

## Space and Spatiality: Re-conceptualising the Creative Urban

The need for creative economies can never be seriously refuted. Breaking away from a fully mechanised and institutionalised everyday life pattern will only help generate new opportunities for the individual and the society as a whole.

Similar to the Slow Food ® movement ideology, the need to create an urban environment where individuals are not saturated by 'laboured' time helps to create the possibilities to think creatively and operate outside a systemised world. For example, if 100% of the inhabitants of a village would need to work in order to feed all its members, then undoubtedly the village would be able to sustain itself. But would the speed of its development and evolution not be highly hampered? If however 95% of the village would work in order to feed all of its inhabitants, then it opens up the possibility for 5% of the villages to think creatively in order to spawn new economies.

This paper investigates the role of the creative economy in the contemporary metropolis by focusing on its emergence as a result of shifting global economic and political structures, and its 'grounding' in the contemporary urban field.

The developments of the last century has ensured that the contemporary urban environment in which we live has entirely embraced, and is entirely dependant, on a capitalist structure. In 1776 the Scottish moral philosopher, Adam Smith promoted 'capitalism' as a way of life, slowly leading to the replacement of the Aristotelian view. He defined it as an economic system in which the individual will act in their own self interest, after which the society as a whole should benefit. However accurate such a system may have facilitated the economic impulse, it overlooked one significant detail. The belief went out that in the capitalist system there would spawn some type of idealistic 'invisible hand' that would correlate the individuals actions and choices, to the society in which they operated. Unfortunately, this invisible hand did not emerge from the capitalist system itself like some idealistic effect. Instead the system became governed and carefully manipulated by the nation state administering and facilitating its growth and direction. As capitalism (e.g. money) structured the way people lived, an imbalance started to emerge within the nation state as a result of class systems and aristocracy. A further more severe imbalance was generated on a global scale as colonial power imposed unequal trading systems for their own interest. Competition between nations intensified to such an extent it contributed to both World Wars and is the underlying motivation for the current war on Terrorism as both parties seem to be fighting for oil, as opposed to fighting for ones societal belief. Simultaneously this colonial driven organisation has facilitated the current global state of poverty in which most developing countries find themselves entrapped in.

However, none of the above is novel since numerous studies have managed to depict exactly what effects the problems have created. And with a naïve conscious, 'solutions' are imposed that only suffice needy recipients. But what good is a solution if it only modifies the problematic. The modernistic approach to problem solving is much like putting a bandage over a wound, it attempts to conceal its effects, hoping the body will heal itself. Most detrimental effect are caused by a process that is generated by numerous inter-related factors. Building a reservoir in a dried out area will not 'solve' the problem of irrigation! This temporal 'solution' will only temper the moods of the desperate individuals directly effected. For a seriously sustainable solution, a configuration must be proposed through which the system of everyday life activities can be facilitated. An ecologic equilibrium must be found between all ins and outs that pass through the system. The relations that directly and indirectly effect the problematic must be carefully mapped, after which a innovative dynamic diagram should illustrate to what extent a new configuration can facilitate all related actors

and factors. Very much like a computer mainframe, they system would need to be updated, or even upgraded.

In order to act appropriately concerning the problem of contemporary economic performance, a careful depiction of the current 'system' is required. To facilitate sustainable urban opportunities one must not look simply *vertically* at the local condition, but one needs to represent all components that effect the entire system in which the activities operate. Investigating from the macro to the micro so as to be able to look at the system horizontally and understand its dynamism and complexities; its complete interrelatedness. All essential ingredients must be regarded so that the existing organisation can be properly reconfigured. Although individual studies have analyzed social, political, economical and even environmental shifts effecting the 'urban', there exists no inter-related dynamic representations of an urban system that incorporate all of these forces. In addition, one should not forget the more current developments effecting urban systems, namely that of technology. Technological advancements of the last few decades have facilitated global movement and communication to an unprecedented scale. These two primary ingredients that effect economic impulses are being completely invigorated, effecting the system as a whole. The speed and intensity of change complexify the fluxes we had come to understand. And with new ICT's at the forefront, instruments to spawn economic thrusts emerge throughout the urban field, essentially creating a manifold of possible economies (e.g. e-commerce) in the contemporary city. New forms of movement and communication arise as this *digital* sphere is spread over the surface of our urbanised world.

Looking back at the technological developments of the last century, we see that the 20<sup>th</sup> century instigated large global shifts concerning economic and political relationships between the state, market and the individual by moving primarily from an autonomous and nationally empowered system to a complex layered and globally inter-dependant organisation. The rise in technological advancements facilitated the underlying economic shift from a politically driven urbanity, to a market driven urbanity. The market, directed by trans-national corporations, operated outside the nation state resulting in a shift that targeted primarily the macro economic structures. The micro economic structure however, found itself embedded in 'everyday publics'. Publics consisting of global migrants from both developed and developing countries striving for sustainability and growth by pursuing economic advances. This primary division introduced a multitude of new relations. A set of relations that was not visible in the physical environment, yet very apparent. Non-local forces were increasingly effecting the local condition. A *virtual* sphere entailing increasingly significant relations overlays the physical environment, a layer invisible to the individual, and inaccessible for the local entrepreneur.

What remains of the individual in this new layered reality? The 'urban being' is constituted both through ones 'situated-ness' in the *hard* urban construct entailing programmed buildings, infrastructures, and contemporary 'public' space, as well as a 'situated-ness' in a *soft* network entailing ones social, cultural, political and economic relations. The positioning of oneself in this real and virtual web is a fundamental condition in manifesting ones economy. The creative individual scavenges the urban 'battlefield' for opportunities, in the physical, digital and virtual realm; tracking shifts concerning the intensification of a myriad of ecologies. The movement through the city is examined. Like the veins in our body, streams of 'urban material' flow through the city. The movement and creation of life forms throughout the space of the city as they intensity are carefully monitored. Where the mass is, the money is, so when the opportunity presents itself the vendor initiates. Investigation into such cities as Istanbul, Bangkok or Delhi can best illustrate how merchants from the country side *situate* themselves in the city in order to capitalise from the prosperous urbanist, local or international. While millions of individuals carry on with their *every day* activities, the hawker is scavenging for *everyday* opportunities.

The developing nations, after having been exploited ever since the colonial era, have in some cases, managed to respond intensely creative and surprisingly resourceful to their predicament. Having been deprived of a stable economical foundation, they have been able to generate some of the most efficient creative cultures. Looking into several different settings, one can witness that the common underlying structure that facilitates this creativity, is a flexible or adaptive *spatial principle*. The flexibility can be found in the way space is designed, monitored and regulated, resulting in an adaptive, time-based and efficient spatial 'appropriability'. The intensity of every day activities that occupy the city according to a regulated structure, allow for the 'gaps' in time and space to be reappropriated accordingly. The opportunists are keen to situate themselves alongside the programmed city. Whether it may be the programmed building (space of containment), or the programmed mobility system (space of movement). All these *hard* agents allow for a *soft* tissue to capitalise from the aura of opportunity that surrounds it. Sometimes they manifest themselves purely as a parasite, leaching from the masses with no positive contribution to the system usually leading to detrimental effects; whether by its own demise, or worse, as it may even threaten to collapse the subsystem entirely. At other times, a synergy can be created as this responsive market in fact enhances the quality of the system from which it profits, without interfering with the overall configuration.

An understanding of the inter-related system concerning economic exchange, and an awareness of the dialogue between the incessant buyer and the opportunistic seller is required if urban strategists hope to positively invigorate the system. Every intervention results in a re-configuration of an existing system, creating an assemblage of positive and/or negative effects. The programmed city, the outcome of our modern epistemologies, operates similar to a closed circuit. Every action is predetermined and organised to perform in an *optimal* manner. All agents are configured in space in order to operate optimally. First we must ask ourselves what is this 'optimal' actually is? And whose optimum is actually being facilitated? Do we not benefit mutually more when striving for *efficiency*? And secondly, why can we not perceive the limitations of this closed system? For one, it is only aware all its *own* inputs, and as a result is completely dependant on them. All components are engineered to function accordingly, with almost zero margin for error. Urbanity is not like a light switch that we can simply turn on and off. It is filled with numerous unknowns, and even in the most controlled environment the residual can be found. Modernism gave us the conviction that 'placeness' could be constructed, we now know that sustainable placeness in the public environment can only be generated by creating the proper conditions. In an enclosed setting, such as a mall, one could strive to create an optimal economic atmosphere. But public space, the space where diverse publics operate, is saturated with moments of appropriation and re-appropriation. The individual, although entrapped in a panopticon, still entails their individuality. Given the opportunity, they will act and react accordingly. The profit making urbanism of contemporary cities overlooks the residual effects that emerge as a result of *everyday* individuals acting in *every day* operations. 'Urbanism' for our current 'ministers of knowledge' who govern our cities, is like a black box. As Lefebvre criticised the urbanist of the 1960's, he explained on how they know what goes in, are astonished at what comes out, but have no idea what takes place inside! Even Maurice Merleau-Ponty questioned the limitations of our current perception. He states that "intellectualism (...) is blind to the mode of existence and co-existence of perceived objects, to the life which steals across the visual field and secretly binds its parts together." (2002)

We continue to strive to 'grasp' the city and mould it accordingly. The unknown is perceived as a threat instead of an opportunity. Consequently, we are only engaged in a problem-solving urbanism.

A paradigm shift is needed. To break free of the limitation resulting from a binary mode of thought, a re-conceptualisation of the contemporary urban reality must be embraced in order to properly facilitate the necessary *spatial* (physical, digital and virtual) conditions for a

creative economy. As planners and designers of the urban realm, we have the possibility to construct urban realities and facilitate urban desires. The hard reality which we build is only the canvas upon which *real* urban life forms take place. Our conceived world is not the *lived* world. Ideas, goods, economies and cultures all stream in and around the structures that we build. Understanding these effects and affects allows us to conceive an environment that *can* be efficiently appropriated. Studying and understanding how different spaces of the city are appropriate can generate the 'tools' to design an *urban field* of opportunities where forces flow through, and temporal crystallisations allow for exchanges to transpire.

As an agent of the city, the urban being is entitled to their claim of the city. And whether we like it or not, they will assert their claim. It is for the spatial strategist, to understand how this lived space comes into being. What are the spatial requirements necessary in order to facilitate a certain type of spatial appropriation? Space *produces* the city, our structural elements (physical, digital and virtual) are only the seeds upon which life forms are generated. The *genius loci* of each and every space can be understood by the relations that pass through it. Each entity *relays* its relations. In movement and communication the city is manifested, everyday again. And although we can study patterns in order to classify and categorise so as to 'copy-paste' a certain condition hoping to generate similar or larger effects elsewhere, the DNA of ones emplacement cannot be duplicated. Only through careful *analysis* can we hope to *synthesise* the relational components in such a manner that our desired affects can be attained.

Urban designers throughout history have been engaged in conceiving utopic worlds; engineering space and its inhabitants to operate in certain ways. A 'disciplined society', beautifully illustrated in Fritz Lang's 1927 "Metropolis". Since the rise of post-modern city, mass studies have been carried out on how to counteract the 'negative' appropriation by for example skateboarders, graffitiist and the homeless. If with a similar vigour the energy and focus could be directed at trying to understand how we can facilitate a certain 'positive' re-appropriation, then one would truly be able to envisage a utopic world.

This paper has intended to open up our way of thinking regarding the city by illustrating some of the primary inter-relatedness on how the relationships between a local condition in a globally correlated world are too complex and dynamic to be dealt with through simply a homogenous problem-solving or purely localised consideration. The *object* city must be perceived as a *relational* city if we truly wish to understand and conceive a sustainable urban milieu.

#### References:

Borden, I. (2001) *Skateboarding, Space and the City: Architecture and the Body*, Berg Publishers

De Certeau, M. (1988) *The Practice of Everyday Life*, University of California Press

De Certeau, M. (1995) *Difference and Repetition: A Critical Introduction and Guide*, Columbia University Press

Deleuze, G. (2003) *The Logic of Sense*, Continuum

DeLanda, M. (2000) *A Thousand Years of Nonlinear History*, Zone Books

Jacobs, J. (1969) *The Economy of Cities*, Vintage Books

Lang, F. (1927) *Metropolis*, Eureka Video

Alexander G. Vollebregt, Space and Spatiality: Re-conceptualising the Creative Urban  
41<sup>st</sup> ISOCaRP Congress 2005

Lefebvre, H. (2003) *The Urban Revolution*, University of Minnesota Press

Lefebvre, H. (2001) *The Production of Space*, Blackwell Publishers

Maeda, J. (2004) *Creative Code*, Thames and Hudson

Merleau-Ponty, M. (2002) *Phenomenology of Perception*, Routledge Classics

Smith, A. (2003) *The Wealth of Nations*, Bantam Classics

Studio Sputnik (2003) *Snooze: Immersing Architecture in Mass Culture*, NAI Publishers

Slow Food: [www.slowfood.com](http://www.slowfood.com)