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Productive possibilities? Valorising urban space through pop-up?

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Productive possibilities? Valorising urban space through 'pop-up'?

Abstract

Purpose: The 'pop-up' epithet has become a synonym for virtually any temporary event in a range of commercial, non-commercial and cultural contexts within the urban spatial arena. This paper discusses the role of the pop-up concept within urban space, to address the question articulated in the Call for Papers for this special issue, of whether 'everywhere needs to become a marketplace'.

Design/methodology/approach: We review a range of sources—both academic, popular press and practitioner publications and reports—to inform our critique of the use of the pop-up activities in urban space.

Findings: We identify four ways in which the pop-up concept can be valorised—*pop-up stores and experiences*, *pop-up agglomerations*, *pop-up service facilities* and *pop-up space brokerage services*.

Originality: Adopting a critical perspective, we address pop-up's implications, especially the impact on urban places and the people within them. We conclude by discussing the potential for an increased use of pop-up within urban spaces impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, which could be focused as much on social as economic value.

Keywords: pop-up; urban space; precarity; value

Introduction

In recent years, the 'pop-up' epithet has become a synonym for virtually any kind of temporary event within the urban arena, in a range of commercial, non-commercial and cultural contexts (see Beekmans and de Boer, 2014; Bishop and Williams, 2012). Our consideration of the role of the pop-up concept in the specific context of urban space addresses directly a question posed in the call for papers for this special issue of *Qualitative Market Research*; namely, 'Does everywhere need to become a marketplace?'. And, we discuss the extent to which an affirmative answer to this question is necessarily 'a good thing'.

We begin by theorising the temporal and spatial dimensions that characterise the pop-up concept—and consider their implications for the valorisation of urban space—before outlining four manifestations of such urban pop-up activity, namely: *pop-up stores and experiences*, *pop-up agglomerations*, *pop-up service facilities* and *pop-up space brokerage services*. We conclude by discussing their impact on otherwise unproductive—and often interstitial—urban space, and its possible transformation into 'marketplaces' which, in turn, provide opportunities for retailers, budding entrepreneurs and creative industries practitioners. At the same time we also identify the darker 'underbelly' of the pop-up retail phenomenon. We conclude by discussing the potential for an increased use of pop-up within urban spaces impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Theorising the temporal-spatial characteristics of pop-up

To make sense of the pop-up concept in theoretical terms, we draw on Henri Lefebvre's (1991) triadic notion of perceived, conceived and lived space; where the interaction between these three concepts contributes to the production of (urban) space. Lefebvre posits that *perceived* space comprises people's spatial practices (e.g. daily routines and everyday experience), and that this determines the uses of space and the accompanying social formations. *Conceived* space is the space of 'scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers' and is 'the dominant space in any society (or mode of production)'. By contrast, *lived* space constitutes 'space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols', which are partly imagined, and encompass sets of meanings derived from experience (ibid: 38-9). Of particular resonance to our discussion is the interplay between conceived space (i.e. the primary functions of urban spaces as they were planned) and perceived space (i.e. the appropriation of urban spaces through spatial practices). In the specific context of pop-up, the fact that vacant space in towns and cities has, over time, been adaptively reused in a way that deviates from its original intended purpose raises significant issues relating to the extent to which everywhere is a marketplace within urban space.

Fundamental to any consideration of pop-up in urban space is *temporality*, and in particular its essential ephemerality. This concept has been discussed in the broader context of temporary urbanism, defined in terms of 'the temporary construction and use of space'. It is manifest in 'the increased frequency of short-term events' (Madanipour, 2017: 3), often characterised by counterculture and activism (see Beekmans and de Boer, 2014; Bishop and Williams, 2012; Zeihl and Oβwald, 2015, for various examples). According to Ferreri (2015: 182), a core appeal of the 'interruptions' created by such temporary urban projects (variously termed 'interim' or 'meanwhile' uses) is:

> …the lure of the experiential and the pioneering, which takes on an embodied spatial
> dimension in the exploration and physical occupation of underused, neglected and
> marginal sites, as well as a dimension of praxis, where the spatial frontier becomes
> analogous to the frontier of innovative and creative practices.

This resonates with Fois's (2018) discussion of temporary 'alternative' spaces, as having a processual, experimental and dynamic nature; continually being (re)made and (re)constituted. Situating this idea in the context of Baumann's (2000) liquid modernity thesis, Bishop and Williams (2012) identify a range of factors driving the development of temporary urbanism. These include growing uncertainty about 'political, economic and environmental conditions that we had once assumed were inviolate' (ibid: 23), especially in the aftermath of the 2007-08 global financial crisis. This heralded an era that has fuelled a political economy of 'austerity urbanism', where 'many cities are bearing the physical scars of disinvestment, disuse and decline; in vacant and abandoned spaces of private recession and public retreat' (Tonkiss, 2013: 312). Madanipour (2017) highlights the cyclical nature of the urban market economy in driving this trend, often resulting in a mismatch between supply and demand, which has 'created spatial, temporal and institutional gaps, which are sometimes filled by temporary interventions, in search of interim solutions until the crisis is over' (ibid: 51). Such temporary interventions are part of what Bishop and Williams (2012) identify as an increasing intensity in the use of space through more diverse and concentrated usage; for example, through multiple uses of the same space for different purposes at different times. According to Madanipour, this allows for 'new possibilities for a variety of activities within the same place, none of which is allowed to become permanent' (2017: 49).

This has inevitable *spatial* implications. Drawing on notions of 'territorology' (Brighenti, 2010), Shi *et al*. (2021), from a retail perspective, regard pop-up shops as spatially flexible retail 'territories', constituting the material and processual confluence of a range of elements (both actors and actants)

at a particular place and time. Pop-up activities may occur in a range of locational contexts, including traditional shopping/city centres and transport hubs, cultural and sporting events and—importantly for our discussion— abandoned areas and vacant urban space. The presence of these latter areas is indicative of the uneven nature of economic development more generally (as described by Savage and Warde, 1993), where there will inevitably, in spatial terms, be 'winners and losers' (Jensen-Butler, 1997); and one manifestation of the losers' plight may be disused buildings and associated areal decline. Nassauer and Raskin (2014) characterise such spaces as: (1) combining occupied and abandoned structures, and vacant formerly occupied land, in a dynamic, patchy pattern; (2) bearing the legacy of past human uses; and (3) having, in the near term, limited potential to attract financial investment.

Considering vacant urban space (with emphasis on the built environment) through this particular lens resonates with the burgeoning academic interest in ruins (see DeSilvey and Edensor, 2012). Whilst much research on ruins has an obvious emphasis on their materiality, De Silvey and Edensor also stress that ruination can operate on a finer grain, and may eventually produce *absences*, such as 'vacant lots and gaps in infrastructure' (ibid: 467). By way of a summary, they define ruins as 'structures and places that have been classified (by someone, at some time) as residual or unproductive, but equally most of these sites remain open to appropriation and recuperation' (ibid: 467). In a particular retail context, for example, every vacant store has arguably been classified as residual or unproductive, by virtue of the inescapable fact that no business is situated there at that particular point in time. However, there always remains the possibility that the situation could change (perhaps as a consequence of an economic upturn). This implies some potential for those 'productive possibilities' (ibid: 474), which can arise from adaptive reuse, such as the re-appropriation of such vacant space for pop-up activities.

The fact that spatial re-appropriation (and adaptive reuse) can be motivated by both alternative commercial—and (counter-)cultural—uses has some resonance with Foucault's (1986) notion of heterotopia; i.e., places of 'otherness' in which alternate ordering (Hetherington, 1997) occurs, and where resistant forms of social organisation are enacted (Kohn, 2003). Roux et al (2018: 219) introduce an explicit temporal dimension here, describing some heterotopias as 'ephemeral' and 'episodic'. In turn, this chimes with Foucault's (1986: 26) 'fourth principle' of heterotopias; namely, that they 'are most often linked to slices in time—which is to say that they open onto what might be termed, for the sake of symmetry, heterochronies'. We now critically examine various ways in which these potentially alternative and productive possibilities may be manifest in an urban context, serving to valorise otherwise unproductive urban space through pop-up activities.

Pop-up manifestations in an urban context

As mentioned above, flexibility is a key characteristic of pop-up (Harris 2015), and our review identifies various commercially oriented ways in which the pop-up concept may be enacted. These are discussed below with a view to the implications for urban space, particularly in terms of the nature of the 'value' created, and who benefits from this.

Pop-up stores and experiences

Pop-up stores are described by Shi *et al*. (2021: 373) as 'one manifestation of the changing landscape of retail consumer culture'. Individual pop-up shops can open for varying time periods, from a weekend for up to a year, with a mean duration of about one month (Pomodoro, 2013). The spaces appropriated are mostly vacant retail units, typically owned by a landlord seeking to maximise 'yield'[1] from that property. Ideally occupancy would be on a long-term basis in order to provide continuity of income flow, but where this is not possible temporary occupation (through pop-up activities) may be considered, although the vast majority of property owners would, at least in the past, view this as sub-optimal (Guy, 2010), and in Foucauldian terms such arrangements might be regarded as 'heterochronies'. However, the structural economic situation currently facing many traditional urban retail areas appears to be paving the way for multiple, temporary and flexible retail tenancy periods, a factor perhaps indicative of Moatasim's (2019) notion of 'long-term temporariness' in terms of occupancy modalities and materialities in urbanism (in the specific context of street hawking).

The term 'pop-up' has also become synonymous with other types of experientially-oriented consumption in vacant and unused urban space (see Harris, 2015, 2020). An example is pop-up film screenings offered by organisations like Secret Cinema (see www.secretcinema.org). Harris notes that these events 'don't just screen films, but also offer spectators an immersive experience of urban space, either by using city spaces to (re)create fantastical, normally fictional, film worlds or by applying immersive viewing practices to real urban issues' (2020: 30 - see also Lashua, 2013, who discusses one specific example of pop-up cinema in Leeds). Harris highlights the possible tensions arising from such activities: immersion is a means by which pop-up 'romanticises relatively deprived areas and readies them for gentrification' (2015: 599), a process which in itself might appeal to archetypal pop-up shoppers, described by de Lassus and Anido Freire (2014: 66) as self-defining in terms of being

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[1] Defined by Guy (1994) as the current annual income from a property, and expressed as a percentage of the property's freehold price.

'avant-garde or "hip"', and eager for innovative and experiential concepts (see also, Kim et al, 2010; Neihm et al, 2007).

For Tonkiss (2013: 313), temporary pop-up activity constitutes 'a mode of urban practice that works in the cracks between formal planning, speculative investment and local possibilities'; or as Harris suggests, pop-up occurs 'not just in the physical but the conceptual 'margins' of the city' (2015: 597). Put otherwise, pop-up activities can be seen as existing within urban *interstices*, which Tonnelat (2008) identifies as the space that intervenes between one thing and another, or:

> ...useless leftovers of the process of design and use of urban space...the main property
> of the interstice is its temporary absence of attributed function; the interstice
> definitionally exists between a functional past and future (ibid: 293).

Harris proposes a state of affairs whereby pop-up activities are able navigate this interstitiality by filling up—or papering over—the cracks in the capitalist system, thereby perpetuating the old order during times of urban crisis, and reverting to 'normal use' when the crisis passes. Similarly, Hatherley, (2013: online) describes pop-ups as 'urban placeholders, there to fill the space until the market picks up'. There is obvious resonance here with notions of ruination, absences, and appropriation and recuperation (see De Silvey and Edensor, 2012), as discussed above.

Pop-up agglomerations

Pop-up agglomerations are most obviously manifest in pop-up 'malls' constructed from repurposed shipping containers. In the UK, perhaps the best-known example is Boxpark (www.boxpark.co.uk), comprising 60 repurposed shipping containers occupied by retail tenants and food vendors, sited on what would otherwise have been an interstitial 'unproductive' space in part of the old Bishopsgate Station goods yard of London's Shoreditch district. Originally intended to remain open for five years, Boxpark has become a semi-permanent part of the locale; and the rotating cast of businesses occupying individual shipping containers raises some interesting temporal questions relating to the multiple periodicities of tenants in the same facility. Its success is demonstrated by the fact that further Boxparks have opened in Croydon and Wembley in 2016 and 2018 respectively.

Such agglomerations—in the form of street food markets (or 'street foodification')—have been identified as a means of 'rinsing every last inch of urban space for rent extraction' (Hancox, 2020: online), and this is arguably a symptom, as well as a cause, of structural market tensions and value inequities. Hancox (2020), for example, argued that the boom in so-called pop-up street markets has been driven by the fact that for many budding entrepreneurs the barriers to entry in brick-and-mortar

operations are so high. On the one hand, therefore, 'street foodification' might been seen as a positive development in which the market can flexibly accommodate every type of vendor with every type of spatial requirement. A more critical reading is that it represents a situation in which urban space has become monetised at every level to the benefit of land/property owners. Furthermore, in a world where each scrap of space is competed and paid for, the consumer and cultural offer is inevitably refracted, and potentially limited, through the lens of property owners who want to maximise their financial returns by following market flows and trends of what sells best. As Hancox explains, this can result in:

> a sanitised smorgasbord of multiculturalism, available at an inflated price, with security guards on the door. It is the offer of a culinary grand tour, designed for a generation of yuppies who don't want to leave a converted tramshed in WC1 (2020: online).

Pop-up service facilities

Another recent manifestation of the pop-up concept is the appearance of prefabricated metal boxes in car parks and on disused urban brownfield sites, which serve as so-called 'dark kitchens' for well-known restaurant brands operating under the umbrella of food service platforms such as Deliveroo and Just Eat. Whilst these online platforms essentially aggregate restaurants into a virtual space (Richardson, 2020), dark kitchens are a physical manifestation of that aggregation. One such example sits under a railway line in Blackwall, east London, in the shadow of Canary Wharf:

> Ten metal boxes [or Rooboxes] of a similar size to a shipping container are on this site in Blackwall. They are fitted with industrial kitchen equipment, and two or three chefs and kitchen porters are at work in each, preparing food for restaurants... The boxes have no windows and many of the chefs work with the doors open, through which they can be seen stirring huge pans or flipping burgers. (Butler, 2017a: online).

Dark kitchens encapsulate an urban-centric, low-cost, high-margin food production model in which rents are kept down by occupying temporary and otherwise unproductive space. Indeed, the rise of 'Rooboxes' can be linked to an ongoing tide of insolvencies amongst big-name restaurant chains and independents on a high street hampered by challenging rents and business rates. However, this arguably comes at a cost of natural spatial displacement, with food and beverage retailing that might have once added vibrancy to a struggling high street relocating to the cheapest available form of urban

space. Accordingly, pop-up presents a challenge to notions of wider 'social' value in that it capitalises on cheap space at the expense of any meaningful contribution to a sense of place. Furthermore, any contribution it does make is often perceived as disruptive, with local residents complaining about 'the buzz of delivery vans and mopeds' from facilities that have 'been set up without planning permission' (Butler, 2017b: online). Writ large, this is a 'victory' of economic over social geographies; a process in which the value(s) of urban communities, built around shared understandings of what constitutes their locale or neighbourhood, is overwritten by the exploitation of a seeming planning loophole through the inexorable drive of market forces. It is a situation where, as in the wider 'gig economy', corporate profit can be extracted from place(s) through the exploitation of emergent cracks in a regulatory framework that offers little precedent for dealing with such innovative and disruptive business operations.

Pop-up space brokerage services

A means by which the pop-up phenomenon is bolstered lies in matching vacant urban space with those businesses that seek to territorialise it, albeit temporarily. This space brokerage for the short periodicities inherent in the pop-up concept could arguably be regarded as a new business model for the retail property industry. Organisations operating in this arena have a similar modus operandi, with online platforms allowing property owners to list their empty space, and entrepreneurs/operations/brands requiring such space can then book it for the time period required. In addition, the space brokers can provide additional resources, including background detail on particular locations for prospective tenants.

In certain urban locales there is a strong concentration of properties listed on space brokerage websites, suggesting that pop-up is, to quote Harris, 'increasingly being mobilized towards the creation of cities where critical and temporary uses of space are becoming both secondary to, and at times enabling of, processes of commodification, gentrification, precaritization and spatiotemporal control' (2015: 601). Accordingly, in some instances the more radical, activist functions of disused urban space with which temporary use has previously been associated (see Colomb, 2012; Tonkiss, 2013; Zeihl and Oβwald, 2015) are changing as pop-up activities become more mainstream and act as 'instruments of the neoliberal city' (Harris, 2015: 601). This reframes pop-up enterprises as not simply 'interruptions' or disruptions to the dominant capitalist system. Instead, such operations indicate a form of hyper-flexible capitalism that seeks to maximise the value of otherwise problematic space as far as 'yield' is concerned. The outcome is a more intensive form of urban land use where, as already

noted, short-term financial returns can easily become prioritised over longer-term spatial planning considerations.

Discussion: Does everywhere need to be a marketplace?

Tonkiss (2013) suggests that in times of 'austerity urbanism' there are four planning and policy approaches which could be adopted to regulate temporary interventions in urban space. The first is a *positive* model, which creates the conditions that allow for such activity through various legal, property and policy measures. The second, *permissive* model does not explicitly facilitate, but on the other hand does not exclude, such activities, thereby 'allowing some latitude for self-organisation and improvised spatial solutions' (ibid: 314). By contrast, the third model of *proscription* precludes such possibilities altogether, whereas finally, a politics of *abandonment* cedes urban territory to independent agency. Linking to these ideas, Harris notes that as pop-up activities are often commissioned and monitored by intermediate organisations (such as the brokerage services mentioned above), they can often preclude illegal or undesirable occupations. So, whilst pop-ups 'can then be understood as sites that exist within the margins of dominant distributions of space, they are also instrumental in defining, debating and policing those distributions' (2015: 598). That said, the permissive and abandonment scenarios outlined above are ones in which more 'informal' manifestations of pop-up may emerge organically, and in so doing create alternative—and possibly heterotopic—systems of spatial production within perceived gaps in urban space, which as a consequence do not become 'marketplaces' (to reprise the question asked in the call for this special issue).

The contrasting fortunes of two identical previously unused spaces on either side of the A57(M) Mancunian Way flyover (the two-mile long elevated motorway to the south of the city centre that forms part of Manchester's inner ring road) exemplify these issues. In early 2015, on the eastern side of Oxford Road under the A57(M) flyover, an 'informal' pop-up activity—'the Ark' homeless camp— was established. The Ark comprised a collection of tents and 'rooms' built with wooden pallets, and was able to accommodate 10-15 people staying there every night. Its apparent creator, Ryan McPhee, described it as the 'only emergency homeless shelter in Manchester' (Murphy, 2015: online). This was, therefore, a pop-up space that was organically created in response to a perceived market deficit. However, an initial position of apparent abandonment to its presence amongst city authorities soon turned to one of proscription. The camp occupied land owned by one of the city's universities which, in partnership with the City Council, served an injunction forcing the camp's removal. Subsequently, high metal fences were erected around the space to prevent any reoccurences, and the area is now a

cycle and car park for staff of the adjacent university (see Figure 1). This experience is in stark contrast to the equivalent unused (and perhaps otherwise unusable) space directly opposite on the western side of Oxford Road under the A57(M) Mancunian Way flyover. This space, which was also fenced off to prevent incursions by the homeless, has since been developed into the 'Hatch' pop-up agglomeration. Like Boxpark mentioned above, Hatch also comprises a set of repurposed shipping containers, along with an open-air streetfood courtyard, housing over 30 creative, independent businesses (see Figure 2).

Insert figure 1 about here

Insert figure 2 about here

From the contrasting experiences of the Ark and Hatch, it is evident that the pop-up concept is operating in various ways, with differing implications for urban spaces, in terms of how they are perceived as 'marketplaces', and moreover, highlighting the primacy of pop-up's commercially-oriented manifestations over potential considerations of social value (a theme we return to below). These manifestations mentioned in the previous section would be regarded by many as 'a good thing', repurposing otherwise unproductive urban space and providing opportunities for budding entrepreneurs and creative industries practitioners. Indeed, the perceived 'cool' and 'trendy' nature of some pop-up activity has proved attractive to—and has arguably facilitated—commercial development, thus catalysing gentrification. Whilst Harris (2015: 597) suggests that the occupation of urban space by temporary activities (such as pop-up retailing) might be indicative of gaps and cracks in the capitalist system (or spatially and temporally realised 'grey markets'), at the same time these activities can 'close up those gaps by occupying them, posing a distraction from sites where dominant systems have broken down and precluding practices that might use those cracks more radically'.

This raises the concept of a 'meanwhile' rather than a 'temporary' use of space, emphasising the idea that spatial occupation can operate as a kind of parenthesis in the longer term plans of property owners and developers. Problems might arise when such a parenthesis becomes permanent, and could include concerns about the potential absence of a sustained, strategic, and socially and economically meaningful investment in place. This issue is articulated by Hatherley, who in critiquing the 'placeholding' nature of pop-up mentioned above, states:

> Rather than the Great Recession appearing as a series of gaping, rotting scars in the urban fabric, which would at least have the virtue of honesty, it is creating a series of spatial gap years, where people have a bit of fun and learn a few skills which they can eventually put to more usual profit-making service (2013: online).

Such situations link through to considerations of labour market precarity, which Harris (2015) highlights as another downside to pop-up. In this context, we suggest, precarity can be both of place (because it is provisional and temporary), and also of labour, as there is often an assumption that those employed in pop-up ventures should accept flexible, or intermittent, employment. Emphasising this, Gourzis *et al.* (2019: 1450) state that 'in myriad places gentrification has created spaces in which to host a new type of precarious/gig economy but it has frequently relied upon growing precarity… to do so'. Ferreri (2015: 185-6) argues that this has meant that employees 'are expected to be "plugged in" to "fill" site-specific resources', and such flexibility on the part of workers may indeed be subject to a series of power relationships where they are at a distinct disadvantage (see Richardson, 2020, in the specific context of Deliveroo riders), sometimes as a consequence, normalising 'not just pop-up places but also "pop-up people"' (Harris, 2015: 596).

We have already discussed the deterioration of value in places that pop-up can bring for local residents, even if it is delivering apparent value to customers and corporate owners. The fact that pop-up operations often rely so heavily on the flexibility of their workforce also raises issues regarding value for employees. One might legitimately argue, therefore, that whilst pop-up creates economic value for society through employment opportunities, that value is simultaneously eroded through long and irregular hours, low wages and poor job security. In this regard, pop-up without adequate regulation and policing of employee rights emerges as the spatial manifestation of a zero-hour contract culture. In these instances, pop-up is not a wholly positive force. Rather, it has the potential to cause damage in those areas where it is prevalent, at least in terms of employment rights and conditions. This links through to ongoing political and academic debates about the poor quality of work available for many of those employed in the gig economy (MacDonald and Giazitzoglu, 2019), and wider discussions about the cultural geographies of precarity (Harris and Nowicki, 2018; Harris, 2020).

Conclusion

In concluding our discussion on the role of pop-up in urban space, we look to the future and consider the potential impact that the Covid-19 pandemic might have on these issues. One fascinating outcome of the pandemic has been the ingenuity of solutions emerging in different corners of the globe to enable business continuity and continued employment in an era which has witnessed significant restrictions on the movement and circulation of people within and across urban space. A common theme arising in such situations has been the idea of pop-up, as a consequence of its inherent flexibility. There are, for example, numerous instances of pop-up solutions being used to circumnavigate the established structures of conventional food supply chains in a manner that allows struggling businesses to keep trading and hungry citizens to keep eating. This includes pop-up grocery shops in some pubs and cafés that had been mothballed, whose patrons have taken it upon themselves to act as 'middlemen' between their catering trade suppliers and a new type of customer (Nott, 2020); and dormant sit-down restaurants adopting pop-up distribution approaches such as click-and-collect and/or take away delivery (Brennan and Ellis, 2020). Such business innovations have been encouraged by national and local governments, who have been willing to waive or rapidly adapt supply chain regulatory mechanisms to allow these kinds of activities to evolve rapidly (see for example, Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, 2020), thereby seeking to safeguard economic value.

The use of the pop-up concept to mitigate the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic is equally evident in non-commercial contexts to enhance social value. For example, attempts to balance the need for social distancing with effective movement around urban space (especially through 'active mobility') has resulted in pop-up bike lanes in Germany (Olterman, 2020), and discussions about their potential in the UK (Gallagher, 2020). Most notably, in many countries governments constructed large, pop-up field hospitals to treat Covid-19 patients (Hickman, 2020), as well as drive-through, pop-up testing facilities for tracking and tracing the virus (BBC, 2020) that repurposed areas such as empty retail store car parks (Holder, 2020).

If pop-up has been at least one part of the solution to Covid-19, it has also brought together an intriguing combination of political and economic trajectories that are often seen to be in conflict—for example, deregulation and regulation, or laissez faire vs. government-controlled markets. This is an indicator, perhaps, that the Covid-19 crisis has presented an opportunity to try and do capitalism differently and blend together the contrasting views and economic and political aspirations of its different stakeholders, who in the past may have even been at odds with each other. Such a vision presents pop-up as a potential testing ground for a spatially and temporally distinct economic smart pluralism, in which multiple representative groups and institutions have a voice and stake in any outcomes.

We conclude by returning to the question posed in the call for papers for this special issue; namely, 'Does everywhere need to become a marketplace?' Marketplaces are traditionally seen as places that add value, and certainly the pop-up concept can be leveraged to create 'value'—potentially in economic, social and community terms—in otherwise unproductive urban space. Yet despite such optimism around the potential of pop-up, we must also be mindful of its dark underbelly. We have seen how pop-up could be regarded as a potentially destructive form of hyper-mobile capitalism, which can bring additional precarity to human labour through zero-hour contracts and poor working conditions, and which reduces places to mere commodified spatial entities that have little connection to the needs and desires of their surrounding local populations. In such situations, it may arguably corrupt the marketplace concept, presenting an outward impression—or 'shell'—of a vibrant and responsive marketplace, but one which often has its value hollowed out and extracted for the financial gain of a few entrepreneurs and corporate entities who are, to all intents and purposes, spatially disconnected from an urban locale. For pop-up to work well and deliver a marketplace that provides value for all stakeholders, it perhaps has to be grown from within communities and places, and not brought in from outside, which automatically provides a routeway back out for the flight of value from a place and its citizens.

The future of pop-up, therefore, remains in the balance; the challenge will be whether companies, governments and societies are able to work collaboratively to draw out its potentially positive contribution to places, economies and societies, or whether its forward trajectory is entirely within the grip of market forces, whereby everywhere really does become a 'marketplace'.

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Figure 1: Site of 'The Ark' under the west side of Mancunian Way, Oxford Road, Manchester

Source: Author's own photograph

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Figure 2: Hatch, under the east side of Mancunian Way, Oxford Road, Manchester

Source: Author's own photograph