At least since the seminal work *The Metropolis and Mental Life* (1903) by Georg Simmel, the city has been a topic of interest to social researchers. During the first half of the last century, the Chicago School, fostering among other prominent urban sociologists Robert Park and Louis Wirth, was in many ways instrumental in the development of the city as an academic subject with its own field of research and theories. Since then research on the city has only widened in scope. Ethnographically, works like William Foote Whyte’s *Street Corner Society: The Social Structure of an Italian Slum* (1943) and Elliott Liebow’s *Tally’s Corner: A Study of Negro Streetcorner Men* (1967) are examples of early ethnographies focusing on particular aspects of city life. Ethnographic approaches to the city have become important in relation to understanding subjects like marginalization, community, planning, social networks, and relations between systems of welfare and their citizens. The city is the scene for everyday urban life and ethnographers have explored myriad iterations of the everyday: from how people inhabit and use urban spaces in different ways than planners and architects intended in the new city of Brasília (Holston, 1989); over how marginalized citizens get by in gap spaces and barrios (Bourgois, 1995; Bourgois and Schonberg, 2009); to how police officers interpret duties and make decisions on the streets of cities (Moskos, 2008); how large-scale transformation alters not only the physical landscapes of cities but also the mental (Fennell, 2015); and to how a skyscraper can become a specter haunting the inhabitants of a city but also a successful legacy of a former political regime (Murawski, 2019); and many other phenomena that affect or are part of the everyday lives of people in cities.

This special issue contributes to the above body of research in two ways. First, it investigates the city as a particular kind of organization. That is, by piecing together studies that, each in their own way, address and feed into the broader picture and discussions of what it means to “run”, use and define a city, how this is experienced and by whom these processes are influenced. They remind us – perhaps – of the complexities of concerns, interests, needs and wishes of stakeholders such as citizens, investors, planners, administrators and politicians that need to be taken into account when playing the video game SimCity (a simulation game, invented in the 1980s, where the gamer acts as a mayor who designs and develops a city).

Second, the special issue brings together a diversity of researchers from anthropology, urban sociology, urban management and migrations studies, who share a comparative and ethnographic approach to the study of different aspects of city life and organization, whether it is classic fieldwork observations, interviews, document analysis or a mixture of them all. Methodologically, ethnography has widened its scope from the still fundamental building block of “being there” long-term, to also incorporate more time efficient strategies and also understanding places (like cities or neighborhoods in cities) as embedded in webs, both local, national and international and affected by legislation, political dynamics, financial development and many other factors. Despite very different empirical foci and methodological approaches, what the articles have in common are theoretical and analytical interests in trying to develop ways of more precisely understanding the overall workings of organizing city life. Further, all articles display a particular sensitivity towards the nuances, complexities and relatedness between the different elements of each study conducted. For researchers, who work in disciplines where ethnographic approaches and methods are applied regularly, the latter might seem self-evident, but as pointed out in several of the articles, this is certainly not always the case in all disciplines that engage in the studies.
of cities and urban life. On the one hand, to put a given issue on the agenda, the issue needs to be represented, legitimized and acted on as a specific kind of problem, e.g. problem youth behaviors in ghettos or climate adaptation (cf. Bacchi, 2009). On the other hand, if complex and locally situated elements are not taken into account in a nuanced way, the organization and re-organization of the city might fail in achieving what the organizers, be they planners, other government officials or politicians, are expecting—which might happen anyway as organizing and re-organizing the city are constantly ongoing, dynamic processes.

Three of the articles in this special issue focus on city planning in relation to particular groups of citizens, who to some degree are represented as problematic. Tina Gudrun Jensen and Rebecka Söderberg’s article focuses on problematizations of urban diversity in urban and integration policies in Copenhagen, Denmark, and Malmö, Sweden. Taking their analytical point of departure in such policies as cultural texts, they investigate how visions of diversity take shape and develop over time, particularly focusing on representations, social imaginaries and categories about self and other. Despite differences in the two countries, what they have in common is that urban and integration policy constructs the figure of “the unproductive”/“the non-Western” as well as myths of national sameness based on productiveness and cultural homogeneity. According to Jensen and Söderberg such processes legitimize measures to “improve” or “remove” diverse others from urban space as a way to include/integrate “them” into a national “us”. By exploring the policies ethnographically, it becomes clear how taken-for-granted perceptions of sameness and othering are re-produced and thereby have the potential to influence how the city is or should be planned and organized.

Similarly, Jonas Strandholdt Bach and Nanna Schneidermann focus on integration and diversity in their article on moral urban citizenship and “the youth problem” in a Danish ghetto, Gellerup in Aarhus. Drawing on “patchwork” ethnographies and a research intervention in the area, the authors investigate representations of the area as an unsafe estate haunted by young thugs, and how this becomes integral in the planning and adoption of material and social transformations of the Gellerup estate. Further, the article adds to discussions of how the relationship between territorial stigmatization and citizenship is crafted by the way different institutions and researchers approach urban transformation. Like the article by Jensen and Söderberg, this article points to the often hidden and uncontested cultural stereotypes that affect city planning in areas that are represented as “unsafe”. The article also points to some of the implications of doing “step-in-step-out” fieldwork (Madden, 2017) over long periods of time and not necessarily being in a position in the academic system that can secure long-term focused fieldwork and the implications that can have on research.

In the article by Maj Nygaard-Christensen and Bagga Bjerge, it is another kind of problematized citizen that is in focus. Applying a multi-temporal ethnographic approach, the authors investigate processes of exclusion and inclusion of socially marginalized citizens in the city of Aarhus in Denmark. The article demonstrates contradictions not only between but also within both punitive and including approaches. The authors argue, that such contradictions exit due to an unresolved ambivalence about how marginalized citizens can legitimately occupy public space, resulting among others from the multiple and competing interests involved in the ongoing organization of the city and absence of long-term planning. Nygaard-Christensen and Bjerge thus argue that seemingly contradictory attempts to exclude, disperse and include socially marginalized citizens in urban settings should be understood as relationally constituted. The article adds to discussions on the “right” of marginalized citizens to public space, and it points to how future urban planning strategies are vulnerable to reproducing the same logics of exclusion.

Rather than specific kinds of citizens, the last three papers of this special issue address the organization of city life by exploring other types of issue that need to be handled, yet at the
same time pointing to the multiplicity of factors and stakeholders influencing such processes. Uri Ansenberg’s article analyses the interplay between real-estate valuation, city planning and finance in Tel Aviv, Israel. Taking his point of departure in the so-called “Standard 21” document, around which many Israeli constructions are planned, assembled and committed, Ansenberg demonstrates how the document in practice re-organizes and becomes the hub around which the entire planning process of the city revolves. Observing urban planning processes in and around the municipal council in Tel Aviv, he demonstrates how financialization and planning go hand in hand, which is a point seldom made in dominating studies of urban finance. In research focusing on the integration of property and financial markets via the real estate sector and urban policy, financialization and planning are often regarded as autonomous from each other. Thus, the empirical finding of the article underpins the importance of including ethnography in urban financialization as this can add significant knowledge of the consequences of such dual processes, and how these mutually re-organize urban landscapes and change how the city is organized.

Similarly, the article by urban sociologists Anja Jørgensen and Mia Arp Fallov add new knowledge by investigating the organization of territorial cohesion in three Danish localities, representing different types of settlements and urban density in the municipalities of Lemvig, Horsens and Aarhus. Exploring the dynamic outcome of relations between structural forces and endogenous conditions and cultures, the authors investigate the interplay between territorial capital, collective efficacy and territorial governance, applying an extended case method approach. In previous research, territorial inequality and uneven life chances are often addressed as deriving from a lack of territorial cohesion with close relations to uneven economic growth and consequences for spatial justice and democratic capacity. Yet, according to the article, the meaning of the concept of territorial cohesion and the actual consequence of this are understudied, and territorial cohesion is often regarded in a linear conceptualization of territory. However, the article demonstrates that, to understand the phenomenon more adequately, the specific social life and interaction with places where this takes place needs to be included in the analysis. This approach enables the authors to demonstrate how the degree of urbanization does not necessarily in and of itself reduce cohesion, yet it affects the way cohesion is organized, particularly the kinds of actors involved.

Finally, Maia Ebsen’s article explores forms of critical urban engagement emerging in tandem with sustainable city making, a timely subject indeed. Taking her point of departure in an ethnographic study of a politically oriented construction company in Copenhagen, Ebsen follows the daily workings of the craft workers of the company. The author analyzes the struggles between diverging and competing modes of urban engagement in sustainable city making. Pointing to how these workers often try to resist technocratic approaches to climate adaptation and find innovative solutions, Ebsen challenges existing ideas about what and who counts as an urban planner; the craft workers are just as important for planning and organizing the city as, for example, formal city planners or politicians, and yet they also feel estranged and attempt to mark their resistance to dominant technocratic approaches to building “sustainably”.

Taken together, the articles of the special issue suggest that the organization, planning and re-organization of cities and urban landscapes involves extremely complex processes that are difficult to control even in countries with strong state structures, like Israel, Denmark and Sweden. In practice, calculated as well as not so calculated “disturbances” of city planning and strategies, in terms of citizens who do not act as expected, professionals trying to find their own alternative solutions to problem-solving or changes in housing markets and population growth, significantly impact the actual outcome of such attempts to organize the city.
The collection of papers in this special issue thus highlight the strengths of an ethnographic approach to understanding not only phenomena from the margins of city life but also contending with technical processes that are embedded in the bureaucracies of cities and ongoing discussions about what constitutes “sustainability” in the built environment. While most of the papers focus on Denmark, the papers have a wide thematic range, underlining the value of the ethnographic approach in the study of cities and the lives that are living there.

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