# Chapter 3
# Cultivating Virtue: Neo-Aristotelian Concepts in Public Space Development

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## 3.1 Introduction

We propose the Aristotelian concepts of *eudaimonia*—which we translate as human well-being or flourishing—and of the virtues (excellences of character and understanding) and civic friendship as guiding concepts for today's urban development, especially in the design and programming of urban public space. Taken together, they offer a coherent and, we believe, compelling framework for understanding how to enhance the lives of citizens and to build a "sense of We" across sociocultural and economic difference, which is crucial from the perspective of social cohesion.

By including the ideal of civic friendship in our conceptual framework, we add a new dimension to the discussion of eudaimonic well-being that has been gaining an increasing importance in social scientific research over the last decade (see also Chap. 2). On our Aristotelian account, civic friendship denotes an ethical and political virtue to be cultivated in any urban environment, as well as the kind of social relationship which such cultivation entails. We argue that civic friendship can be an important bonding and bridging factor in today's differentiated and fragmented societies.

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In determining how best to integrate the above-mentioned notions in urban development, we employ the neo-Aristotelian concept of practices, as distinct from organizational institutions (MacIntyre, 2007: 186–203; Knight, 2008a, 2023), and introduce a concept of communities of virtue (cf. MacIntyre, 2016: 176–182). We propose that the development of urban public space should take account of citizens' participative practices, rather than only of functions that are administratively conceived. This way of approaching urban public space allows for addressing individual and communal well-being to a much higher extent than the framework of multifunctionality. Enhancing the conditions for participation in shared practices in urban settings facilitates the development of communities of virtue—localities consolidated by shared goals and standards of excellence, which are a setting for cultivating virtues (intellectual and moral), and development of civic friendship. Although state and corporate institutions are indispensable in supporting urban practices, the motivating goods they pursue differ from the goods internal to particular practices. This tension needs to be addressed and negotiated if we are to provide conditions for practices and communities of virtue to flourish.

In the final section of this chapter, we identify three concerns to be addressed in developing public space, based on neo-Aristotelian insights:

(a) Identifying practices that are to be supported within a given location
(b) Mapping threats to the internal goods of practices from institutions' pursuit of external goods and finding ways to mitigate these threats
(c) Facilitating the development of communities of virtue around selected practices

In line with Aristotle's emphasis on the importance of direct political engagement, all these domains should involve local citizens in participatory mapping of stakeholder needs and place values, codesign of necessary material infrastructure, and suchlike.

This discussion is illustrated with references to urban agriculture—understood as practice in the MacIntyrean sense and therefore a potential setting for the development of communities of virtue that could be integrated in development of public space. Importantly, an urban agriculture project can potentially offer settings for cultivation of multiple, additional practices—such as culinary arts, herbal medicine, mindfulness, carpentry, or even chess playing or raft building, as exemplified in some of our project cases (see Chaps. 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, and 13).

The chapter is divided into three parts. First, we introduce Aristotelian notions of *eudaimonia*, virtue, and civic friendship as guiding concepts for addressing individual and communal well-being in contemporary cities. We continue with the discussion of MacIntyre's concepts of practices, institutions, and communities of virtue, before concluding with a neo-Aristotelian approach to public space development and references to urban agriculture.

## 3.2 The Well-Being of Citizens in an Aristotelian Perspective

### *3.2.1 Eudaimonia and the Virtues*

*Eudaimonia* is often translated as happiness, but it differs substantially from today's understanding of this word in terms of pleasurable, often transitory experiences (hedonic happiness). For ancient Greeks, *eudaimonia* denoted human flourishing—the actualization of our full potentials, a rewarding and fulfilled human life, which was necessarily one lived in accordance with virtues—excellences of character and understanding.

The idea of human flourishing is more than mere metaphor (MacIntyre, 2016, 24ff.). It is grounded in a teleological conception of living beings as having a natural potential, which is the specific good of each to actualize over their lifetime. This naturalistic ethic can be traced through Western intellectual history and can still be proposed as a solution to the aporia of rival moral philosophies (Irwin, 2007–2009 passim, 2020: 2). Since human beings are socially dependent, rational, language-using animals, the fulfilment of our individual potentials—that is, our flourishing as the kind of beings we naturally are—is conditional on our social conditions. More analytically, it is dependent upon the purposive social practices in which we engage with others. It is through such lifelong participation that we develop our dispositions and virtues, our own character and personality. With the progress of humankind, our social conditions are also increasingly determined by the historically given institutions in which personal virtues are necessarily subordinated to those institutions' constitutive rules, resources, and hierarchies.

Aristotle observes that everything has a *telos*: a natural purpose or final end and good. If we want to understand what something is, we should search for its *telos*. What is the *telos* for human beings? According to Aristotle, we are meant to fulfil our innermost potentials and thereby live happily, by cultivating both the moral and intellectual virtues. Someone who is not living a life that is virtuous is not living the life of a fulfilled human being. They are like a plant that does not flourish, an animal that is disabled, or an instrument that does not work, except that their dysfunctionality, their failure to actualize their own good or *telos*, is not due merely to their conditions but also to their own choice and intellectual error.

Someone who does live according to virtue is living a life that flourishes—they are being all that they can be, realizing their innermost potential. What does this involve? For Aristotle, humans are rational and social beings and therefore "political animals." Like other species, we come into being full of potential which, given favourable conditions, we are able to fulfil. The human good therefore includes much in common with the good life of other living beings, such as physical health, and still more that we share with other intelligent and sociable species. Even so, human abilities are of a higher order and wider range than those of any other species, and therefore so too are the excellences of which human beings are capable. These include the intellectual virtues actualized by those engaged in philosophical, practical, and scientific pursuits as well as the moral virtues that may be actualized

by all of those engaged in the social activities and to some extent in one's solitary pursuits. Both types of virtues are essential for the political activity of organizing communal life and directing it to the common good. To cultivate the virtues is to cultivate oneself, and to achieve excellence is to flourish as a human being.

The importance of actualization of our potentials for our well-being is one of the central assumptions behind Martha Nussbaum's capability approach, viewing capabilities as an attempt to map central dimensions of human flourishing (Nussbaum, 2000, 2011; see also Chap. 2). Whilst capabilities discourse primarily focuses on societal or political arrangements supporting the actualization of human capabilities (material and institutional settings for realization of human flourishing), Nussbaum's earlier work emphasizes the importance of individual attitudes (emotions, values, judgements) and community in the achievement of *eudaimonia* (Nussbaum, 1994). In this she is very close to the Aristotelian vision.

Virtues are exercised and can only be cultivated and developed through different kinds of social interaction. Various kinds of community provide their members with opportunities to exercise and cultivate such moral virtues as courage, temperance, generosity, magnanimity, truthfulness, wit, justice, decency, and friendliness (Aristotle, 2014, 46–97, 104–107, 136–174: 1115a- 1138b, 1141b-1142b, 1154b-1172a,). In these communities people usually cultivate also intellectual virtues, including theoretical wisdom (*sophia*), scientific knowledge (*epistêmê*), the ability to make things (*techne*), and practical reason (*phronesis*): an experience-based ability to judge and act successfully with regard to "those things that are good or bad for man" (Aristotle, 2014, 103–104: 1141a22–28). These opportunities allow community members to grow and to flourish, through participation in common activities with common goals. To participate in such shared activity is to incur obligations to others that are voluntary. These include obligations of loyalty and solidarity to particular communities in which one participates. To share in actualizing a common good obliges one to act in the best way to achieve that good and to act in the best way toward others who are similarly obliged.

It is worthwhile paying more attention to the aforementioned division of virtues into intellectual virtues, or excellences of understanding, and moral virtues, or excellences of character. For us today, virtue has predominantly moral connotations. This makes it somehow less attractive as a conceptual tool in such domains as urban development. Emphasizing the knowledge dimension is very important in this context—virtue is as much about refining our character as it is about developing different kinds of understanding, practical reason, and hands-on skills.

Different types of intellectual virtues correspond to the ancient Greek division of knowledge into three main categories: theoretical, practical, and productive. Theoretical sciences are concerned with that which can be described by exact laws and include domains such as physics, mathematics, and metaphysics. The intellectual virtue to be achieved in their pursuit are theoretical wisdom (*epistêmê*)) or philosophic wisdom (*sophia*) which is a combination of *epistêmê* and intuitive understanding of first principles (*nous*). Poetical or productive sciences (*technai*) are concerned with producing an end result. Their aim is *poiesis*, production. The practical sciences are concerned with achieving the human good through right

conduct. Here Aristotle situates politics and ethics. Their ideal is practical wisdom, *phronesis*, that unlike theoretical wisdom is always context-dependent and requires an extensive experience of particulars, typically gained throughout the years of life. Phronesis is a foundational virtue for the development of social virtues. Unlike his teacher Plato, Aristotle argued that best practice cannot result from the application of purely theoretical knowledge. Neo-Aristotelians often extend the objection further in arguing that such practices as agriculture are best understood by those who do the work.

### *3.2.2 Ethics and Politics*

The concept of *eudaimonia* has, over the past couple decades, gained increasing attention within psychology and other social sciences dealing with human well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryan et al., 2008; Huta & Waterman, 2014; Vittersø, 2016). This body of research is typically juxtaposing hedonic and eudaimonic form of human well-being in different contexts. The philosophical grounding of this discussion is usually limited to Aristotle's discussion of *eudaimonia* included in *Nicomachean Ethics*. *Politics*, however, gives additional insights into this concept.

Aristotle viewed ethics and politics as two interconnected fields of study, the former addressing the good of the individual, the latter the good of the *polis*, which he considered to be the best type of community. He was specifically interested in the role that politics and the political community can play in bringing about the virtuous life of citizens. In this he initiated a tradition of reasoning about politics as the activity of urban living: meeting the fellow citizens in public space and deliberating about what is good for their shared community. In this context he asserts, somehow shockingly for us moderns, that politics is the science of what is good for humans:

> For even if the good is the same for an individual and for a city, that of a city is evidently a greater and, at any rate, a more complete good to acquire and preserve. For while it should content us to acquire and preserve this for an individual alone, it is nobler and more divine to do so for a nation and city. And so our method of inquiry seeks the good of these things, since it is a sort of politics. (Aristotle, 2014, 13: 1095a6–11)

The good of *eudaimonia* participates in the good of political community through citizens' participative political practice, which Aristotle considers the most comprehensive form of the cultivation of moral virtue and exercise of practical reason. The conditions under which humans most truly flourish differ from those of beasts or gods in being social, institutional, and rationally, cooperatively purposive. Humans' moral virtues are those characteristics that are conducive to activity that is social, rational, cooperative, and, in a single word, *political*.

Politics is the shared reasoning and activity of citizens, *polites*, as such. As Strang (1998) puts it, "ancients called themselves 'political' not insofar as they were engaged in legislation or constitution-making, but insofar as they were engaged in direct deliberation, participation, decision-making, and follow-through." Their

polis-life was participatory to a degree hitherto unheard of, and "its preeminent achievements were not laws as *products* but *actions* as embodiments of practical intelligence" (ibid.). The citizenry of a Greek polis might have been slave-owning patriarchs, but, in their social capacity as citizens, they were engaged in both making and executing collective decisions.

Following Aristotle, we propose the revival of such participative, political activity in our contemporary urban communities, even whilst differing from the original view in proposing that this be done in a way that is fully socially inclusive.

Another insight for today's thinking about cities is the importance of participation in the political domain for the good of citizens. As Aristotle says in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1099b30), "the main concern of politics is to engender a certain character in the citizens and to make them good and disposed to perform noble actions." Unsurprisingly, most people living today's Western societies would disagree with that statement. We are used to regard politics (and politicians) as aiming at selfish ends, such as wealth, status, and power, rather than the "best end" of a virtuous life and the good of the community. Most of us would also see the idea that politics should be primarily concerned with creating a particular moral character in citizens as a dangerous intrusion on individual freedom, largely because we do not agree about what the "best end" is in our diversified and fragmented societies. Consequently, we expect of politics and the authorities that they keep us safe from other people (through the provision of police and military forces) so that each of us can pursue our own ends, whatever they may be. Development of individual character is left up to the individual, with possible support from family, religion, and other non-governmental institutions. In these ways the prevailing political and ethical beliefs differ from those of Aristotle.

If we are to apply Aristotle's insights under modern conditions, we must bear in mind that the ancient Greek *polis*—the kind of urban "political" community in which Greeks, Phoenicians, and some others organized their common life—was the community of citizens, not a separate institution constituted by a hierarchy of particular, professional roles. In translation of the term *polis*, we should also hyphenate our modern concepts of city and state. Whereas the Athens of which Aristotle wrote was politically independent and, on his account (since he took little interest in its maritime grain trade), economically self-sufficient, neither is the case with modern cities. For Aristotle, the *polis* was identical with the activity of its citizens, even though it also included both households and a variety of official positions. As the constitutive participants of a political community, Athenian citizens could determine their own laws, could decide collectively whether to go to war, and were responsible for their own defence. Only in the extraordinary circumstances in which citizens of Leningrad, Stalingrad, and Moscow once found themselves, as do, at the time of writing, the citizens of Mariupol, Kharkiv, and Kyiv, is it necessary to cultivate such martial virtues as those considered normal, and essential, by ancient Spartans, Athenians, and Romans. Similarly, our cities do not rule the surrounding agricultural land in the way that allowed Aristotle's many *poleis* to be economically autarchic.

What we now know as the sovereign state is a bureaucratic hierarchy of offices that is clearly separate from those who are subject to its impersonal rule and, indeed, is separate even from the private activities of those individuals who occupy those public roles professionally. In most cases, modern states may be defined, following Weber (1994: 310–311), by their monopolization of the means of legitimate physical violence. Whereas Aristotle defined the *polis* by its purpose or *telos* of actualizing the common good of its citizens, Weber stipulated that the state be defined only by reference to such particular means and not by any such specific purpose.

Despite these differences, we can still agree with the statement that an urban community "comes to be for the sake of living, but it exists for the sake of living well" (Aristotle, 2017, 12: 1252b29–30), and living the best kind of life for a human being requires participation in such a community. Such participation requires that citizens have sufficient political and legal freedom, sufficient material resources and free time, and sufficiently accountable and responsive civic authorities for them to be able to exercise effective agency over their own lives, individually, and over their own localities, collectively.

Even if excluded from practising martial virtues, we, as modern citizens, are normally free to reason with one another about how to exercise our moral agency and engage in collective action. Such an individual freedom, and the institutional conditions that secure it, can be considered today as a common good of citizenship. Conversely, we may very well reject Aristotle's proposition that workers, farmers, and others who lack time to devote to the activity of citizenship are therefore necessarily excluded from it. His supposition that citizens' living well also requires that they, as men, dominate their households, and therefore excluding women from the political domain should also be rejected. What remains is the idea that the good life is one lived in a civic community in accordance with virtue or excellence.

### *3.2.3 Civic Friendship*

In our above conception of modern citizenship, we agree with Martha Nussbaum, Terence Irwin, and others that Aristotle's ideas of citizenship, virtue, and a political common good can, to some considerable extent, be applied to our contemporary conditions. We also agree with MacIntyre that such ideas are most easily applied to such localities as cities, towns, or even more particular neighbourhoods. It is at the local level that citizens can freely participate alongside one another in cooperative practices, together exercising their practical reasoning and judgement in deciding upon particular, revisable goals, and upon the performance of the tasks necessary for their actualization. This is the activity of civic friendship.

Aristotle argued that a *polis* is not just "a community of location" or an association "for the sake of preventing mutual injustice or for the sake of exchange." It is rather "the community in living well for both households and families." He acknowledged the household or *oikos* as a necessary constituent of the *polis* whilst regarding it as a fundamentally different, private (*idia*) sphere, being ordered to a lesser,

economic good than the political community of the *polis*. In this context he talks about *politike philia*, civic (political) friendship, a form of friendship that can only arise amongst people inhabiting the same locality and connected to each other through different forms of social interaction. In Aristotle's time these included "brotherhoods, religious sacrifices, and the pastimes characteristic of living together," generating feelings of camaraderie amongst male heads of households. For him, such active friendships support the greater, civic friendship which is an essential aspect of "living well" (Aristotle, 2017, 65: 1280b29–39).

In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle proposes that civic friendship "holds cities together and that legislators take it more seriously than justice" (Aristotle, 2014, 136: 1155a22). This type of friendship occurs when citizens "wish each other well for their own sake, do things for fellow citizens both individually and as a citizen body, and share in values, goals, and a sense of justice" (Schwarzenbach, 1996, 97). Such friendship is for Aristotle a criterion by which to distinguish just regimes from unjust ones; in tyranny there is least friendship (Aristotle, 2014, 150: 1161a31).

Whilst such a conception of citizenship can be traced through modernity as a declining tradition of republicanism and "civic virtue," it differs radically from that of what has become the dominant, Western political tradition of liberalism. Whereas the tradition that may be thought have begun by the time of Niccolò Machiavelli and culminated in that of Thomas Jefferson and Maximilien Robespierre (who still conceived of citizenship as a public, political activity), liberals understand it as a passive status involving legal rights over property and to privacy. For liberals, the most institutional forms that friendship takes are those of family, faith, and business.

Hannah Arendt (1958, 1968) is one who differed from this liberal conception, instead championing the republican tradition of civic virtue and of citizenship as political friendship. She assimilated this idea of community in contesting liberals' prioritization of private over public concerns. More recently, Sibyl Schwarzenbach has argued that civic friendship "must again be acknowledged as an essential factor unifying even the just modern state" because "in our time, the problem of social unity—of what it is that generally binds persons together in a just society—is emerging as of critical importance once again." Referring to "growing disparities in economic wealth, mounting violence, religious and racial tensions, the disintegration of traditional … familial relations, and staggering rates of systemic homelessness, drug dependency", she describes citizenship as a resource for "a fair and undogmatic social unity" (Schwarzenbach, 1996, 98–99). Citizens' common good should be therefore understood as more than that of freedom to reason about one's own ends and actions; it should also involve shared reasoning about ends and means, not against foreign "others" but in bettering shared conditions of life in a community of "civic friends."

Civic friendship can be seen as a factor grounding the sense of "We" across the difference. It emerges when we are interacting close with each other—it makes us more likely to acknowledge each other's values and claims as valid (Parkinson, 2012). This does not imply an imposed unity—we can be civic friends despite differences, mobilizing and working together for shared goods.

In practical terms, to facilitate the development of civic friendship, we need arenas for interaction beyond random encounters of urban life—spaces for doing things together, communicating, and deliberating on the common good. These include both formal, political arenas (such as townhall meetings) and informal, socially oriented public spaces, such as urban gardens or community kitchens. The latter has been the focus of our research project—Cultivating Public Space. We elaborate on this subject more later on in this chapter, extending the discussion with neo-Aristotelian concepts of practices and communities of virtue.

## 3.3 Alasdair MacIntyre on Productive Practices and Communities of Virtue

### *3.3.1 The Contemporary Reassertion of Aristotelian Concepts*

The philosophical dominance that Aristotle's account of human conduct enjoyed from the late twelfth century onward ended during Europe's Enlightenment, after which Aristotelianism continued to be on the defensive for most of the nineteenth century. The reassertion of Aristotelian ethics and politics is identified by Nussbaum (2000) and Irwin (2009) with the work of the so-called British idealists, especially Thomas Hill Green, which led to a "New Liberalism" (see especially Nussbaum, 2000, 105–106, 112–116; Irwin, 2009, 536–624; Knight, 2011). These philosophical and political movements combined Aristotelianism's idea of the common good with Kant's philosophy of moral duty and Hegel's idea of the state as an ethical instrument. They thereby gave a philosophical grounding to the new idea of "the welfare state," an alternative to market-oriented liberalism.

Whilst this new kind of state was being democratically instituted, Elizabeth Anscombe and her husband Peter Geach led the way in using insights into linguistic practice from Ludwig Wittgenstein to update Thomistic Aristotelianism. Anscombe's "Modern Moral Philosophy" (1958) took a more uncompromisingly Aristotelian approach to ethics than that of political liberals. In her view, the dominant ethical positions neglect several topics that had been central in earlier ethics, such as those of character and the nature of a good human life. Ethics, if it is to be meaningful, should revive these concepts.

The principal question asked by Aristotle was "what is this for the sake of?" and, of humans, "what is the best life?", rather than to ask more abstractly, of particular situations and acts, "what is the right thing to do?" Hence, the specification of the rules of action is in this perspective of secondary interest. Ethics is seen as a domain "concerned with one's whole life – and not just the occasions when something with a distinctly 'moral' quality is at stake" (Russell, 2013: 2). Accordingly, "the focus is not so much on what to do in morally difficult cases, as on how to approach all of one's choices with such personal qualities as kindness, courage, wisdom, and integrity" (ibid.).

There is nonetheless a great diversity amongst understandings of Aristotelian ethics and politics (MacIntyre, 2020). Certainly, rather than refer to a diffuse "virtue ethics," it is better to talk about "a class of ethical theories that share a common emphasis on virtues as central features of their account of morality" (Ivanhoe, 2013: 50). Still more certainly, an Aristotelian ethics is one that regards virtues as real constituents of the human good.

Our Aristotelian approach to the development of public space is especially inspired by the way in which Alasdair MacIntyre has updated Aristotelian practical philosophy. He first did this in his 1981 *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, in which he identified Aristotle as the crucial figure in what he called "the tradition of the virtues." This was a work of intellectual history, exemplifying the idea that philosophy is inseparable from its past. This perspective enabled him to identify the basic, teleological structure of Aristotle's ethics as the beating heart of a continuing way of justifying morality, entirely separable from the historical specifics of Aristotle's own conception of the virtues. Further, MacIntyre shows why and how a contemporary Aristotelianism opposes patriarchal and other, institutionalized kinds of social injustice and domination (MacIntyre, 2007: 23–33, 74–78, 84–89, and 1998a; Knight, 2007: 102–225).

MacIntyre's argument remains that the best (and, to put it more strongly, the only philosophically sustainable) justification of moral precepts is that they command actions constitutive of one's good (understood in terms of human flourishing) and that habituation to courageous, truthful, prudent, just, and, in a word, virtuous acts is a necessary and constitutive "means" to the end that is the good life for a human being (MacIntyre, 2007: 184) as a rational, social, and, insofar as institutions permit, political animal.

### *3.3.2 Communities of Virtue and the Local Scale of Urban Politics*

What most obviously distinguishes MacIntyre's ethics from that of almost all others who identify themselves as Aristotelians is his refusal to identify bureaucratic nation states as instruments of any genuinely common good. This is precisely why his understanding of a contemporary Aristotelianism is so apt for citizen-driven, locally based projects such as urban agriculture. He understands modern cities, towns, and villages as far more proximate than modern states to what Aristotle understood as a *polis*. On his account, individual freedom and rights secured by a nation state cannot be enough to secure democracy. A truly Aristotelian politics (*politike*) can only be practiced at a more local level, with opportunities for direct engagement, action, and deliberation. That said, he concedes that such a level can be extensive:

> A local political community with its own economy can be of considerable size, providing sophisticated forms of exchange, both between local producers and consumers and between both and more distant producers and consumers, and yet be made to serve the purposes of

> the community. If we look at … those modern forms of association that have for some significant period of time sustained participatory achievement—forms of association as different as Donegal farming cooperatives, the state of Kerala in Southern India, the municipality of Bologna under Communist rule—we find excellent examples. (MacIntyre, 2008, 268)

In his *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity* (2016), MacIntyre elaborates two examples. One is the Danish fishing village of Thorupstrand, the other is the urban favela of Monte Azul in São Paulo, Brazil, where groups engage in

> deliberative discussion on how to define and achieve the common goods with which they are concerned, on how to obtain the resources needed for their struggles, and how to mobilize political support, embarrassing national and municipal governments and elites that claim to be concerned for the poor, but who are strikingly unresponsive to the poor who do not organize politically. (MacIntyre, 2016, 181)

For the inhabitants of the Brazilian favela, the same virtues as for the villagers of Thorupstrand have been important: political prudence, justice, courage, and temperateness. Without these virtues the achievement of common goods of their communities (such as the maintenance and enhancement of commonly valued natural, educational, or other resources) would not have been possible.

The Nobel prize winner Elinor Ostrom argued for collective "self-organization and self-governance" against the neoliberal proposition that private ownership and management of scarce resources, such as fisheries or land, is the best way to avoid their depletion (Ostrom, 1990; Aligica, 2014) and "the tragedy of the commons" (Hardin, 1968), as the supposedly inevitable consequence of shared access and use. With Ostrom, we propose that resources are best governed and maintained through cooperation within the local communities who depend upon them.

That achievement of common goods enables individuals to identify and achieve their own good, as persons. Such a situation we call a community of virtue. It exists where and when people identify common goods and get their reasoning and actions together in pursuit of those goods, at the same time cultivating virtues and political friendship. Any such community needs to be on its guard against corruption by external interests and institutions.

### *3.3.3 Practices and Institutions*

In *After Virtue* MacIntyre moved beyond the idea of shared practices with which Ludwig Wittgenstein had inspired much of post-war analytic philosophy. On Wittgenstein's account, to follow a rule is to engage in a shared practice (Wittgenstein, 2009, 87–88). For John Rawls, when developing his theory of justice, "practices" and "institutions" were therefore synonyms (Rawls, 1999a, b). MacIntyre went further than either in his social and ethical analysis, adding to Wittgenstein that to engage in a developed practice is to also actualize a shared good, whilst differing from Rawls in differentiating practices that prioritize the shared goods, from

institutions, which prioritize the rules, along with the money, power, and status that accompany rules' application and enforcement. Therefore, on MacIntyre's account, institutional rationality differs from practical rationality. His stipulative definition of a practice is well-known:

> By a "practice" I am going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended. … Planting turnips is not a practice; farming is. So are the enquiries of physics, chemistry and biology, and so is the work of the historian, and so are painting and music. In the ancient and medieval worlds the creation and sustaining of human communities … is generally taken to be a practice in the sense in which I have defined it. Thus the range of practices is wide: arts, sciences, games, politics in the Aristotelian sense, the making and sustaining of family life, all fall under the concept. (MacIntyre, 2007, 187–88.)

As MacIntyre argues, practices aim at their internal goods which are "good for the whole community who participate in the practice" rather than such goods external to the practice as money, status, or power which, when achieved, "are always some individuals' property and possession" (2007, 190–191). MacIntyrean practitioners, unlike modern bureaucratic managers, do not claim value neutrality; they are moral actors. Three virtues are central in their activities: truthfulness, justice, and courage. Courage is defined as "the capacity to risk harm or danger to oneself in connection with care and concern" (MacIntyre, 2007, 225). These virtues affect practitioner's relationship to their fellow practitioners and to others. Authority in this type of practice is derived not from power but from the mastery of the virtues internal to the practice. Those who have such an authority do not use it for purpose of domination and are not afraid to share their knowledge for the good of their community.

In the case of the practice of urban planning, internal goods can be linked to a good city, a city where major objective is the flourishing of its inhabitants and sustaining of their natural and cultural environments. The internal goods of planning practice can be also localized in the attempts to sustain disciplinary progress and to respond creatively to given problems, to move beyond the status quo.

Practices should not be confused with institutions, yet they usually require some institutional framework. For example, urban planning is conducted within planning institutions such as municipal planning offices (similarly—medicine is a practice; hospitals are institutions). "Institutions are characteristically and necessarily concerned with … external goods," being structured in terms of money, power, status, and distributing them as rewards (MacIntyre, 2007, 194). Characteristically, the more that any person has of such external goods, "the less there is for other people" (MacIntyre, 2007, 190), unlike with internal goods.

Practices cannot survive without institutions but need to resist their acquisitiveness: "the cooperative care for common goods of the practice is always vulnerable to the competitiveness of the institutions" (ibid.). This is very much the case for

planning, where planners in neoliberal institutions often experience value conflicts, most typically subordinating their precepts of the common good to the institutional and political agendas (Sager, 2009).

Whilst some practices (such as medicine or planning) are performed by formally trained practitioners, others have a more inclusive nature. A single practice of this kind can be the focal activity of an entire local community, as in the fishing village of Thorupstrand. Traditionally, many rural communities have been similarly organized around the practice of farming. Agriculture has therefore been a practice to which MacIntyre has often referred in illustrating the more general concept. Farming is a socially established human activity with particular standards of excellence. To be an excellent farmer, one must care for one's land and for the excellence of one's livestock and crops. Besides such "excellence of the products" particular or internal to any practice, there is a second kind of good internal to any particular practice. This is "the good of a certain kind of life," including moral and intellectual virtues necessary for the conduct both of such a life and, more generally, of civic life. This includes virtues such as fairness, perserverance, frugality, etc.

Here, we may note MacIntyre's difference from Aristotle about the relation of farming to the good life. For Aristotle (and for Arendt, 1958, 136–247), production is an activity based on technical skill (such as shipbuilding, shoemaking or even creating works of art) entirely different from action, which they limit to politics. Furthermore, in Aristotle's view engaging into productive activity is a form of cultivating intellectual virtue that does not, like action, contribute to the cultivation of moral virtue (Aristotle, 2014, 101: 1139b38-1140a24). Time, effort, and knowledge expended in production are, on this account, for the sake of the product, not of the human agent. MacIntyre, in contrast, does not distinguish between *praxis* and *poiesis*, calling both practices. In specifying that the excellence of products (or of performances, in the case of, e.g., sports) is typically accompanied by the "internal" goods of the way of life particular to these practices, he makes clear that he views productive practices as ethical activities pursuant of genuine goods. With the concept of practice as ethical activity, MacIntyre places productive work and workers at the centre of the ethical community from which Aristotle and many others have excluded them.

What is important for the cultivation of virtue on MacIntyre's account is that a person recognizes something beyond their present self as a good for the sake of which they should subject other desires to education and rational reordering. If someone desires to become an excellent farmer, capable of excelling in and extending farming's standards of production and practical reasoning, then they must subject their "own attitudes, choices, preferences and tastes" to the common goods and standards internal to farming as a shared practice (MacIntyre, 2007, 189–190; cf. MacIntyre, 1998b & 2016, 1–13). Only then will they become capable of exercising practical reasoning in overcoming new challenges and solving new problems.

## 3.4 Facilitating Practices and Virtue Communities in Contemporary Cities

### *3.4.1 Three Concerns for Public Space Development*

We believe this conceptual apparatus of practices, institutions, and communities of virtue provides a promising approach to the development of urban public space and a feasible way to operationalize in the urban settings the Aristotelian conception of a good life as cultivating the virtues. In the following, we identify three concerns to be addressed in a public space development process: (i) identifying practices, (ii) mapping the involved goods, and (iii) facilitating communities of virtue. The concept of a practice offers a fine point of departure for public space development, since practices are constituted and identifiable by the goods internal to them and because they serve as schools of the virtues (MacIntyre, 2007 184–202, 227–228, 273–274; Knight, 2008b). In line with Aristotle's emphasis on the importance of direct political engagement and the exercise of practical reason for human flourishing, these concerns should always be pursued in dialogue with local practitioners and citizens.

(a) **Identifying local practices**: what practices can be facilitated/accommodated in a given public space?

Addressing this question is different from thinking about functions of public space, such as recreation or commercial services (Gehl, 2010), as we discussed in the previous section referring to MacIntyre (2007 184–202, 227–228, 273–274). Urban agriculture or horticulture, even pursued simply for ornamentation or relaxation, is an example of practice that can be facilitated in public space development. It can be advantageously accompanied by other practices co-existing in the same location—such as herbal medicine, carpentry, mindfulness, art, music, chess, cooking, or wine-making. Typically, the more practices we can facilitate in one space, the better—this makes a given space appealing for broad segments of users and provides more opportunities for development of civic friendship. The identification of practices should always be a participatory process, mapping both the needs of local stakeholders and place values. A variety of methodologies and methods may be used here (Brown et al., 2020). Both the accommodation of diversity of practices in one location and involvement of local stakeholders are in line with recommendations of placemaking community—advocating extensively tested, experience-based principles that can be used to transform public spaces into "community places" (Madden, 2018; see also Chap. 7).

(b) **Mapping the involved "goods"**: "external goods" of an institution vs. goods "internal" to practices. This stage of the process is very much about mapping the power dynamics at play, and anticipating possible conflicts.

Usually, the initiatives regarding public space development come from municipal actors or the private sector. At times, practices in urban spaces emerge spontaneously, as grassroot initiatives. These, however, are usually short-lived without any kind of institutional support (still, even a temporary, informal space for practice(s) can have numerous benefits in terms of *eudaimonia*, virtue, and political

friendship). A practice that is to survive in urban public space in a long-term perspective typically needs to be systematically supported by an institution (such as a municipal office of city planning, a NGO, a private developer). In this context, it is important to remember that the goods of money, power, and status distributed by institutions are always in tension, if not conflict, with pursuit of the goods internal to particular practices, and therefore with the excellences internal to the way of life of practitioners. On this neo-Aristotelian view, it is important for the development of public space to create and sustain conditions conducive to the cooperative care for goods internal to practices, enabling them to resist the acquisitiveness of institutions and find ways to mitigate the potentially disastrous consequences of shifting power relations and political agendas.

Practices and institutions can be juxtaposed on multiple levels. For example, there is usually some need of self-organization within the local community of practitioners—taking care of such formalities as paying membership fees and safeguarding shared resources. Even with no need for formalities, leaders usually emerge. This may introduce into the community of practitioners the element of institutionalized external goods—seeking prestige, acknowledgement, or other forms of external gratification. The interplay of internal and external goods should therefore be under constant scrutiny.

(c) **Facilitating the development of communities of virtue** around selected practices.

We have described communities of virtue as localities that are socially consolidated by the identification of common goods internal to practices, upon which political activity might construct a more comprehensive common good. Facilitating communities of virtue in urban neighbourhoods requires providing conditions for collective self-organization through the cooperative coordination of different practices and raising the possibility of collective self-governance in actualizing such local autonomy. Public authorities, corporate powers, and more impersonal market forces can all obstruct such development and almost always do. What we propose is that public authorities, including planners, rather than regulate the organization of urban communities of practitioners, can and should concentrate upon regulating corporate power and doing their best to allow locals to secure whatever resources they require for cooperative projects and the cultivation of their shared, local practices (Fig. 3.1).

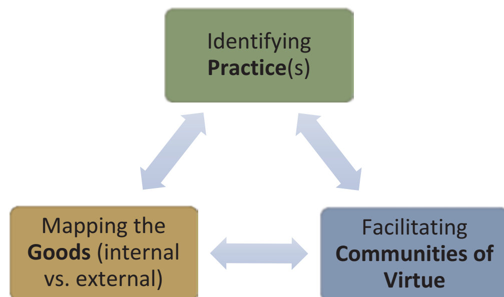


**Fig. 3.1** Three concerns in public space development

### *3.4.2 The Example of Urban Agriculture*

In the following we focus on urban agriculture as an example of a practice to be integrated in public space development. We propose that urban agriculture projects can function as locally based communities of virtue, that is, as arenas of social engagement that facilitate both the development of civic friendship and personal self-cultivation through the exercise of moral and intellectual virtues.

Urban agriculture remains a part of humans' ancient practice of farming, upon which the more institutional but scarcely less ancient process of civilization, the creation and sustaining of urban communities, has always depended. Nonetheless, the institutional context of urban agriculture differs markedly from its more traditional, rural settings. Water and land for cultivation are likely to be provided by public institutions or by private actors under public regulation, because in today's market realities, these are otherwise unobtainable through simple collective effort. Under these conditions, practitioners' shared reasoning is likely to be more often concerned with how to negotiate with such institutions and how to satisfy their requirements by mobilizing political support, than with such activity as the planting of turnips. Furthermore, particular activities such as cultivating specific crops are likely to be subject to more collective reasoning in urban agriculture than is traditional under rural conditions. It follows, however, that urban agriculture is likely to provide a more intensive education in the virtues (especially intellectual virtues) than the more traditional agricultural forms celebrated by such protagonists of the virtues as Hesiod, Jefferson, and MacIntyre. Apart from theoretical knowledge, practical reason, and skills, the practice of urban agriculture requires cultivation of justice, courage, and temperateness, as well as all of the moral virtues necessary for people to sustain their own and others' commitment and work toward a common good and shared goals.

Urban agriculture of the kind recorded, analysed, and championed in this book is a radically social and cooperative practice. Participants must learn how to work with others for a common good. Whilst that good can and should be understood as contributing to the wider, communal, and political good of their city, it is nonetheless likely that their fellow citizens, as well as the city's professional managers and politicians, will require constant persuasion that scarce resources of land and money should be made available to practitioners and that regulations should be interpreted or changed to facilitate their activity. The argument will always be met that, since food can be efficiently supplied from the countryside, cities should be ordered to providing more lucrative services. Under such conditions, urban farmers are likely to require even greater cultivation of moral and intellectual virtue (if perhaps a lesser range of technical skills) in resisting the corrupting power of institutions than is demanded of rural farmers in resisting market and regulatory pressures. The *telos*, the good and goal internal to the project and practice of urban farming, and common to its practitioners, will make significantly different demands upon them than are made upon rural farmers, but, insofar as their time, energy, and determination are similarly committed to it, the demands may prove no less difficult to meet than

those pressing upon their rural relations. Indeed, given that the good they pursue is more marginal to the politics and economy of their locality, the corrupting power of their local institutions will feel all the greater.

For the goods and practice of agriculture to be pursued and sustained in an urban environment, kinds of local institution need to be created that differ greatly both from national farmers' unions and from such traditional, rural farming cooperatives as those identified by MacIntyre (2016) in Donegal, Ireland. Creating and sustaining the institutions necessary to organize and defend communities pursuing common goods is what MacIntyre calls politics in the Aristotelian sense. He cautions that such political practice must always be understood apart from the politics of the modern state: "All power tends to coopt and absolute power coopts absolutely" (MacIntyre, 2007, 109). Since organizational institutions necessarily deal in the currencies of money, power, and status, their very success and growth always tend to exacerbate the danger of corrupting or betraying their original purpose, as tasks of administration take their officials away from the task of production and into meeting and negotiating with external bureaucrats and executives. If the project of urban agriculture is to succeed, its administration must subserve its practical aim. In MacIntyre's Aristotelian terms, external goods must be used for the sake of the goods internal to the practice of urban agriculture. Insofar as this practice is sustained, it will sustain local communities of virtue in which all living beings may flourish in their various, specific ways.

## 3.5 Concluding Remarks

We conclude with a more general reflection on the relevance of the neo-Aristotelian perspective for contemporary planning discourse, particularly regarding the challenges related to urban sustainability.

The prevailing ethic in urban planning is that of a utilitarian concern with the efficient distribution of resources in pursuit of growth. For example, the European Commission frames social exclusion and environmental degradation as "obstacles to growth" (European Commission, 2009, 18), envisioning "an urbanised EU with cities driving growth and resource efficiency" (European Commission, 2014, 3). This approach is evident in extensive use of sustainability indicators and cost-benefit analyses.

Weaknesses of this conceptual framework emerge in several contexts. First, it pays too little attention to nonmaterial aspects of human well-being, including the social, cultural, and spiritual backgrounds of our lives. Numerous voices suggest that we need a different, more human-orientated and context-specific approach to sustainability (Williamson et al., 2003; Jackson, 2009; Demaria et al., 2013). Such an approach has been said to require a "new politics of the common good," "a more demanding idea of what it means to be a citizen, and … a more robust public discourse – one that engages more directly with moral and even spiritual questions" (Sandel, 2009).

Secondly, it gives a false appearance of value neutrality. Since the concepts of utility and effectiveness are far from being merely technical in nature, they are prone to ideological misuse. As MacIntyre (2007, 70) observes, too little attention is put on the essential difference between short-term and long-term effectiveness. Likewise, the utilitarian idea of the substitutability of different goods and the possibility of "summing" a variety of aims people value is highly questionable. To use these concepts as if they could provide us with a rational, value-neutral criterion "is indeed to resort to a fiction" (ibid.). In utilizing such a criterion, neoliberal policies implicitly promote a vision of individuals' lives that is in many respects inimical to their flourishing.

Thirdly, the utilitarian approach has failed to tackle the fundamental causes of our environmental predicaments. Whilst sustainability has remained on the agenda for nearly 40 years, neoliberal policies have failed to resolve cities' socio-economic and environmental problems. Arne Næss's original (1973) distinction between "shallow" and "deep" ecological purposes and values continues to be pertinent. The "shallow" approach stops before the ultimate level of fundamental change, often promoting short-term, technological fixes, whereas the "deep" approach, targeting the root causes of our environmental problems, involves rethinking our relationship to external nature in order to facilitate both its and our own flourishing. Our current policies are predominantly operating on the shallow level, hardly addressing the real causes of our environmental problems—the paradigm of growth and unsustainable lifestyles. In order to escape the current crisis, we need to go further than focus on resource efficiency and environmental impacts; we need to rethink our value frameworks and redefine the way we think about human prosperity (Jackson, 2009; Demaria et al., 2013).

Finally, neo-Aristotelian insight also requires a new approach to education in which students are provided with an opportunity to acquire experience and develop the character traits and abilities necessary to become fully ethical actors. As Russell (2013: 3) observes, students most "need, not a decision procedure from a text-book, but the practical wisdom to understand for themselves how to be people who take responsibility and why taking responsibility matters." The dominant models of education discourage such engagement. As one graduate reflects, "young people are not being educated to take their place in society. They are being trained – trained in a narrow body of knowledge and skills that is taught in isolation from larger and vital questions about who we are and what we might become" (Friedmann, 2002, 105).

The neo-Aristotelian perspective provides a viable basis for an alternative, "deep" approach to sustainability. Applied to planning and public space development, it demands incorporation of the human *telos*—a fulfilling individual and communal life—and an explicit normativity in planning and urban development strategies. Focusing on the excellence of human character and emphasizing such social virtues as solidarity and responsibility toward others, it should contribute to an alternative model of economic development and the inspiration of social change. It may also encourage a more respectful attitude toward natural environments and a limit to personal consumption, since an Aristotelian reflection on the virtues acknowledges non-human natural goods (MacIntyre, 1999: 11–85).

In sum, the concepts of the human flourishing, the common good of participative communities of practice and locality, and of particular virtues—including that of civic friendship—can all be applied in urban planning. In this book we try to illustrate this empirically with cases of urban agriculture—referring to the goods internal to the practice itself (such as food production), to the part that such shared participation and pursuit plays within the life of each practitioner, and to how it contributes toward society's wider common good, by, for example, distributing fresh local produce, disseminating nutrition and farming knowledge, and cultivating social and political activity befitting real citizenship. Understood in these terms, an Aristotelian case may be acknowledged, as well as endorsed, by urban planners concerned with the efficient allocation of limited institutional resources.

As we have now emphasized, the Aristotelian case against its normative, institutionalized rivals might also be taken further. To do so would involve politicizing and democratizing planning, so that it is no longer understood as primarily the domain of institutional experts but as the common concern of all those citizens whose neighbourhoods are being developed. In this, our neo-Aristotelian vision supports the "right to the city" perspective (Lefebvre, 1996) that emphasizes two principal rights for urban inhabitants: the right to participate in urban decision-making and the right to appropriate urban spaces, based on citizens' needs.

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