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Reflections on law and place: an editorial

For this editorial, we tasked 5 legal scholars representing different areas of law and diverse theoretical and methodological backgrounds, with writing about the relationship between law and place. We further tasked them with incorporating a practical and grounded approach to their papers, considering what law means to place users, place managers, and those overall responsible for places. Our contributors were at liberty to choose their own perspectives, methodologies, and definitions.

The result is the present special issue on “Law and Place”, through which we address those who make decisions, design policies, and implement place-making strategies, altering them to the presence of the law around them, in both its material and immaterial dimensions.

The papers in this special issue, therefore, address the following points in the context of place management and development: what can a place-first approach teach us? Why does thinking about place matter in the context of the law? Ultimately, what can the people who manage, regulate, and make decisions about places learn by focusing on the way the law’s universality manifests *in* place, especially in the context of practice?

We start this special issue by offering a walking tour of Sheffield in the Northwest of England, led by Dr Luke Bennett, Associate Professor and prominent legal geography scholar. The piece entitled “A legal walk of Sheffield: foregrounding the everyday presence of the law in the city” opens the discussion on the manifestation of the law in the everyday. We learn about Sheffield’s industrial past and redevelopment present, whilst considering the legal implications faced by place and site managers at the same time.

In a similar note, John Pearsons’s paper, “Place and avoiding the race to the bottom of the fractured well”, offers a novel approach to seeing fracking sites (and the extractive industries in general) as *places* of practice, specifically addressing those responsible for their management and operation as place-practitioners. Pearson alerts us to the potential implications of the layering of regulation in relation to hydraulic fracturing (fracking) at the borders between the nations of the UK and considers a place-first approach to explore how such issues can be addressed.

Moving from environmental law to urban planning and from the natural to the built environment, we encounter the work of Athena Michalakea on land use and sex work in Greece, through the prism of legal geography. Michalakea’s paper entitled “From the margins of law to the margins of the city; a legal-geographical analysis of sex work regulationism in Greece”, demonstrates how we can reach spatial justice by seeing the places of sex work in the city as the intersection between policing,

planning, public hygiene, anti-immigration policies, offering an invaluable angle for place managers and policymakers

Still on city-level, the interdisciplinary paper by Kanellopoulou, Panayiotopoulos and Pavlidis entitled “Cultural heritage beyond juridification: towards a place-first research agenda” foregrounds place in the context of law-making for cultural heritage. The authors bring law, tourism, and cultural research together to argue that cultural heritage law should be place-sensitive and accommodating of the multiple meanings associated with places that attract great volumes of touristic footfall. They see cultural heritage law as enabling rather than prohibitive of the multiple narratives associated with the value of lived-in historic places.

The last paper comprising this special issue discusses the meaning of being and belonging in public places, only now in the context of human rights law and sexuality: Alex Powell’s work entitled “The place where only gays go: constructions of queer space in the narratives of sexually diverse refugees”, critiques the legal construction of claims of queerness under asylum seeking procedures. He argues that the law “sees” queerness as the act of being present in *specific public places* such as gay bars and pride parades. Powell’s work alerts place-managers and event organisers of the multiple legal identities of those in attendance, critiquing place-based assumptions as legal claims in the eyes of the law.

This special issue comprises papers offering diverse perspectives on thinking about place as far as the law (in both the contextual and the normative sense) is concerned in the natural and the built environment. We draw attention to the fact that “place matters” both as a field of inquiry and as a lens through which we see law in our surroundings. We therefore reiterate the value of foregrounding place when it comes to examining the law’s everyday presence. This way, both the law and those affected by it, become visible to those responsible for the construction and maintenance *of place*.