

*Keynote address to the TASA Conference, November 2019, Sydney*

## **Planning and Diverse Urban Cultures: A Sociological Critique**

By

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### **Abstract**

City life is now the dominant form of existence for most people on the planet, which means that urban environments are at the centre of the political-economic processes and social relations that shape and define the contemporary world. Along with size and density, the overarching characteristic of a city is, as Louis Wirth suggested, heterogeneity, which is inscribed on the urban landscape in a range of ways, while the diversity of the population is a defining demographic marker of the city. But difference has implications beyond the descriptive; indeed, it structures the experiences and lives of urban dwellers, and is both cause and manifestation of inequality and disadvantage. A quest for difference also animates many recent city reimagining strategies intended to foster local cultures and to mark the city itself, or its precincts, as 'different'. More ambitiously, such strategies are increasingly positioned as facilitating social inclusion and nurturing urban citizenship. This keynote address explores such issues, taking stock of implicit tensions, underpinning objectives and key legitimating discourses. It argues that the dominant cultural planning agenda is framed, in part, by a conceptualization of culture as the entire way of life of a group or collective, while subsuming other understandings and perversely fostering 'serial monotony' rather than socio-cultural diversity.