

Urbanisation, Capital and Land-Use in Cities

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The outcome of the production process is a commodity, a thing with a particular economic value. I argue that materiality still matters a great deal despite many scholars' (see Castells 1989) claim that cities are becoming increasingly important as spaces of virtual flows. Production, consumption and reproduction increasingly take place in cities. The economically fastest growing areas in the world, especially in south-east Asia, are those that are urbanising the most rapidly. In demographic terms the world is urbanising in an unprecedented expansive mode. This urbanisation has a fundamentally material outcome. Global urbanisation promotes the uneven division of labour and economic resources within and between cities, so a broader analysis of socio-spatial changes in the urban environment is needed.

Urbanisation, capital and land-use in cities are intertwined. Henri Lefebvre has noted: 'Piles of objects and products in the warehouses, mounds of fruit in the marketplace, crowds, pedestrians, goods of various kinds, juxtaposed, superimposed, accumulated – this is what makes the urban urban.' (Lefebvre 2003: 116) Land and particular uses of land are the necessary conditions for capitalism. The cornerstones of the contemporary economy – production, consumption and reproduction – are organised in and through the material environment, leading to continuous change in the built environment. However, urban transformation is always a highly political, rather than natural, process (Castells 1977). The production of particular spatial configurations is an active moment within the overall temporal dynamic of capital accumulation and social reproduction in society (Harvey 1982). Nonetheless, it is difficult to create universal models that will fit in each particularity of land-use in all cities.

In this article I have three aims. First, I argue that critical consideration of political economy is fundamental for the analysis of contemporary cities. A crucial starting point is that the desire for economic profit is a socially accepted

goal in western capitalist societies. However, an economy is not simply money or economic transactions, but also a profoundly political issue related to capital, and the transformation of the material environment through capital. According to Neil Smith, who characterises societal development through a Marxist interpretation, capital is not only a thing but also a social relation and a value in motion (Smith 2000). In addition, 'capitalism' occupies a special and privileged space in the language of social representation so it is difficult to be outside of the totality of capitalism (Gibson-Graham 1996: 1–4).

The second aim of this article is to present a synthesis of urban transformation under capitalism, especially concerning the built environment. Marx (1977) and Engels (1972) did not make the city a central theoretical object of analysis and there are considerable urban omissions within Marxism (Katznelson 1992: 32–36). Despite this, I rely on the basic principles of a political (Marxist) economy regarding the organisation of society through production, consumption and reproduction. To understand the relationship between the built environment and capitalism, David Harvey, the leading geographer of the 20th century, has proposed a theory of circuits of capital (Harvey 1973, 1982, 1985, 1989). I develop this theory further, so that it includes the context of the early 21st century globalised economy.

In the approach of political economy to urban transformation, the role of space and the relationship between space and capital have to be profoundly considered. The third aim of the article is to study the land-use changes in cities from the industrial to the post-industrial period. I pay special attention to the circuits of capital investment and disinvestment in the built environment. I conceptualise and contextualise urban land, which is used for production and consumption of commodities, reproduction of the labour force and speculation on land rent, as well as for regulating social relations. In addition, land, as such, cannot be produced, so contemporary development is often related to land-use changes in cities. To discuss this I use the notion of land rent, which is crucial in understanding and explaining socio-economic phenomena in a city under capitalism. Land rent influences – or determines, depending on the point of view – the use of land in cities. Urban land rent is a social relation in a concrete context. Land rent may also contain some universal elements connected to broader changes in society (Harvey 1982; Ball 1985; Haila 1990; Jäger 2003). Furthermore, I emphasise

the notion of relational space in searching for alternatives for contemporary urban transformation.

Organisation of capitalist society

The key to capitalism and society is the search for economic profit. The organisation of society under capitalism is uneven, as the classic Marxist standpoint holds (Katznelson 1992). There is a continuous polarisation between classes when in the profit-seeking process rich people, i.e. owners of the means of production, get richer, and poor people, i.e. the working class, which sells its labour in the name of survival, remains poor and dominated by the ruling owner class.

All economic and social activities are spatial, as is the transformation of built and un-built environments around us. Under capitalist conditions, investment in the material and social environment has to be economically profitable. It is crucial for the expansion of capitalism that the owner gain surplus in the organisation of production and consumption and that this surplus is at least partly invested further. However, urbanisation and cities are unique because the creation of a built environment is a long process. To grasp the changes in the material environment one can use the theory of capital circuit developed by Harvey (1982; 1989). The theory explains how change from one economic activity to another is a shift in capital, which is circulated to find a profitable investment opportunity. The first circuit of capital leads to the rise of an industrial society and industrial land-use in cities. It includes the construction of a built environment, the use of the existing built environment and changes in the uses of buildings (Jäger 2003). The growth of cities was connected to the expansion of industrialisation from the 19th century to the latter part of the 20th century (Harvey 1989: 61–64).

The costs of production influence the price of the final product, which is a commodity. Following the premises of political economy, in general, economic surplus can be enhanced by lengthening the working time of workers and/or improving the mode of production (Smith 2000: 57–58). Transaction costs relate to the movement of commodities from the production site to the consumption site. During the 19th and the early 20th century, in many countries, laws were approved that limited the number of weekly working hours of workers roughly to 40 hours and a regular eight hours per day. This reduced the opportunity for the owners of the means of production to increase the absolute surplus value per individual worker. In certain industrial activities the production volume was

increased by adding one to two more shifts a day. However, additional salary and related costs during night and weekend shifts made the production process less profitable.

A broader change in society took place when emphasis was shifted from absolute surplus to improving the relative surplus value of the production process. This was realised through raising the professional quality and efficiency of workers and standardising the production process. In many countries the quality of workers improved during the 20th century when comprehensive vocational education systems were organised. These systems were provided both by the owners of the means of production and public authorities. The latter were interested in making the local and national economy more competitive. Scientific organisation of work was applied to standardise the production process. In Taylorism, different phases of production were integrated and the usage of time per labourer was shortened. At the local level, the authorities promoted local transport systems and public transport to facilitate access to production sites. Furthermore, it was essential to guarantee the reproduction of the labour force and thus raise the number of available workers. To accomplish this, the state organised an appropriate health care system.

However, the human body is rather fragile and uncontrollable. Several regulations emerged that prevented the maximum exploitation of people in the production process, especially when labour unions expanded during the 20th century. The limits on increasing economic profits and surplus value of production by directly relying on the labour force became evident. One possibility was to invest in the second circuit of capital, consisting of fixed assets. This fixed capital was (new) machinery, which led to enhancement of the productivity of durable consumer goods. The role of machines in the industrial production process increased. Finally, in many industrial activities, labour-intensive production was replaced by machine-intensive production. Harvey indicates these changes as obligatory shifts from one to another circuit of capital to develop capitalism further (Harvey 1989: 61–71). Obviously, such activities needed the construction of infrastructure, alteration to it and changes in the built environment. Massive investments started to flow to construction and real estate instead of the productive sector.

In 'Western' societies, mechanical industrialisation and automation of industrial production simultaneously raised industrial output and reduced the labour force in industry. Enhanced productivity increased the surplus gained, the

value of production and the unemployment rate. In fact, a substantial amount of un(der)used labour power is integral to capitalism. The owners of the means of production can maintain the salaries of workers at a rather low level and continue their domination over workers by putting socio-economic pressure on the employed and those who would like to be employed.

In the expansion of capitalism the number of producers increased, leading to stronger price competition in produced commodities. The concentration on specific economic activities led to overproduction of certain commodities. Despite investment in relative surplus value, the profits in industrial production started to fall. In addition, people were not able to consume enough to maintain the growth in production. Such a situation of overproduction and under-consumption led to an economic crisis and to the need to alter both production and consumption. The reasons for under-consumption were that there were too many unemployed and that the commodity market had its limits by not being global. Also, having too many underused workers in the production process became a hindrance to amassing economic surplus in an efficient way. In industrial activities, an extended economic crisis emerged because there was a lack of profitable industrial investment possibilities for surplus capital to attract further surplus.

According to Harvey, such an economic crisis leads to an additional shift in capital circuits (Harvey 1989: 64–71). The third circuit of capital is one option for surplus capital. The third circuit involves investment in science and technology to improve productivity and in social expenditures, such as health and education, to facilitate the reproduction of the labour force and the conversion of its qualities. This third circuit also includes repressive means being used on the labour force by local and national public authorities. Again, spatial changes in the land-use of cities are a clear visual outcome of this shift.

In the 1980s, Harvey could not foresee the extent of the expansion of globalisation, and especially neoliberal economic globalisation. Globalisation of the economy has offered particular out-sourcing options to overcome the economic crises related to production and consumption in Western societies (see Peck, Tickell 1994 for the role of mobilising economic space in cities). One possibility was to expand the global market of commodities by developing global networks of production and consumption and by loosening the control of states. A mechanism to foster such development, to raise productivity and to temporarily enhance the absolute surplus value of production has been the relocation of labour-

intensive production. This relocation has been targeted at countries in which labour costs and total production costs are significantly lower than in Western societies. The result is that certain monotonous labour-intensive industrial production activities have been massively transplanted, for example, to south-east Asia. Simultaneously, production takes place in areas in which population growth is very fast and at least some of the new workers will become able to purchase commodities. In this way the market for commodities expands further and the transportation costs are reduced.

For Western enterprises, another reason for relocation has been to rely on countries in which regulations concerning the length of working time are permissive and/or where the basic rights of the labour force are not guaranteed, for example, in China. However, it is difficult to trace the owners of these enterprises, because globally-generated fictitious capital has been invested in these transnational enterprises. Nevertheless, only very seldom does ownership lie in the hands of those who work in the factory. In some cases the means of production are owned by a wealthy local or national individual. Often the owners consist of unidentifiable groups such as the North American pensioners through owning the shares of the pension fund investments. However, the major profits generated in the production process are generated by those who own the commodities or achieve value by having licence over the commodities. At the local level, this globalised industrial production of the 21st century is only slightly more sophisticated than the early industrial capitalism and the primary circuit of capital described by Marx and Engels in the mid-19th century.

Capital and the built environment

Capital and the built environment are intertwined. Harvey has written about two kinds of fixed capital (Harvey 1989: 64). As discussed earlier, the first is enclosed within production processes as (new) machinery to enhance productivity, and within consumption processes as durable consumer goods. The second fixed capital, and in land-use more significant and interesting one, is the built environment for production (industrial and related buildings) and consumption (housing, sidewalks, shopping malls, etc.). Many items in the built environment work at the same time for both production and consumption, such as transport networks.

The built environment can be changed from production to consumption or vice versa, as well as within production and within consumption. This is manifested as alterations in the land-use of particular sites within cities. Fixed capital in the built environment is immobile in space because a defined piece of land exists only as a particular site in a city and this site cannot be moved elsewhere. Obviously, the activities concerning that piece of land can be relocated, as mentioned with the 'China phenomenon'. States have been significant mediators, allowing and guaranteeing the shifts from first to second circuits of capital, which ensures the availability of loans for long-term investments in the built environment.

The earlier mentioned notion of capital as a value in motion can be understood more concretely by analysing the circulation of capital through different places in cities. The circulation of capital enables the prevailing contemporary economic system, capitalism, to shape its historical geography – the use, abandonment and re-use of particular sites in cities – in accordance with the dictates of capital accumulation (Smith 2000: 57–59). It also increases the possibilities for necessary crisis formation in this circulation of capital investments, which further influences the development of sites for particular uses of land.

A material environment is always needed in production and consumption, so land and land-use are important in the economic organisation of societies. Therefore, contemporary society is fundamentally spatial and urban. Inscribed in the political economic explanation of cities under capitalism is the concentration on specific economic activities, through particular uses of land in cities. This leads to overproduction of certain commodities and, further, to a broader economic crisis in society. This creates a need to alter production, consumption and the uses of land related to them (Smith 2000: 57–58).

A temporary solution for such a crisis of over-accumulation – too much production of similar commodities – is to switch capital flows and to change the land-use of cities. Land rent is involved in the changes of land-use in cities through three aspects: land rent as a regular periodical payment for the use of a particular site in a city; land rent as expected future rental payments regarding the same site; and land rent as fictitious capital (see Marx 1977; Harvey 1989: 90–108). Land rent is also a social institution regulating the relationship between a landowner (physical or juridical person) and a producer, who are not necessarily the same person. Land rent generated via concrete land use is also a matter of speculation regarding future economic development. The effective land rent is

often below or above the calculated price of the value that is possible to capitalise with a particular piece of land (Jäger 2003). This leads to fluctuation in land rents. Obviously, a general condition for the flow of capital from one circuit to another and the realisation of land rent comprise the functioning capital market. This market is often regulated by states through intergovernmental agreements.

Urbanisation and land-use in cities under capitalism

To summarise the conceptual discussion of the spatial-temporal logic behind material urban environment, I will present a synthesis of urbanisation and land use in cities under capitalism from the 19th to the 21st century. There are five different capital circuits related to the transformation of urban space and on the first three I rely on Harvey (1989: 61–71; see also Peck, Tickell 1994). These are manifested through changes in land-use and the built environment within a city. Table 1 indicates what we see in our everyday urban environment: material and visual transformation of urban space from one land-use to abandonment and then to another active land-use. In practice one city is never fully converted to a single land-use. The information presented in Table 1 must be understood as an indication of how certain uses of land emerge and gain relative importance in cities. The information predominantly refers to capitalism experienced in Western cities.

Observing land-use changes carefully, one notices how capitalism has been, and is, inherently anarchic and revolutionary because it finds new places in cities and new locations in the built environment to reproduce itself (Smith 2000: 58). By finding these new concrete sites in cities, these places are transformed into materially and socially different uses of land. The continuous spatial displacement of capital ‘creatively’ destroys and restructures the built environment (see Harvey 1982; Brenner, Theodore 2002: 15–20; Merrifield 2002: 104–105). State and public authorities are important because (inter)national legislation and urban planning are mechanisms, and selective social technologies, which support a particular materialisation of cities. Capital is reciprocally connected to the needs of society and capitalism further redirects the needs of society to guarantee the logic of capital itself. In this spatial-temporal process the particularities of economic systems transform, however, only far enough so that the profound logic of capital(ism) – how investment, disinvestment and reinvestment materialise in cities and gain surplus in this process – will not be altered.

Obviously, in this context I can present only a short summary, which needs to be developed further in detailed empirical research. Furthermore, my aim is not to describe the development of cities in their totality from the perspective of a dystopian urbanist (see Merrifield 2002: 102), but to provide a general overview for why cities change. As I have indicated, the built environment has played, and still plays, a fundamental role in the organisation of society. Economic activities can be intensified through investment in the material environment and the land-use of cities. According to Smith, who follows the Marxist tradition, this investment strategically takes two simultaneous directions: enhancing the production of the city (i.e. the material environment in which production takes place) and the consumption of the city (i.e. consumption commodities and their use in the material environment; Smith 2000: 56–57). Lefebvre has pointed out that urban reality is not associated only with consumption, with tertiary activities and distribution networks (Lefebvre 2003: 47). Urban reality intervenes in production and the relations of production. Furthermore, the reproduction of people needed for production and consumption is guaranteed by investments in the material environment. This is the link to understanding the alteration of land-use in cities, for example, converting the under-used and disused areas into other land-uses. In this complex investment system, rules are needed (e.g. laws and organised urban planning) and so is a well-functioning finance market (banks, investors and land-use rights).

The first circuit of capital creates the ‘city of sweat’, where the workers are physically, an active labour force, involved in the production of surplus value in industry. In a broader context this intertwining of industrialisation and urbanisation is materially organised by providing land for industry in cities. The functioning of the primary circuit of capital is facilitated by the secondary circuit of capital regarding particular fixed capital, e.g. expenditures on transport. Marx mentioned in the mid-19th century: ‘Improvement of towns, which accompany the increase of wealth, such as the demolition of badly built districts, the erection of palaces to house banks, warehouses, etc., the widening of streets for business traffic... This evil makes such progress alongside the development of industry, the accumulation of wealth and the growth and “improvement” of towns.’ (Marx (1977: 812, cit. Merrifield 2002: 156.)) Capital needed for the early industrial city was often generated through local activities. One can find examples of this in the early 19th century United Kingdom (see, Engels 1972) and later in many other

Central European cities.

The expansion of industrial activities both in cities in general and in a particular city augments the migration of the labour force to cities. The need for housing is solved with the construction of housing areas for workers. Such a 'city of sleep' is based on profitable land-use development for residential use. The material environment provided is mainly for workers who are directly involved in industrialisation, but also for employees providing services in the industrial city. Furthermore, the expansion of industrialisation in many countries leads to overproduction of specific commodities. Therefore some industrial sites are converted into housing to accommodate the migrating people who are needed in the various reproduction processes of the workforce. Such a development has been evident in many Western cities from the 1970s onwards. For example, the former industrial waterfronts have been physically regenerated into residential land-use.

Land-use in regard to the third circuit of capital is related to the escalating importance of technologies in society. Many countries are searching for ways to raise national economic competitiveness through innovation and technologies, in a period when traditional industries are declining. In the 'post-industrial' production phase, technology centres, as well as sites to enhance special technology-related skills of the labour force and the population in general through continuous education, emerge. Old industrial areas and parts of residential areas are converted into land-use for intensive research and development, education and training. The 'city of thoughts' has emerged from the 1980s onwards and such a development is currently expanding rapidly around the globe. The funding for this land-use development frequently originates largely from national sources, because the emphasis is on enhancing the national economy.

The fourth circuit of capital is associated with the 'city of play'. This refers to a period when leisure and health care become significant modes of land-use in cities – leisure activities for the youngsters and the former workers and health care for the elderly. During the 2000s the absolute and relative numbers of the elderly are increasing substantially and rapidly in the European Union countries. New modes of care for the elderly are needed, so old housing units are converted to meet the special needs of the elderly and home-care is organised as well. This has a profound significance on land-use on a micro-scale, but also in terms of accessibility to infrastructure and the rest of the built environment. With reference

to the workforce and youth, some buildings in residential, industrial and service areas are converted into information- and communication technology-mediated areas, providing continuous access to virtual space. As one can notice in many European cities, former purely commodity-purchasing-oriented shopping malls are becoming multi-functional units for various virtual and non-virtual leisure activities. The funding to realise these changes in cities' land-use originates from various international sources, because health care and leisure are large international businesses.

The fifth circuit of capital in the built environment is connected with the 'city of the virtual', which refers to a period not firmly established at present in society. The basic logic behind such a city is that material changes are too slow for the fictitious capital (see Marx 1977; Harvey 1989: 95–97). Instead of building and rebuilding the city, their land-use rights and building permits are bought and sold globally. Shares in the construction rights of cities are rated in the stock exchanges in New York, London, Frankfurt, Delhi, Hong Kong and Tokyo. The global market regulates these transactions regarding concrete cities. Under such circumstances, the role of local authorities changes from planning the material city to the virtual promotion of the city image for potential purchasers of transformation rights. The economic success of a city depends on the prices of its shares. The shares become a significant source for local authorities in funding the material needs of populations. However, as in the current stock exchange, the value of shares can also decline, leading to decay in these cities. Furthermore, often the global fictitious capital does not materialise in cities at all.

	CITY OF 'SWEAT'	CITY OF 'SLEEP'	CITY OF 'THOUGHTS'	CITY OF 'PLAY'	CITY OF 'THE VIRTUAL'
capital circuit	first	second	third	fourth	fifth
finance	local	regional	national	international	global
disused areas number	varied few	industrial hardly any	housing increasing	technology plenty	leisure varied
urban conversion	to industrial land-uses	to housing land-uses	to technolgy land-uses	to leisure land-uses	to speculation land-uses

Table 1] Cities of capital circuits.

Conclusions

To understand contemporary society one has to consider urbanisation. To understand urbanisation and land-use in cities, one has to study how capital moves and is made to move through the urban environment and, for example, what kind of progressive and regressive means are organised to enhance the spatial movement of capital. The role of land in the socio-spatial organisation of the economy is fundamental. The amount of land is limited and land is needed for almost everything. Land is crucial for capitalism, so every piece of land is significant in the puzzle of (global) capitalism.

Production, consumption and reproduction take place through the material environment. Land-use changes are necessary outcomes of their relationships, as well as responses to the essential overproduction and over-accumulation problems inscribed in capitalism. Thus the emergence of underused and disused areas in cities is needed for spatial organisation of capital. The shifts of capital from one circuit to another are spatial processes linked to the different phases of urbanisation. The search for economic profit is behind urbanisation, but not everything can be explained simply through economic rationalities. Broader political, social and cultural aspects and the role of various agents in land-use changes need to be considered as well. However, at least in countries actively integrated into global capitalism, all land-use development agents try to follow its main economic logic.

It is difficult to create universal models that fit each particularity of land-use in all cities. Nevertheless, the fundamental starting point in a political economy is that the outcome of the production process is a commodity, a material thing with a particular economic value. Cities are becoming commodities – both directly and indirectly as material outcomes of capitalism. As I have indicated, the circulation of capital is initiated when a profitable investment makes it possible to re-invest in a particular site of a city and its built environment. The faster the conversion and construction, the faster the surplus is gained, so time is money in this process. Under capitalism, the global money supply and credit system support the formation of a fictitious capital to foster production and consumption. Contemporary global economic networks facilitate very rapid transactions around the globe and faster circulation of investments, which lead to a time-space compression in the land-use of cities. Capital jumps in and out very fast, leaving behind similar traces in the material environment of cities: the landscapes of failed investments. Since the overproduction of similar land-use is an outcome

of this circulation of capital, the land-use of particular sites in cities is frequently altered, thus transforming the socio-spatiality of contemporary cities.

In this paper I have not considered alternatives for the expansion of capitalism or studied in detail what is behind the socially uneven logic of capitalism. However, to conclude this article, I will present a few insights that should be taken into account when considering such alternatives (see also Gibson-Graham 1996). Urban transformation and its materialisation through particular land-use in cities are always highly political processes. The possibilities for alternative cities and alternative logic in the organisation of society are, in the end, based on the same human body that currently is persuaded, and repressed, to promote capitalism. Therefore the situation is not necessarily as structuralist and path-dependent as the logic of capitalism might first make it to appear.

The opportunities for different cities lie in further consideration of the role of spatiality as a strategy and tactic. One possibility is to consider (urban) space through its relational aspect, in which an object exists only insofar as it contains and represents itself in relation to other objects: cities exist, present and represent in relation to other cities (Harvey 1973). A socially more just city cannot be based on a utopian alternative. Cities must be conceived from the bottom upward, must be located and grounded in the street, in urban public space, in everyday life (Merrifield 2002: 14). Earlier Lefebvre (2003) indicated the necessity of urban praxis for an urban revolution, by stating that knowledge of urban phenomena can only become a science in and through the conscious formation of an urban praxis.

Developing the thoughts of Doreen Massey (2004) further, even the global capital(ism) in cities has a body – a human body which decides what, where and how to produce, to consume, to reproduce, and to invest in a city. From that perspective an alternative city is no further away than myself or yourself as individuals or ourselves and themselves as collective decision-makers. This is what INURA (2003) calls for in liberating the urban imagination from the false demands and constrictions of neo-liberal globalisation and from the city dominated by pervasive capitalism. As David Harvey has phrased it: ‘We must imagine a more inclusive, even if continuously fractious, city based not only upon a different ordering of rights but upon different political-economic practices. If our urban world has been imagined and made, then it can be re-imagined and re-made. The inalienable right to the city is worth fighting for.’ (Harvey 2003: 941.)

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