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Regulating Design: The Practices of Architecture, Governance and Control

Rob Imrie and Emma Street

[Introduction]

I don’t think most people realise what an incredibly regulated world we live in. That every parcel is almost predetermined by what you can build upon it, in a way of planning code and building code issues. There are very strict envelopes about height, bulk, massing, separation, aspect to light that produce the form of the city. It’s all been pre-sculptured (interview with an architect; quoted in Imrie and Street, 2011).

As this testimony from an architect suggests, the practices of architecture are influenced and shaped by building regulations, codes and rules that are formulated to provide specific and predictable outcomes for all aspects of architectural production, from conceptual design to urban form. Such regulations and codes are not necessarily enshrined in law but are systematic sets of rules characterised and differentiated by authorship, context and implementation. In all instances, rules and regulations pervade and influence, or codify, the practices of architecture, yet little is known about their impacts on, and implications for, the design and production of the built environment (although, see Ben-Joseph, 2005, Ben-Joseph and Szold, 2005; Bentley, 1999; Carmona et al., 2003; Davis, 2006; Dennis, 2008; Harris, 2004; Huge, 2004; Imrie, 2007). This Special Issue of Urban Studies seeks to address this lacuna in knowledge by exploring the interrelationships between regulation and the design and production of urban space, with a focus on the practices of architecture.

This task is important because a feature of modern life is the increase in forms of governance and (re)regulation, influencing everything from food production and its distribution, to the protection of personal health and safety. For some, we are living in an over-regulated world, characterised by, in the urban context, a plethora of rules about conduct in public spaces, the emergence of privatised redevelopment sites that restrict, through formal regulations, rights of access, and an increase in surveillance as part of policy to regularise and normalise citizens’ behaviour (see, for instance, Blumenberg and Ehrenfeucht, 2008; Miller, 2007). Such regularisation of behaviour was highlighted by the leader of the British Conservative party David Cameron (2009) who, in a speech about government powers in the UK, referred to ‘control state Britain’. Here, Cameron acknowledged the well-documented trend, observed world-wide, towards an expansion...
of the regulatory capacities of the state, albeit often through the context of decentred, fragmented forms, including hybrid, cross-cutting organisations (see, Mackenzie and Martinez Lucio, 2005).

These wider, societal trends are evident in relation to the design and construction of the built environment, in which state-centred, legal forms of regulation have proliferated. For instance, in the UK, the government has said that planning regulation and building control will be important for delivering an urban design-led renaissance of the British cities (DETR, 2000; ODPM, 2005; DCLG, 2006). Here, the government is widening the scope and scale of building control activities, to incorporate ‘non-traditional’ spheres of regulation (see Hawkesworth and Imrie, 2009). These include, on the one hand, responding to the creation of ‘resilient cities’—that is, cities incorporating building design sensitised to threats to health and safety posed by terrorism and climate change—while, on the other hand, seeking to use the building control system to respond to socio-psychological and cultural issues related to place-making and sustainable urban living. This is a marked departure from the traditional, physical or design, focus of building control and one where there is little knowledge of how the system is responding and adapting to the new challenges.

Such state-centred, regulatory formations are only a small part of the broadcloth of rules and regulations that shape urban design and the spatial development of cities. In recent times, non-state institutions, or decentred organisational formations, appear to be as influential, if not more so, than their state counterparts in shaping the design and development, or the production, of urban space (Miller et al., 2008). Of significance are the actuarial activities of insurance companies that seek to identify and prevent risk in relation to human behaviour (see Haines et al., 2008; O’Malley, 2004). The formative building codes of the late 19th century were influenced by the regulatory requirements of insurers, who set conditions relating to most aspects of building form and performance. If anything, their role has been heightened and it is indicative of what O’Malley (2004, p. 191) suggests is a post-disciplinary order, whereby the coercive, even punitive, actions of the state, are being supplanted in part by the preventative and risk-spreading (i.e. insurance) activities of organisations that “appear to act technically rather than morally.”

What this suggests is that the actions of architects, and other agents involved in the production of the built environment, are entwined in complex ways with a panoply of state, non-state and civil organisations, associations and relations. These relations extend to the entanglement of architects’ creative practices with the pragmatics of the design process and, in particular, the regulation of design activity through the application of multidisciplines, and disciplinary behaviour, of diverse project professionals (see Baer, 1997; Habraken, 2005). This reflects what Sarfatti Larson (1993, p. 23), refers to as the “heteronomous conditions” of the design process, in which the making of buildings is the co-production of different actors involved in a “creative synthesis and an eminently political activity”. This activity draws attention to the networks that are part of the dispersal, or decentring, of the actions of architects, in ways whereby architects are engaged, increasingly, in complex, interdisciplinary teams of professionals in the negotiation of design outcomes.

This is one of the key themes of the Special Issue—that is, the idea that regulation is ‘co-produced’ through the context of a series of relational networks or socio-institutional and political interdependencies (also, see Baer, 1997; Bentley, 1999; Habraken, 2005; Hawkesworth and Imrie, 2009; Mackenzie and Martinez Lucio, 2005). The papers in this Special Issue of Urban Studies develop, in part, Offe’s (1984) observation that the
fragmented nature of social and political life is characterised by complexity of institutional interdependencies and interactions that render regulation messy and indeterminate. No single actor or institution can dominate social life and agents, such as architects, are influenced by the knowledge, rules, resources and actions of those with whom they interact (see Bentley, 1999). Their scope for action is dependent, in part, on institutional rules, governance processes and practices, and the values of actors relating to different stages of the design process. It is in and through such interactions that the actions of architects can be conceived as part of a process of co-production.

In this respect, the papers in the Special Issue operate with an ‘extended’ sense of what regulation is or how it ought to be conceived and understood. The notion of regulation is not easy to define, nor is it easy or desirable to identify it with, or to reduce it to, any specific set of actors or behaviour. Rather, as Morgan and Engwall (1999, p. 3) suggest, regulation, in its most general terms, may be understood as “formal and informal norms and expectations that social actors generate about how to act in particular social contexts”. Consequent actions, as part of a process of regulation, are subject to monitoring and surveillance, and even to policing and disciplinary regimes and modes of conduct. Regulation need not necessarily be part of legal principle or codified through state rules and actions. It may be part of implicit, informal, often unwritten rules that define principles of interaction between actors that have no basis in law. Thus, part of its basis is moral and ethical, a rootedness to obligated relationships, even to habituated systems of interaction (see Bourdieu, 1998).

There is, however, limited knowledge or understanding of how development professionals, such as architects, interact with and understand rules and regulations relating to the construction of the built environment and how such interactions shape different elements of the design process. This is a key focus of the Special Issue that will seek to develop particular lines or threads of argument, including

1. Rules and regulations are part of a matrix of relations that influence the practices of architecture and they are embodied in different forms, including language, text, (construction) materials, drawings and, of course, buildings. The shape of rules and their shaping of the practices of architecture, is part of a relational mixture of discursive practices and social and political processes.

2. Regulation is core to the practices of architecture and, in turn, such practices (re)define, in part, the scope and possibilities of regulation. If one accepts this proposition, it seems incumbent on research to (re)centre the understanding of the practices of architecture within the broadcloth of the rules and regulations that, in turn, are part of the broader contexts within which architecture unfolds.

3. While conceptions of design may preclude explicit incorporation of regulations and building standards, such standards do influence, in variable ways, aesthetic and design outcomes. Regulations ought to be conceived of as much more than technical instruments or part of a non-creative process somehow removed from architects’ practices (or the practices of architecture). Rather, they are a constitutive element in the (re)production of urban space.

The rest of this introduction to the Special Issue discusses, in brief, four aspects of the relationships between architects, the regulation of design and the production of urban space. First, we outline the importance of rules and regulations in relation to the governance of urban form and process, and
highlight the significance of regulation as political instruments in the shaping of places. Secondly, we develop the contention that the regulation of urban form is part of relational socio-political formations, a conceptualisation that requires a rethinking of the alleged centrality of architects in the shaping of the built environment. Thirdly, we explore some of the debate about, and evidence for, the impact of regulatory activity on urban form and suggest that it ought not to be conceived, as some have, as necessarily inhibiting creative design actions and outcomes. Rather, it may also be thought of as generative, by facilitating as well as constraining actions (Giddens, 1984). We conclude by sketching out what the future research agenda is, or ought to be, in relation to enhancing the understanding of the role of regulatory activities in shaping the spatial development of cities.

The Governance of Urban Space

A recurrent theme in urban studies is the interrelationship between urbanism and bureaucracy, and the regulation of everyday life in cities. Lewis Mumford (1961, p. 608) describes the early 20th century city as characterised by the “growth and widening influence of the bureaucracy”. For Mumford (1961, p. 617), the city was emblematic of the forces of modernity, in which “every aspect of life must be brought under control”. This theme, of social and political control of urban space, is at the heart of the writings of Foucault (1977) who, in commenting on 17th- and 18th-century urbanism, refers to the ‘problem of the town’ as a ‘problem of circulation’. For the town to function as a place of trade, exchange and economy, spaces of circulation and movement were subject to government controls or regulations. Foucault identifies these as measures to open up densely packed spaces, connecting intra-urban flows to external, interurban networks to ensure the physical movement of goods and services between towns and the organising of space to maximise surveillance of the ‘daily comings and goings’.

Foucault’s writings, with those of authors such as Rowe (1993), Rabinow (1989) and Wright (1980), demonstrate the significance of the city as a series of regulated and policed spaces, comprising places subject to particular forms of rule relating to the spatial juxtaposition of buildings, roads and related infrastructure, as well as specifications of what their performance ought to be. For Otter (2002, p. 3), the emergence of a regulatory order in the 19th century was indicative of disciplinary governance or, as he suggests, the making of urban spaces was part of a political programme “where ruling through freedom could be made possible and visible” (also, see Huxley, 2006; O’Malley, 2004; Rabinow, 1989). The visibility of ruling (the city) was, for Foucault, by recourse to the code or the means to ‘do things’, or what Sorkin (1999, p. 1) refers to as “prescriptions for acts of translation”. These acts emerged as part of a process by which space became delimited, categorised, divided and made amenable to the exercise of government.

The making of urban spaces through the application of spatial rule, regulation and rationality has been a staple feature of urbanism across many different socio-temporal, political and spatial contexts. For instance, the design of ancient Chinese cities revolved around the use of grids, squares and regular lines, in which the objective was the propagation of the prevailing religious and political order (Bray, 2005; Friedmann, 2007; Lynch, 1984). Likewise, the examples of for-mulaic urbanism, that characterised most post-1945 housing developments in the Soviet Union and China, were for Bray (2005) indicative of a rational disposition of space. The rationality was part of a broader agenda, by governments, to ensure a minimum quantity of housing supply, while signifying the collective identities of the political regimes or...
what Bray (2005, p. 24) refers to as bolstering “the ordered regimen of collective activity”. These views could apply equally to what was occurring in countries such as the UK and the US during the same period.

The papers in the Special Issue are a contribution to this body of work that seeks to understand the political nature of urban form and to evaluate the regularisation of urban space as part of a broader series of political processes and relationships. Thus, Brand’s paper, in this issue, considers the ways that design conventions can be utilised to shape and influence people’s behaviour. This includes legally binding, state-controlled regulations and codes, along with a growing raft of standards issued by non-governmental bodies. Referring to a case study of Belfast, Northern Ireland, Brand suggests that the socio-political situation requires particular design approaches, such as the removal of bushes and trees in contested residential spaces that would otherwise provide cover for the perpetration of violence. For Brand, while building conventions reflect societal objectives to ensure people’s health and safety in the built environment, they are also intended to create or assert shared bodies of knowledge and common understanding between different actors, and they typically embody struggles over power and influence (Brand, this issue, p. 2671).

Such struggles are manifestly part of a contemporary urban politics that, as Moore and Wilson suggest in this issue, revolves around conceptions of what the good city is or ought to be in relation to the attainment of sustainable urban forms (also, see Mumford, 1961). Their analysis, of green building codes in Austin, Texas, provides an illustration of how equity issues are often sidelined in favour of the use of regulations that seek to ensure the primacy of economic development and environmental protection. In this respect, Moore and Wilson point to the potency of codes, not only as signifiers of political values, but as mechanisms and instruments of governance that absorb and reproduce the dominant socio-political value systems. As they note, codes are not only technical instruments designed to improve efficiency and ensure safety; they also represent particular value systems at specific points in time. That is, codes of all kinds are both an index of changing social values and at the same time a strategy to enforce those values (Moore and Wilson, this issue, p. 2618).

In a similar vein, Dovey, Woodcock and Wood (in this issue) point towards the significance of urban regulation, less as the application of objective, technical measures or instruments and more as political phenomena, embedded in juridical and politicised actions and outcomes. They explore how the character of place is constructed, mobilised and utilised in planning and development processes, with a focus on the example of suburban change in Melbourne, Australia. Their research is illustrative of the politically charged nature of regulation, as part of competing discourses of what urban character is or ought to be, ranging from developers’ seeking to maximise development densities, to residents lobbying politicians to preserve local heritage. For Dovey, Woodcock and Wood, the discursive construction of character “comes to mean what different interests want it to mean” (this issue, p. 2612). The authors suggest that the ensuing complexities of defining what urban character is, or ought to be, means that “attempts to operationalise it as a code of urban regulation” (p. 2612) are likely to be thwarted.

Relationality, Design and Urban Form

Writings about architecture and design often emphasise the creative role of practitioners and the importance of aesthetics and artistic
endeavour in influencing architects’ values and practices (Collier, 2006; Frampton, 1980; Porphyrios, 1985). The architect is conceived of as the ‘eponymous hero’, a figure that for Pearman (Pearman, 1991; quoted in Bentley, 1999, p. 117) propagates “the culture of architecture as an art form”. There are many renditions of this, including Le Corbusier’s observation that “the architect, by this arrangement of forms, realises an order which is a pure creation of his spirit” (Le Corbusier, 1986, p. 5; also, see Le Corbusier, 1925). Recent (re)statements of the ‘architect as artist’ appear in a number of outlets. For instance, an organisation called Art and Architecture suggests that architects build dreams and help clients reconcile those dreams within real budgets. When a small part of the world is shaped precisely as we would wish it to be, an almost magical sensation arises—a feeling of enchantment and fulfilment (Art and Architecture, 2007; also, see Sharp, 2007; Saint, 2001).

This view is not atypical, but it is a one-sided portrayal of architects; it is part of what Sarfatti Larson (1993, p. 14) refers to as the ideology of architecture in which the creation of pure design is propagated as architects’ purpose or raison d’être (see Bentley, 1999; Ellis and Cuff, 1989; Ghirardo, 1991; Habraken, 2005; Vidler, 1999). For Sarfatti Larson (1993, p. 14), architecture and its practitioners are caught in a “permanent contradiction” between, on the one hand, the pursuit for autonomy through design practice, and, on the other hand, the realisation that its making is dependent on “heteronomous” social relations (also, see Vidler, 1999). These relations are part of the complexity of the design and construction of buildings, and the involvement of diverse actors and agents in influencing the design and development process. This observation suggests that the practices of architecture are not reducible to the architect per se; rather, they are part of a matrix of relational networks and socio-institutional and project contexts.

This much is well known and documented by organisations, such as the Royal Institution of British Architects (RIBA) in the UK and the American Institute of Architects (AIA) in the US, concerned with the alleged erosion of architects’ (professional) status in the design process. Thus, a statement by the AIA (2007, p. 1) suggests that “clients see the separation of design and construction as inefficient” and, as a consequence, are using what the AIA term “non professionals” to define “projects from feasibility through design and into operations”. Likewise, the RIBA (2005, p. 11) have noted the emergence of many more actors in the design and development process, with some taking over functions previously the preserve of architects. For the RIBA (2005, p. 11), a problem of and for, architects is remoteness from and, in some instances, resistance to rapid organisational changes in design and building. As the RIBA (2005, p. 11) have argued, the “norms or culture of the profession are seen as increasingly at odds with the modern construction industry”.

These observations highlight processes of organisational dispersal, in which the tasks of architects are increasingly diffused across and defined by interactions within networks. The design and construction of city spaces cannot be understood as product or outcome of any particular organisational forms. Rather, the interdependencies between organisations within the design process shifts attention from what Czarniawska (2009, p. 158) characterises as “organisations to organising”. This is a recurrent theme of papers in this issue of Urban Studies and it is to the fore in the papers by Jones and Faulconbridge. Jones suggests that writings on architecture require greater recognition of the complex social production of architecture. This, he argues, will involve challenging ‘reductionist’ accounts of the profession, which often fail to acknowledge how architects’ practices are

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shaped by political and economic contexts. Drawing on Bourdieu’s theorisations of professional practice, Jones asserts that a fruitful line of analysis may be to view architecture as a ‘field of production’ as opposed to a profession per se, a representation, he suggests, that has been created by professional groups themselves.

Jones’ observations open up, potentially, important forms of enquiry that are reflected, in part, by Faulconbridge’s understanding of the role of regulations in shaping the designs of one particular subset of the profession, the so-called global or star architects (also, see McNeill, 2008). Faulconbridge suggests that, in order to understand the processes involved in global architects’ production of buildings, research has to be sensitive to the local specificity or specific sites or places of both the production and consumption of urban form. Far from the work of global architects leading to a process of cultural homogenisation, as suggested by some, Faulconbridge’s analysis points to the significance of the multiple ways in which seemingly disembedded firms are regulated and embedded in…the places they build in (Faulconbridge, this issue, p. 2538).

Thus, the production of ‘local’ meaning is one whereby more analysis is required of what Faulconbridge refers to as “design-side and consumption-side regulation” (p. 15) or the interrelationships between key actors, such as clients and local regulators, and the instruments of design governance and regulation.

The notion of a ‘field of production’ is also useful in thinking about organisational change in the design process, especially with what appears to be the decentraling of tasks and the dissolution of professional boundaries and roles. This is a focus of the paper by Fischer and Guy who, in noting the introduction of building regulations relating to energy and conservation, suggest that architects’ roles are defined, increasingly, by what they term intermediation. By this, they are referring to the ways in which regulation is creating new layers of complexity relating to their interpretation and implementation, as well as generating problems for design teams to solve. The delivery of design depends on architects to provide means of working through such complexity, by becoming, as Fischer and Guy note, “more self regulatory and regulators of other built environment professionals” (this issue, p. 2592). An outcome may be the (re)invention of architects as intermediaries between different project professionals, able to interpret and make sense of the complexities of regulation. For Fischer and Guy, a likely scenario is shifting design work even further from the romantic image of the lone genius towards that of the systemic intermediary (this issue, p. 2592).

### Regulation and the Shaping of Urban Form

Fischer and Guy start off their paper with the proposition that “regulations are highly influential in shaping urban places and architectural form” (this issue, p. 2577). This appears, at first sight, to be an incontrovertible statement well grounded in the evidence of urban change (see Ben-Joseph, 2005; Ben-Joseph and Szold, 2005). However, while there is much knowledge about the interrelationships between political regimes, power and the formation of urban projects and their outcomes, there is less about the micro-regulations of regulation, or the ways in which specific rules or regulations about urban form influence the practices of practitioners of urban design. Thus, the papers in the Special Issue are concerned, in part, with documentation of the micro-regulatory practices of specific agents and with providing details about how far, and in what ways, professional practices are...
influenced by both state-administered and non-state forms of regulation. This point is particularly pertinent in relation to what some claim as being significant changes in the division of labour with respect to the development and delivery of urban design.

This is an underlying premise of the paper by Fischer and Guy, and their notion of intermediation is an important contribution to the debate about how architects’ roles may be changing in a context of increasing regulation. One interpretation of the intermediary role is that it represents a managerialisation of the practices of architects, in which they are deployed, increasingly, to develop and service key bureaucratic functions related to the regulation of risk in the design process (see Habraken, 2005; Vidler, 1999). This is a premise outlined in Imrie and Street’s paper, in which surveyed architects suggest that much of their daily work routines revolve around the development of new management systems, to the detriment of their involvement in creative design work. Such systems are designed to apportion, and thereby reduce, the risks facing design and construction professions as part of the building process. These risks are diverse and complex, but include budget and programme overruns, failure to deliver on design components or work packages and non-compliance with health and safety legislation.

The regulatory environment relating to the management of risk has also been described by some as part of a transition from prescriptive, rule-based procedures, to the use of verification techniques or what Johansson (n.d., p. 1) refers to as “instruments to ensure the attainment of goals have evolved”. In the papers by Fischer and Guy and Imrie and Street, one of the underlying themes relates to how a goal-oriented system is changing the labour process, whereby architects appear to be much more involved in the development of systems and procedures related to self-regulation, or the means to account for their actions and behaviour. Such regulation is redolent of an auditing society, whereby trust in professionals’ behaviour has to be demonstrated through audits, checks or what Power (1997) characterises as the ‘technologies of mistrust’. As Imrie and Street suggest, for architects, and other design professionals, it appears that a logic of organising processes and practices relates to the securing of reputation, or ensuring that they can verify, to others, their ability to provide professional, risk-free services.

The papers also deal with the impact of regulation on urban form and process and, in doing so, seek to intervene in what is a highly charged debate, often based on ideological viewpoint and hyperbole rather than clear evaluation of the evidence. One of the popular observations is that architects are constrained by regulations and rules relating to urban form and process. The autonomy of architects and their creative powers, so it is suggested, are reduced by the will of bureaucrats who impose their tastes and design predilections through use of prescriptive coding and other techniques of control. A typical comment is that by Liebing (1987, p. 5), noting that architects see regulations “from mere nuisances as necessary evils, to highly restrictive”. It is our feeling, however, that such characterisations do not capture the complexities of regulatory relationships. Much more care is required, by researchers, in evaluating how precisely the different mix of rules and regulations relating to the design of urban spaces influences the practices of architects.

In interviews that we have conducted with architects, a repeated observation was that regulations, while often an irritation and diversion from the main task, need not be anathema to good design outcomes. Indeed, for some architects, regulations are something to be solved or part of a puzzle that has the potential to create a context of creative actions or, as one of our respondents said,
“tougher regulations produce innovation, more invention” (see Imrie and Street, 2011). Similar messages are conveyed in the paper by Carmona in this issue, who notes that design coding, if used correctly, can offer the potential to regulate against what he terms, the ‘tyrannies of practice’, including conflicts around market pressures, the demands of meeting regulatory standards and the desire to protect creative autonomy. In contrast to those who fear that coding represents a threat to the creative freedoms of designers, Carmona suggests that codes, in addition to leaving room for design creativity, can enhance the design process by underlining a shared commitment to design quality across all parties.

Such views indicate that codes and regulations relating to the design of cities may have a positive role in place-making. This is a theme explored by Dovey, Woodcock and Wood in which they consider how far, and in what ways, urban character might be attained as part of a process for ensuring the development of a progressive sense of place. As the authors note, how far does the regulation of ‘character’ open or close the city to creative innovation? Can it become camouflage for creative destruction? (Dovey et al., this issue, p. 2595).

This is a theme aired by Ben-Joseph’s commentary in this issue, in which he surveys urban development trends and evaluates their implications for approaches to code-making. For Ben-Joseph, a lesson learnt from previous periods of code-making and application is to avoid imposition of standards that are applied with “disregard to environmental conditions and locale” (this issue, p. 2700). The important message here is, as Ben-Joseph suggests, ensuring that codes do not obscure the complexity of places, but, instead, provide “a clear vision that communities can grasp and endorse” (this issue, p. 2701).

**Regulation, Architecture, Urbanism: A Research Agenda**

The contributors to this Special Issue of Urban Studies provide suggestions for future research about the interrelationships between architecture, regulation and the design of urban space. We conclude by outlining, briefly, themes that ought to form part of a research agenda. Foremost, the papers contribute to the understanding of the socio-political and cultural relations that shape urban form and, in doing so, seek to steer around the dangers of what Knox (1984) has characterised as ‘fetishising design’. For Knox (1984, p. 114), the study of architecture and urban change has, traditionally, given too much analytical attention to physical form and architects, with the consequence that there has been limited analysis of the “social relations that surround the production and meaning of buildings”. A resolution, for Knox and others, is the broadening of architectural theory beyond its reductive concerns with the activities of architects, to engage with what MacLeod (2005) refers to as the making or production of urban spaces.

These observations provide a route to theory building and development, and part of this is the current concern, in the social sciences, with understanding phenomena as relational and influenced by processes of co-production. Such notions are helpful for steering analysis away from a conception of architecture as an autonomous sphere and are useful in (re)centring social scientific ideas into the study of urban design. However, we feel there is much to be done to develop such concepts to ensure that research based upon them does not reproduce reductive frames of analysis. For instance, co-production implies, helpfully, a sense of negotiation or the search for consensus. It directs attention to the importance of networks and interactions, and implies a sharing, even equalisation, of power between co-producers.
This has analytical benefits, but dangers too in that it may deflect analysis from power inequalities or structural differences more likely to be captured by other concepts, such as those deployed by Jones, in this issue, relating to ‘cultural political economy’.

The papers also highlight the dangers of the regulation of urban form that (re)produces what Sklair, in this issue, refers to as the “consumerist/oppressive city”, a socio-spatial formation based on “the idea of the culture-ideology of consumerism” (p. 2703). For Sklair, the oppressive regulatory regimes of the consumerist city need to be supplanted by a “progressive regulation of architecture and planning in a post-capitalist future” (p. 2703), as part of the production of what he terms ‘functional/emancipatory cities’. These ideas cross-cut with those highlighted by other papers in the Special Issue, in that there is uncertainty about how precisely different forms of regulation, in contrasting socio-cultural contexts or settings, are implicated in the (re)production of places. There is a need to know, therefore, more about how far specific legal or quasi-legal rules relating to the governance of urban design are able to operate in ways that do not (re)produce the oppressive places that Sklair suggests are an outcome, in part, of contemporary political and regulatory regimes.

In this respect, one of the unfolding scenarios relates to the ways in which architects, and other design professionals, are being placed at the forefront of government responses to manage what are, potentially, new urban disorders or risks relating to terror threats, climate change and international migration. As suggested in the introduction to this guest editorial, governments in different countries have sought to widen the scope and scale of building control, to incorporate ‘non-traditional’ spheres of regulation. However, there is little knowledge of how far design professionals, such as architects, are developing the competencies and capacities to respond to what appears to be the identification, by government, of qualitatively new objects/subjects of regulation and control (although, see Coaffee et al., 2008). This is an important area of future research as it relates, in part, to understanding how the tasks of key actors, such as architects, are likely to be transformed or influenced by broader societal objectives relating to the production of the built environment.

The contributions in this Special Issue are also suggestive of the diverse geographies of architecture and highlight the need for much more research about how differences between nation-states, in relation to socio-regulatory processes, influence design practices and the shaping of urban form. Differences in regulatory form and the governance of regulation, are also apparent at sub-national scales, and the paper by Faulconbridge, about the localisation of global architects’ practices, raises critical issues of how the place-specificity of regulation, or its embeddedness in particular spaces, is important in the shaping of places. It may be the case that some types of regulation, in some places, are much more ‘productive’ than others. Conversely, it may be the case that some types of regulation, in different regulatory contexts, are more likely than other types to restrict the scope of architects’ practices. Such observations open up possible lines of enquiry about the socio-political significance of regulation, its form, content and rationale, in the production of urban space, an objective of research that we hope this Special Issue goes some way to addressing.

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