons become inclusive terrains of struggle against the erosion of social ties and arenas for negotiating how coexistence takes shape.

The intention of this contribution is not to provide final answers, nor

can commons be understood as a model to be simply replicated. Instead, it opens questions central to this special issue: What does it mean to live together amid conflict and aspirations for peace? How can fragile yet real forms of coexistence be forged across differences? What places, moments, and relationships keep horizons of possibility open? Where do thresholds appear between a sense of direction and moments of uncertainty that make urban life both settled and open to new possibilities?

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