

**Cities as Infrastructures of Diversification and Homogenisation  
Constructing Multiformal Spaces in Paris and Shenzhen**

Read, Stephen

**Publication date**

2015

**Document Version**

Final published version

**Published in**

New Diversities

**Citation (APA)**

Read, S. (2015). Cities as Infrastructures of Diversification and Homogenisation: Constructing Multiformal Spaces in Paris and Shenzhen. *New Diversities*, 17(2), 131-149. [http://newdiversities.mmg.mpg.de/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/2015\\_17-02\\_09\\_Read-2.pdf](http://newdiversities.mmg.mpg.de/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/2015_17-02_09_Read-2.pdf)

**Important note**

To cite this publication, please use the final published version (if applicable).  
Please check the document version above.

**Copyright**

Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download, forward or distribute the text or part of it, without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license such as Creative Commons.

**Takedown policy**

Please contact us and provide details if you believe this document breaches copyrights.  
We will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

# Cities as Infrastructures of Diversification and Homogenisation: Constructing Multiformal Spaces in Paris and Shenzhen

by STEPHEN READ  
(Delft University of Technology)

## Abstract

Cities have made urban people. Cities are the material condition of complex urban societies and people have been actively formed in them as products of and complements to the politics and economies that cities have engendered. Urban identities and economic roles have formed and massively differentiated and complexified beyond those of pre-urban and rural societies. People have diversified as economic roles especially have divided and formed them around organising and integrating cultures and practices. Cities have, at times and under particular conditions, been diversifying infrastructures, but cities have also, in different times and under conditions of modernisation, industrial rationalisation and the rescaling and financialisation of economies, become infrastructures of homogenisation. In historical and at least partly contingent processes cities have complexified and opened rich and diverse opportunities for livelihoods in particular times and places and decomplexified and closed and diminished opportunities in others. The paper will take the reader on an historical journey through a number of iconic cases, starting in medieval Paris and finishing in contemporary Shenzhen to demonstrate that processes of diversification continue, still today, to open urban lives and livelihoods to urban newcomers, while modernising and homogenising processes threaten those lives and livelihoods.

**Keywords:** urban diversity, urban economy, relationality, Paris, Shenzhen

## Introduction

There were 232 million international migrants in 2013 according to the UN International Migration Report (UN 2013). Millions more made shorter journeys from rural to urban places within national borders. China now has 260 million domestic itinerants shuttling between urban jobs and rural homes (Ma 2015). But migration is not just a factor of contemporary mobility and change. The movement of people to cities, and their transformation from rural into urban people, is a process and phenomenon that belongs historically with cities and their emergence and growth. Migration is a necessary corollary to the formation of cities with its urban societies and

economies. Cities have induced or seduced over the last 7,000 years a stream of more or less willing supplicants into a movement of urbanisation. And cities have been the fonts of innovation that have produced modern people and societies. Cities have added key attributes to our basic existences, starting, according to Aristotle, with the ways we relate to one another and the ways we find our identities and well-being (Aristotle et al 1998; Arendt 1963).

We might begin by imagining cities as passive containers for displaced souls and urban migrants as rooted in and by their pasts, dependent on and protective of communities and iden-

tities under threat by processes out of their control. Migrants might be seen, then, as couriers of culture and other forms of local authenticity to global cities, or as passive victims of global processes beyond their reach, stubbornly or heroically resisting processes that homogenise and destroy local specificity. But understanding displacement as a loss of authentic self and place ignores the positive motives people may have for displacing themselves and may feed a narrative of disempowerment and victimisation. It may also elide the potentials of urban places for positive forms of empowered change beyond mainstream debates about integration or assimilation (Chiswick and Miller, 2009; De Palo et al, 2007; Manning and Roy, 2010).

I would prefer to start in another place, understanding urban places as themselves community and practice forming. Cities may be doing much more than containing the people drawn to them or the activities that animate them. They may set up key relations that make urban places active and complicit in the sorts of things urban people do. They may give form to and condition significant activities, situating people and things in those activities in ways that identify them and start to remake who and what they are. Cities may contextualise strongly, may indeed be *ontological* devices, generative of the identities of people and things in their new urban situations. People may change in new places so that ways we have understood this question in the past – particularly in relation to ethnic and other intrinsic forms of diversity (Vertovec 2007) – may be thrown into question by positive forms of in situ re-identification and re-diversification, in learning new situations, finding livelihoods, coping with problems and exploiting opportunities.

The origins of cities marked the origins of politics and economies so that cities have played an active role in the formation of us as people and societies. This has included a process of diversification as divisions of labour have massively complexified and differentiated beyond those of pre-urban societies. Diversification may

indeed be thought of as as intrinsic to cities as writing and numeracy. But urbanisation may not be a consistent process or consistently a force for progress or for the good. Migrants have not always achieved what they came to cities for, and we should not take urbanisation as some sort of quasi-natural occurrence or a reliable answer to big problems we may face.

What there may be, however, are answers contingent on the details of specific relations in specific situations, and strategies may be built by being attentive of the fact that migration and urbanisation is necessarily a question of the arrival of people in real urban places. Henri Lefebvre sought ways to engage more directly with urban objects and relations in situ through what he called ‘metaphilosophy’ – by engaging with not just the object but also the conditions that produce or create it (Lefebvre 1991: 113; Read 2013). People emplace themselves in new situations and become subject to new sets of relations between specific others and within specific processes. We can look at where they find themselves situated, what happens to them, between what urban things and urban others. We can observe and analyse what gets made and changed in situations that impose demands, establish imperatives and present possibilities and opportunities that people engage with in ways that form them. Differentiation, integration and identification may be processes that happen not in theory or in the abstract, but in specific urban situations.

The intention in this paper is to begin to explore questions of the making of viable local communities and economies as factors of the activity of people in urban situations. Cities have served historically as generators of livelihoods. They have been places of a primary innovation in the creative re-differentiation and re-identification of new populations as these people have found their ways in a new urban world. However, they have also been the places where they have been exploited and coerced into abandoning self-sufficient livelihoods for dependency on wage labour (Perelman 2000).

The paper is intended also to begin to make a contribution to a neglected area by taking up an often overlooked methodological challenge – to plot how urban relations organise social and economic processes at urban – that is, street, neighbourhood and city – levels. It builds from key moments in the history of the city, taking the position that cities are essentially historical and contingent constructions. They could have been built in other ways, but they were – or some of them were – built in this way and to this general effect. Of course, there is theory behind this and I try to give at the same time the beginnings of a theoretical framing of political and economic spaces, framings that will be developed further elsewhere.

The longer aim this effort points to is a reconsideration of the idea of urban development. Enthusiasts for the city, like Henri Lefebvre and Jane Jacobs, have argued that urban spaces at the street level are complex and *ordered*, and support productive embedded social and economic activities as well as everyday and street lives. These processes have obvious social value; they also have value, however, in that they are a legitimate and indeed essential part of the whole urban picture. What I will suggest is that cities are built from the ground up. The scales in the city support one another, higher scales pointing towards opening, in terms of action and communication, to further places, and lower scales pointing to a closure and community that is inclusive and productive.

The choices regarding development are often presented in simplistic single-dimensional terms, where one has to take sides between the economic and the social, formal or informal, one form of (inclusive) social order or an (exclusive) other. I would argue that the nature of the problem is, potentially at least, more complex and interesting than this in that the city presents different issues related to different structures at different scales, and these issues and structures can, when joined up, add up to significant increases in the capacities of the whole to both resolve problems or to superimpose issues that

they may be creatively or abductively opposed as ongoing agonistic challenges in situ. There are different economic and political valences at different levels and while we may continue to argue the legitimacy of the one or the other there is no necessary reason why, with the necessary institutional adjustments in place, multiple of these may not be implemented simultaneously. We could take seriously the proposal that cities are multiple and contradictory, and instead of thinking formality vs. informality or this order vs. that, we may think of a *multiformality* as different agendas are pursued at different levels (Deng 2010; Deng 2015).

### Urban Infrastructure

Urban relations shape and organise urban life, not through enclosure or control but through providing the conditions for people to act. They are capable of *empowering* the people caught up in those relations by putting them in productive enabling situations and opening them to productive opportunities. Our capacities for action as humans are linked to these relational and material conditions and their spatialities. We can think of this convergence of material, relational and spatial conditions very broadly as *technology*. The etymological roots of ‘technology’ are in the Greek *techne* (τέχνη) which refers to that which is made by people. The notion suggests also the material, relational and spatial *environment* that is more than just surroundings, that is an integral part of everyday life that opens people to their worlds of action and facilitates action. It draws on the ecological proposal that all creatures are active in the strategic making and adaptation of *environment-worlds* (*Umwelten*) (von Uexküll 1992). *Umwelten* comprise sets of socially significant and material objects or elements which act as equipment and as ‘marks’ in the active lives of creatures (see Agamben 2004: 40).

Environment-worlds are *spaces* that capture the lives of these animals in the particular ways they do things. They are limited, discrete material distributions and integrations of the things

animals engage with in activity, that *mediate* activity. They are also of *communities* as social creatures share the things and the marks that are significant in collective lives. Humans are no different in this regard and have crafted cities and urban spaces in order to facilitate urban lives. Where they do differ is in that over historical time humans have constructed new spaces and have, through these constructions and the new objects and elements and social organisations that have accompanied them, extended the capacities and ranges of their actions so that they are capable of travelling, communicating and acting non-locally.

Urban spaces are *technological* in the broad sense given above. They are built in patterns that organise – that is, distribute and integrate – material elements significant in urban lives and therefore human lives themselves. Renate Mayntz and Thomas Hughes noted the social significance of “modern transportation, communication and supply systems, which one might subsume under the heading infrastructural systems, since their primary function consists in enabling a multitude of specific activities to take place” (Mayntz, 1988: 233-259, quoted in Joerges 1996). These “spatially extended and functionally integrated” systems like electrical power, railroad, and telephone systems have made significant changes to cities and urban lifestyles (Mayntz and Hughes 1988). They described these systems as socio-technical – which would raise issues regarding the definition of both the social and the technical if we regarded these terms and the relation between them as universal (Joerges 1996: 55-72). The point is that neither term is a category in its own right and the relation between them is situation-specific. Technology is enrolled to specific social ends in specific situations, to the equipping (and legitimation) of places for specific action.

Technology is the stuff we surround ourselves with in order to do things and spaces are those technologies in their organised states. The urban situations I describe are constructions in which social and technical relations are organised in environmental-worlds, as spaces of organised

material and people, and we could think of these as urban infrastructures.

But human lives and societies change over time. Urban change, often in the form of ‘renewal’, has historically been provoked by crisis and correlated with new phases of urbanisation and urban growth. These phases define urban histories as cities, connected in regions, tend to go through analogous processes of change and expansion at the same or similar times. The development of cities has been a layering of new spaces as existing urban societies and the significant elements and spaces that mark and shape them have been overlaid with new ones. These new spaces consist of new distributions and integrations of elements that remake the city and its daily life together.

But old spaces do not disappear. They remain and the relations between new spaces and old is itself organised so that people can move between the different modes and capacities their lives encompass in cities. We are neighbours as well as urban citizens and walk to the corner shop as well as taking the tram to the station and the train to the next city. Space here is not a geodetic surface over which humans move but a structured set of discrete internally coherent domains, the relations internal to and between which establish patterns of everyday life and activities. New urban spaces have tended to add new capacities for action – associated with technologies of the city tram and the motorcar, for example – and to scale up over time. But these scalings-up are not unproblematic in that they have to do with relations of power and, as we will see, this can mean the loss of power of the least powerful.

Space and its ‘community’ is a scalable term that may refer to neighbourhood, city, region, and nation. We tend to naturalise these spaces but each one was constructed and each has an origin. The constructions of new ‘communities’ like those of the nation or of the metropolitan region are themselves significant events in urban and social history. Even the neighbourhood, which in a form that did not derive from pre-existing villages, was invented in the indus-

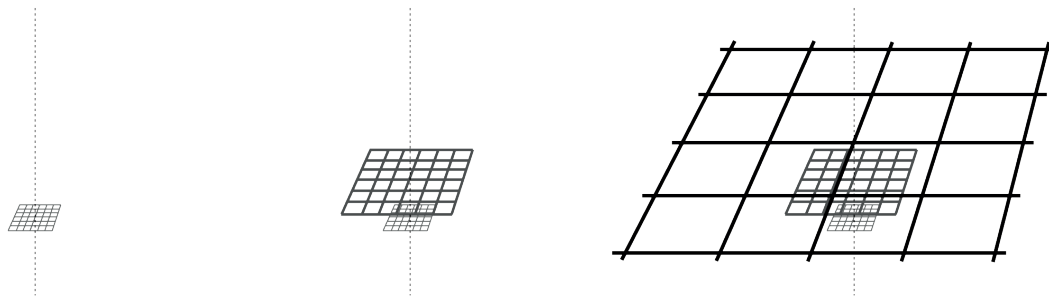


Figure 1. A schematic of the layered growth of a city through two technological transformations. In European urban history, for example, this could represent the 'progress' from the medieval or mercantile city, through the industrial city to the 'post-industrial' metropolitan city. 'Borders' between these spaces are articulated in the vertical rather than horizontal axes

trial city. Cities and city systems don't have structure so much as they have history (Read 2012). Larger scaled spaces – of regional or global trade or of imperial government, for example – have been around a long time. They may have more abstract 'communities' but are understood here to be part of this layering of space.

These layerings and foldings of inter- and intra-urban relations have formed cities, creating differentiated domains of everyday life with borders over which social and economic processes and interrelations take place. These processes have differentiated the city over time, not just into different places with different characters across the urban surface, but also across scales – as cities and regions have grown they have also differentiated into structured configurations of districts, neighbourhoods, centres, sub-centres etc.

The city with its social and economic relations and characteristics is defined and redefined in this process. An early modern mercantile city was established around divisions and differentiations that produced the spatialities and conditions that underlay the blooming of an urban commerce and *petit bourgeoisie*. Further divisions in the industrial city separated working from middle classes and created spaces of consumption separate from those of production. New constructions and divisions in today's regionalising and globalising city further fragment the urban surface and differentiate and facilitate new modes of power. The 'structure' created by these his-

torical divisions is built by and into the everyday spaces of neighbourhoods, suburbs and centres and by and into technical infrastructures. Space depends on the social for its completion but this basically artefactual and constructed – technical and material – structure *shapes* the social, affecting everything in the city, defining movement and retail patterns for example with precision.

Urban space and social organisation are both hierarchic and heterarchic. Space distributes and integrates people in their relations with the people and the things they are involved with 'locally' – within the 'community' the space represents. It creates urban communities by holding people together in urban orders of association and sets up borders between different scales of social organisation and action. It organises by collectivising spatially around socially significant elements, marking these things out as being of common concern, objective and communicable in the 'community' and significant in what people do. It is this 'structure' of 'layers' stacked hierarchically that distinguishes and makes operationable different normative orders of human association ('communities' at neighbourhood, city, metropolitan and national levels, for example). It is to the 'rights' of urban forms of organisation of association and livelihood that Henri Lefebvre referred when he spoke of the 'right to the city' (Lefebvre et al 1996). And it is the struggle over urban space and the powers it distributes that make up the politics and drama of urban development.



Figure 2. Expansion of Paris: maps 1180, 1223, 1383 (Nicolas de La Mare & Antoine Coquart)

### Political Space

The public space of medieval Paris was “no coenobitic place created by common labour” (Sennett 1994: 193). Nor was it held together by kinship or ethnic bonds. A migration to the city was underway as peasants exchanged a precarious rural existence for what they hoped would be a less precarious urban one. A diversity of previously unrelated people were arriving through the gates and found their first points of contact with the city and its people in the markets of the city and in the main streets and back streets of the neighbourhoods. They would have been thrown together by the circumstances of their arrival in the city – especially concerning the dwelling places and work or livelihood they managed to find and would have used urban space to associate with others and find livelihoods.

The arrivals swelling the neighbourhoods were mostly from the rural provinces, but they would have included intercity migrants from provincial centres around Paris as well as from further afield. The urban community is in its beginnings a gathering of strangers. The city, meanwhile, is a construction that frames relations between people in their economic and social lives. These relations have an economic dimension which is also the reason many of the migrants come, but they have also a political which is to say a community or collective dimension.

The three maps in figure 2 show the development of Paris over 200 years. They show an evolving street grid of the city growing around villages (*communes*) on the routes from outside the city. These *communes* were enclosed into

the city proper, with the original *cite* and *bourgs* of Paris, in two stages, first by Philip Augustus in the early 1200s, and then by Charles V before the 1350s. The new quarters or *faubourgs* of the city were divided along the lines of the access routes to the centre (*cite*) and the *commune*-neighbourhoods grew around these.

Land was owned by the crown (the *cite*) and by the various religious orders that clustered around the *cite* (the *bourgs*). Village (*commune*) land was owned by the parish. Parish land was brought under the jurisdiction of the religious orders who also took over the expanding charitable functions of the parishes as the city expanded. In the city, building rights on (usually church) land was transferred to individuals or corporations for a fee. Richard Sennett describes how little control was kept over how collective space around buildings was organised so that there was little concept of or attention given to public space (191). Not even access to buildings was protected and disputes were sometimes settled by force. The street emerged in neighbourhood space as a by-product of aggressive contestation of individual building and collective accessibility rights.

Building on or over the main thoroughfares through the *faubourgs* raised the most public resistance and these routes began and remained the most coherent, binding the expanding city together from *cite* to gates. As the *communes* grew, what identified them as discrete entities was not bounding at their edges but an effect of the difference in scale of movement and action

between the street-grid of the neighbourhood-*commune* and that of the *faubourg*-to-centre route on which it was structured. What ‘closed’ neighbourhoods as social spaces was not edges – which, over time, join with other edges to create a continuous fabric of streets and blocks – but *centres*, on the major thoroughfares to which neighbourhoods attach and are socially and economically oriented.

The deficit of urban design noted by Sennett is overstated in that the fabric is already clearly articulated into major and minor spaces by the difference in scale and intensity of use between common neighbourhood backstreets and the *faubourg*-centre routes between gate and centre. These routes formed in fact a border condition between a space of the city as a whole and the more local and intimate neighbourhood spaces centred on these main routes. This ‘structuration’ of urban space delivered central places along the main routes, as active and significant places in the city, which were at one and the same time centres of neighbourhoods.

The polis makes people urban; new arrivals in Paris were changed by their encounter with the city. Aristotle understood the city as a ‘political community’, the highest form of community, set apart from other forms like the household or the village. The polis also makes people *political* by relating them one to another. More to the point, it organises and frames them in their relations. By imposing its own framing, cities frame people in a way that makes them equal who come to the city non-equal. The key for Hannah Arendt in understanding the space of urban community was a property called ‘isonomy’<sup>1</sup> which indicated equality of political rights. Urban community was predicated on a putative right to be there and on living in (relative) peace once one was there. It set up a synthetic equality of differences: “the equality of the Greek polis – its isonomy – was an attribute of the polis and not of men, who received their equality by virtue of citizenship, not by virtue of birth” (Arendt 1963: 31).

<sup>1</sup> ἰσονομία: ἴσος, equal; νόμος, custom, law

Arendt describes the politics of Periclean Athens taking place on the Agora and between free men, each of whom could participate directly in the political affairs enacted there (Arendt 1958). Arendt’s example of the Agora shows a space of relations of appearance and speech between different but equal people. Community here is not a bond of affinity or similarity but of relations between differences (see Derrida 1976) that have equal chances or rights to be heard. It is in this space and in these relations, according to Arendt, that power and action is born. Power here is the power to act but it is also Arendt’s contention that no action is possible *before* it is mediated through the heterarchic, isonomic structure of a political community.

The Agora has been seen as an ideal case of direct democratic politics, but as such it elides some significant points, the first of which being that the political space of the Agora did not exist on its own, nor was it the only space affected by the discussion taking place there. Athens was at the time the most powerful of a cluster of Greek city-states, and the politics of peer-polity (heterarchic) relations, of alliances, trade, tribute and warfare between Athens and the others (Ma 2003) were a major part of the political discussion on the Agora. Closer to home, the space of Athens itself included the bonded and ‘unfree’ – slaves and women for example, deemed to not be part of the political body of the city but over whom the word from the Agora had dominion.

Far from being an ideal model of politics, what this wider conflation of differently scaled political institutions started to represent was the scaled and layered hierarchical form of interrelated heterarchical polities. This form can be understood as the basis of a calculus of power relations within and between polities and informs an understanding of how power shifts occur and under what conditions various power distributions work (see Crumley 1995).

Paris of the 12th century was a disorderly and power-hierarchical space and it would not do to suggest it was any kind of ideal space of measured argument and democracy. The point is that



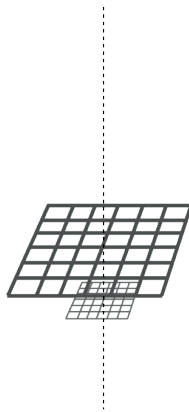


Figure 3. Making polities 1: the neighbourhood and the city in medieval urban space

isonomy does not indicate democracy here at all but rather the property of *heterarchy* in space. Herodotus understood isonomy as a condition of no-rule, of being without a division between rulers and ruled. It was precisely in isonomic conditions that the rough ‘negotiation’ of building and access rights in the emerging neighbourhoods of Paris occurred – as a contingent instance of this ‘politics of no-rule’. The neighbourhood was a heterarchy – a flat, equal space which inter-related the people and things of the neighbourhood without an overruling authority.

In medieval Paris the heterarchical space of neighbourhood connected with and was centred on another space, that of the city – carried on the *faubourg*-centre route. The form is of two scaled political spaces or *polities*, constitutively neighbourhood and city and interrelated precisely where they overlap. People would have been situated and even *constituted* as neighbours and as citizens in these spaces, their political (community) and economic (market) relations with one another articulated and centred by this situational nexus. Where they are not only determines what they can do but also who and what they are. People *become* something in these sorts of situations. The same could be said of the objects people emplace around themselves and that mark their activities. What these objects are is a factor also of where they are.

There is an openness about these spaces in that they may be adjusted and manipulated. The significances of people and things are given in relations. But they are also changeable and the agents of change may, at this scale, be the people themselves, not just by themselves but in negotiation with others. People may build these spaces out, elaborating them, putting in place agents and equipment to some or other end. The processes and operations are never complete and never completely secure, they need to be maintained and developed, and adapted to changing conditions, instituting new processes and operations as these become necessary. Spaces that support these kinds of dynamics are learning environments, where people learn from what goes on around them, negotiating themselves into and out of what is happening. They may also be innovative, allowing changes and initiating new customs and practices that consolidate change.

### **Economic Space**

Public space was more than the space left over after buildings were constructed (contra Sennett 1994: 193). It may have been crowded, noisy, and dangerous but it was not without order. The streets and neighbourhoods of medieval Paris created on the one hand the *closures* that defined urban communities (neighbourhoods in



Figure 4. A Paris market, from *Le Chevalier Errant* by Thomas de Saluces (1403)<sup>2</sup>

this case) and on the other the *openings* of urban practice and action oriented to the rest of the city and the world beyond. Neighbourhoods were centred on the main routes, and these neighbourhood centres coincided with the locations of markets and other economic activities, which also accounted for concentrations of activity.

These urban and geographical structures were political, defining how people and things were ordered in relation to other people and things, and defining conditions for both acting and interacting. These same spaces provided the conditions for urban economies. There is strong evidence cities were initially established as political entities – as part of an infrastructure of government to administer territories – or as centres of the larger-scaled trade or distribution of strate-

gic goods and materials. But cities are not self-sufficient. The relation between cities and their surroundings is a dependant relationship and once cities were established it became necessary to organise reliable supplies of food and other products into the city. Yoffee describes how urbanisation entailed the building of the logistics of these supplies in the concomitant ‘reconstruction’ of the rural as “new villages, towns and hamlets arose in the backdraft of urbanisation” (Yoffee 2005: 60).

It was in cities that both commerce and agricultural market systems were centred. If we look at agricultural markets, these are structured hierarchically. Markets connect to other markets. Small local markets connect upwards to larger and more central markets. The main Parisian markets would have stood at the top of this hierarchy in the region, with smaller markets in towns and villages being the first stops for agri-

<sup>2</sup> Thomas III de Saluces, *Le Chevalier errant*, France (Paris), vers 1400-1405. Paris, BnF, département des Manuscrits, Français 12559, fol. 167.

cultural products for local townspeople, but also for trading up the hierarchy and ultimately to Paris. Once food was in the city it would have also been traded down from central city markets to neighbourhood and street markets. This last hierarchy is coincident with the basic city-neighbourhood structure of city fabric I have just outlined.

The economic space of medieval Paris was a simple hierarchy of markets in a mixed economy. Food would have been sold alongside craft and manufactured goods, cloth and clothing. Some goods and produce was made or prepared and sold from shops lining especially the main route to the centre, but commodities were also made in household workshops, or imported via agents and middlemen from the provinces or from even further off and warehoused in the neighbourhood to be sold from stalls and pavements along the busy routes. Artisans, traders, money lenders and other service providers, agents, middlemen and the labourers, clerks and porters that served them, mixed with new migrants, seeking out roles in these processes, producing new diversities of urban people specialised into and even defined by roles that their urban situation facilitated.

What was produced was an urban division of labour. Urban situation offered opportunities, and produced roles – which is to say urban identities – for all manner of people who sought out and embraced them. These roles proliferated as economic and political relations proliferated in a context of urban communities and economies of provision and exchange. The city was the place where innovation happened in social, technical and industrial organisation. The making of things and the exchange of goods and services for money or barter was a flexible and expanding means of securing livelihood in urban conditions. But the scope of this urban economy also went beyond industry and commercial exchange. The presentation of oneself and representation others, the making of contacts, business, social, and personal as well as the search for and exchange of knowledge would have happened through the same structures as local encounters in the streets

of the neighbourhood were supplemented by wider ones in the *faubourg*-to-centre routes and still wider and perhaps more formal ones in the centre or central market. The net result was that it was possible to learn, to gain knowledge and profile and to gain economically from one's location at boundaries of the spaces of the neighbourhood and the city and of the city and wider region.

Viable livelihoods were consistently secured in the space of the neighbourhood from economic exchanges where that space met the space of the city – which would have meant a net economic flow from the city to the neighbourhood. Such a flow represented the economic productivity of the political and economic organisation of the neighbourhood and the economic viability of its community. Power was in the hands of those who negotiated a position for themselves in this space.

There is nothing to suggest that any of this was planned. Indeed, there is reason to believe that this proliferation of new and diverse identities was a contingent effect, an accident of space and history. The knowledge of these processes started as a common and a minor knowledge, emergent out of the potentials space afforded, held in the customary doings and practices of people, held in the spaces and in the situations in which they happened rather than coming from 'authoritative' sources. People acquired roles in their new urban situations and roles and 'places' in the urban societies that emerged around them. These 'societies' were themselves a contingent outcome of the encounter of people in urban space. The production of diversity was not a natural or inevitable outcome however. Public order issues and the poor urban image with the ruling classes of what was sometimes not more than an "inextricable tangle of wooden stalls and mud-walled shacks, occupied by a crowd of petty trades" (Alfred Delvau, *Les Dessous de Paris* 1862, quoted in Hazan) provoked intervention from those classes, and these interventions led to a quite different configuration of power.



Figure 5. Haussmann’s spatial interventions in Paris, 1853–1870. (Wagenaar 2000)<sup>3</sup>

**Haussmannisation**

A reconfiguration of the space of Paris by Louis-Napoléon and Georges-Eugène Haussmann radically altered the way these spaces worked. Haussmann began developing the centre of Paris during the 1850s using innovative methods of financing. However competition for State funds from the building of the railways, an economic down-turn and the fact demand for the kind of high-rent housing this development produced peaked quite quickly (Harvey 2003: 130-133) meant that the direct impact of his interventions may be less than is sometimes claimed. His interventions however, including the development and construction processes themselves, decimated the fine-grained neighbourhood-to-city economic relation. It did this first of all by reducing urban structure to land and real estate for surveying, calculation and financial specula-

tion. Then the new city space Haussmann created supported other developments to consolidate effects that were not explicit in his original strategy.

Haussmann connected new modern cultural, public and commercial places and buildings into a highly integrated central city space through a redesigned network of boulevards lined with middle-class housing. He also linked this remade urban space directly to the new railway stations, connecting directly with the regional and national spaces that were being consolidated at the same time. Haussmann’s motivation was predominantly to do with public space and public order issues. There was wide support amongst the ruling classes for improving the image of the city and taking back control of the streets for

<sup>3</sup> Michiel Wagenaar Townscapes of power *GeoJournal* 51: 3-13, 2000.

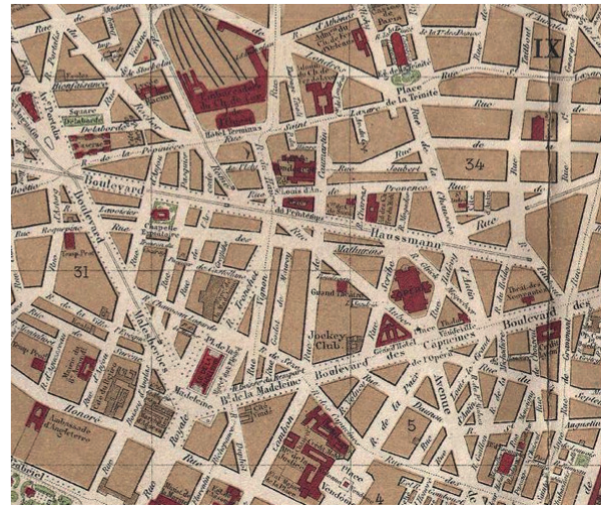
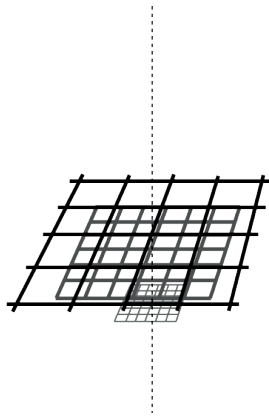


Figure 6. Making polities 2: Haussmann's rescaling and reconfiguration of Paris

consumerist and middle class pursuits. In the process he introduced a new urban scale into the city of Paris, shifting social and economic relations decisively to this scale and devastated the street life and petty commerce of the *communes*.

The redevelopment coincided with a rising property market and easy availability of capital, both actively supported if not engineered by the state, so that the project stimulated on-going rounds of speculative property development which traded on the steeply rising land prices on the new boulevards and waves of land price rises towards the periphery (Harvey 2003: 133-136). The effect was to provoke property speculation and to raise rents to levels beyond the reach of the small artisans, craftspersons and manufacturers, *petit bourgeois* shopkeepers and small-time middlemen and entrepreneurs. The users (shopkeepers and artisans, liberal professions and commercial interests) owned more than 80% of land before the Second Empire. By 1880 their share of the total had been reduced to a little more than 20% by a new *haute bourgeoisie* of landlords and large commercial interests and *rentiers* (Harvey 2003: 124).

The change defined not just a new aestheticised, commodified city, stripped of the orders that benefitted its inhabitants, but also a new social dependency concomitant on the disabling of social and economic processes these

orders represented. The result was a massive homogenisation of people that created a working class for the new industries emerging beyond the centre. Haussmann's interventions coincided with the increased demand for labour in industry so that those who were effectively swept out of the new centre and beyond the ring of stations by rising rents were available, demoralised and dispossessed, as labour. Class divisions consolidated and were inscribed in urban space. Later waves of migrants have been delivered into these peripheral spaces, which have become ever more segregated from the mainstream life of the *bourgeois* city.

The redevelopment plans contributed in this way to facilitating (and fixing in real estate) new flows of capital, establishing a new 'spatial fix' (Harvey 2001) for a new phase of industrial capitalism and bourgeois consumption. It was finally this and the '*embourgeoisement*' (Gaillard 1977) or gentrification of Paris that were the achievements of Haussmann's plans (Harvey 2003: 135). The new space itself asserted the scale of the city over that of the neighbourhood so that urban strategies shifted from the securing of strategic economic position in the streets and neighbourhoods to the exploitation of the increasing value of urban land as neighbourhoods became resources to be exploited for their rents (Smith 2002: 427).

A new *rentier* economy profited from returns from spiralling values of land and the financialisation of urban space. It is largely on these precarious foundations that contemporary financial economies still stand (Smith 2002). Retail had not gone as a product of the structure of main and back streets but the new space and rent rises had shifted the emphasis from the small shops, backstreet workshops and street vendors to the *Bon Marche* and its like which had opened their doors to middle class shoppers coming in from the region as well as from Paris. Cultural (like the Opera) and government (like the Hôtel de Ville) facilities were more large scale functions oriented to the region inserted into a fabric which had previously mediated the relation between neighbourhood and city.

The power of people in the neighbourhoods to adapt and change things was lost as power shifted to city and regional spaces, to owners of land and the technologies of order and policing that controlled the new spaces and access to it. Knowledge of what was proper or allowed came from a 'higher' source than the everyday space and activity of the neighbourhood. The neighbourhood lost some of its autonomy as it lost the power to define its life and significance in what was customary and everyday.

The neighbourhoods had been recast as land and real estate and the very role and meaning of the city was shifted away from a complex structuring of locally productive forms of association and exchange. This was a dispossession of the 'rights' to association and livelihood of those who had most relied on them. An 'informalisation' of these older urban strategies of small-scaled production and exchange – a new 'moral order' – was imposed as dominant strategies of the capitalisation of land assumed the right to discount all others. This also achieved Haussmann's explicit aim of a 'reclaiming' of the space of the city for the middle and upper classes. This space was now one where a *bourgeois* "dawdling on a cafe terrace ... was disconnected from the street ... the people on the street now appearing as scenery, as spectacle (Sennett 1994: 346).

The sort of dispossession of 'rights' of livelihood this represents has been called 'Haussmannisation' (Jordan 2004; Merrifield 2014). A regime of social control and dependency was instituted and a social diversity that was non-standard, non-rational, never pre-planned or calculated but also productive, that added complexity, creativity and resilience, was lost. The strategy was carried out again in another iconic case, that of the 'renewal' of New York by Robert Moses after the Second World War. In this case a rich heritage of small businesses and local livelihoods had been built by migrants arriving in the city from Europe. Again the initiative for renewal coincided with state supported availability of capital and Moses built, creating the space and setting up the conditions that lead to the outcome.

In this case the reorientation of the city Moses effected was to a regional grid of highways he had begun building in the 1930s using funds that had become available with the New Deal. Again private developers made use of easy credit made available after the war and a fine grain of society and commerce was decimated by rising land values. Moses direct responsibility was limited to a few projects. The building of the Lincoln Centre for example, oriented to the larger region, laid waste to a small-scale commercial area while on the other end of the new regional connectors tracts of suburban housing were being built for people who would commute to work by car. But it was again waves of speculative development by private developers, supported by a liberal regulatory regime that was behind the gentrification of areas like the Lower East Side whose working and *petit bourgeois* classes were pushed out as their houses were turned into apartments for a new consumerist class who enjoyed the local character while relating beyond the city through the enhanced connections to the region and to the world.

Jane Jacobs was a vociferous opponent of Moses' 'development by gentrification' arguing for affordable housing and workplaces as a condition of an urban order of small-scaled diversity

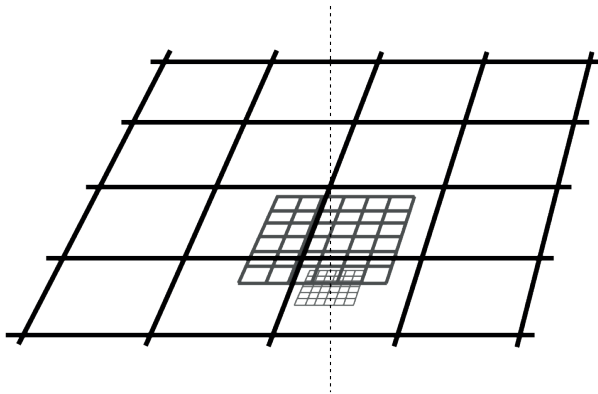


Figure 7. Making polities 3: Robert Moses' metropolitan rescaling and reconfiguration of New York

and creativity she identified as 'organised complexity' and located on the streets and pavements of neighbourhoods (Jacobs 1993).

### Shenzhen: a 21st Century City of Migrants

Shenzhen in the Pearl River Delta represents perhaps the most striking example of urbanisation in the world today, growing from 1980 to the present at an average rate of 27% per year. Shenzhen was built after 1980 as a Special Economic Zone (SEZ) with preferential policies for foreign investment. The influx of young migrant workers to fill the demand for labour was facilitated by the changing of the agricultural collective system in the late 1970s which exposed the scale of rural underemployment. With the lifting of restrictions on migration after 1983, rural youth began migrating to the SEZs *en masse* working for the most part in factories. A share, increasing today, however found employment in petty retail trade and construction. It is estimated that 20-25% of migrants are self-employed. The city became known as the 'workshop of the world', exploiting the cheap labour and investment allowances to make commodities for the global market. Government kept migrants tied however, administratively and in terms of social welfare, to their places of origin and the result was the emergence of a 'floating population' of rural commuters. Today the number of people travelling regularly between work in the SEZs and rural

areas in China is estimated to be 260 million (Ma 2015).

The original population of the area was 300 000 living in agricultural and fishing collectives. This group had retained part title to their land and had in the years immediately after reform used skills developed in the collectives to participate in industrial development on their own account collaborating with industrial partners mainly from Hong Kong. Land has again played a primary and pivotal role in economic development and growth. The original vehicle was the expropriation of agricultural land and its reclassification as urban land. What was dispossessed was agricultural rather than urban productivity, and then the rights to use the land of the village itself left for at least a time with the original owners. Government and collectives had in some cases come to agreements regarding development rights according to a so-called Guangdong model (Chung & Unger 2013), in others they had exploited legal loopholes and grey areas and in still other cases developments were simply illegal. The collectives have still the use of 42% of potential development land (Caixin 2012) in Shenzhen. These 'urban villages' are under continuous threat of 'legalisation' by expropriation due to the potential redevelopment value of the land.

George Lin's study of local development in Guangdong demonstrates the connections



Figure 8. Making polities 4: Shenzhen: the village exuding the city (Sze Tsung Leong)

between urban expansion and rural land expropriation. Capital produced elsewhere (in industry for example) has not been the primary means of accumulation in urban circuits, rather land expropriation has produced capital to finance development. The original 'urban villagers' soon however made something urban of this. The collectives were the most active of all parties in early development which started with low-skilled manufacturing contracting and the building of migrant housing. A corps of military engineers had installed an urban grid over the land of what is now the central city in the 1980s. This grid was organised (and curved sometimes) to avoid the villages. The new industrial or housing buildings the villagers built at the perimeters of their villages joined up with this grid, forming edges to the new streets. The villages in a sense started exuding the city around themselves and for the most part found themselves left in the interiors of the blocks in an 'urban village' pattern while the new buildings oriented to the new fabric of the city (see O'Donnell 2013 for a different interpretation).

High-tech industry replaced the low-tech industry of the early industrialisation in the 1990s and the collectives have for the most part moved out of industrial development and settled into a role as landlords to the city's ever-growing migrant population. The original village buildings have been replaced with so-called 'handshake buildings' developed on collective housing land. These house the migrant tenants while the villag-

ers themselves have built more luxurious housing and facilities for themselves and run commercial ventures on the edges of the villages where they meet the grid and the space of the new centre.

The construction of this relation between the new urban grid and the village is different to Paris in that the fabric and structure of the city was engineered much later around long-existing villages soon to become neighbourhoods. But the orders of city and neighbourhood, though different to Paris in scale, were nevertheless established by the relations the urban villagers set up with this grid.

Another time, another commune: in Shenzhen the beneficiaries of this first round urban space making were a group empowered by a negotiation of their 'rights' based on the customary claims that farmers had on the use of land going back deep into Chinese history. The collectives were allowed to draw on their own resources in exploiting not just their land but also organisation skills developed in the Peoples Communes. They were also innovating by pooling their assets into joint-owned management and development companies and participating on their own account at multiple levels of the urban economy from their participation in street-edge commerce to the establishment of small industries, to renting of low-cost housing to migrants and on to their development of properties for industrial and higher-end residential rent or sale.

The Nanshan district of Shenzhen is within this original urban grid but some distance to the west



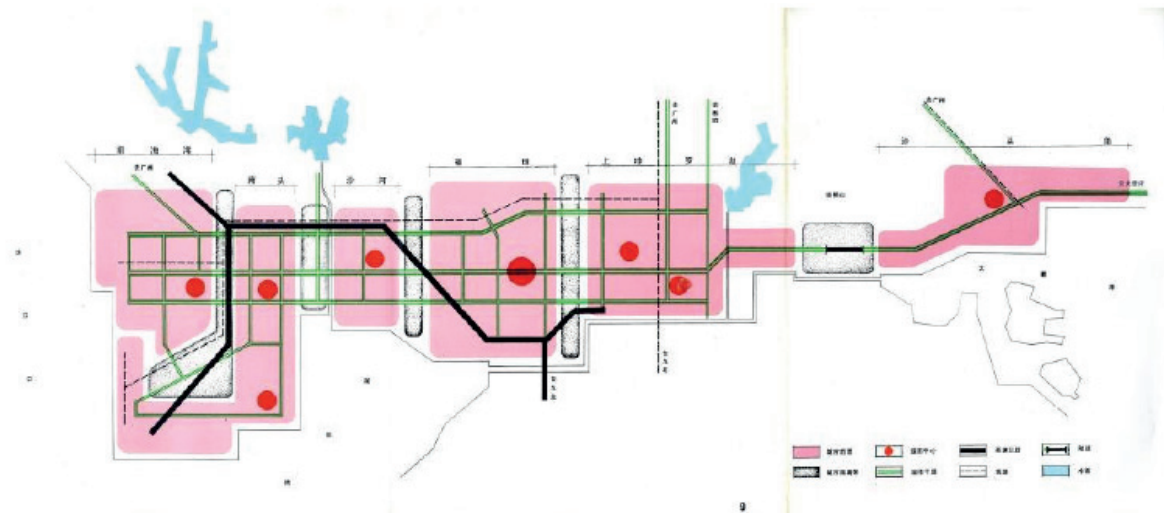


Figure 9. The Shenzhen master plan of 1982. The Nanshan district is the second pink area from the west. (Shenzhen municipality)

of the main centre and with lower rents than the centre. Today Nanshan hosts a burgeoning technology sector. But this is not the only 'creative' factor in the area. At the same time, it is the site of a string of three adjacent villages that used to sit on the waterfront of the Pearl River. Today the river is a kilometre away and the original road that linked the villages like three beads on a string tracks through the middle of three blocks of urban grid. The villages are less prosperous than those in the centre proper but the villagers have established a vibrant and very mixed local economy at the interface of the villages and the city.

The original coastal road can be accessed where it crosses the city grid and along it we find the main food market serving the whole area as well as a number of lines of small shops, some of them quite smart but most of them serving both everyday and small industry needs, as well as small industrial premises. The villages themselves are made up of low and medium-rise rental housing while on the urban grid and facing the city they have built better apartments, occupied also by the villagers, small hotels and malls, strings of small shops and light industrial premises. The area is occupied by shop-keepers (some of them the original villagers), shop-workers, industrial workers, mechanics, bakers, sheet metal workers, food vendors, barbers, and

agents and sellers for all manner of goods from household and shop and hotel-fitting equipment, industrial machinery, chemicals, industrial and building materials and from plastics to packaging and foodstuffs.

Migrants rent small apartments and work either in the area or in larger factories or offices in the neighbouring industrial and business areas. Some of them will live in the villages and work on their own account from the lower rent premises along the old road or the adjacent main roads. Urban villagers will own some of the shops and local enterprises or work in the management of the village properties. Many of them will lounge in the smarter public spaces, or in the tea shops, chatting and playing cards. The villagers have secure livelihoods and the affordable rents they charge migrants contributes to making migrant livelihoods relatively more secure. Many migrants will be working on their own account in small industries or as shop-keepers and will themselves employ other migrants.

By now many areas of Shenzhen are into their third phase of development, each regeneration producing land price and rent increases. The city's economy has doubled between 2009 and 2014 with a new emphasis on "innovation and finance" (Bloomberg 2015) and migrants today also include people working in professional and other higher-skilled roles. Some of the growth is



Figure 10. a. Nanxin Road curves to avoid an urban village b. Looking into the urban village

fuelled by start-ups of mainly technology companies and the growth of established ones. These are the cases that are in the news today but the diversity of business, industry and commerce in Shenzhen is quite staggering and it and the productive urbanisation it engenders and the livelihoods it supports defy easy summary. But we have to see this relative success against the fact that rather than being an outcome of economic growth urbanisation today is for the most part strategised as a means to mobilise and accumulate original capital (Lin 2009: 4) by dispossession.

### Conclusion

Cities have at multiple times in history supported the lives of the steady stream of migrants who have urbanised them. People commit themselves to migration not in order to protect or project their rural identities but to be part of a process that has diversified and productively complexified both the city and the identities of the populations that have inhabited it. It is in the multiplicity of opportunities, underwritten by an associational structure and practical community that a diverse urban community and economic life emerges. This is a community founded not on kinship or ethnicity but on shared situations and situated points of view on a practical world. The process is at one and the same time socially and economically productive, productive of distinctive local social places, and socially reproductive,

constructing livelihood and community in place of dependency.

The situated, community based small-scale livelihoods we see in medieval Paris and on the Nanxin Road in Shenzhen are created in and create distinctive and productive places of exchange and interchange between neighbourhood and city. It is these processes that in the first place underwrite the attraction of urban places for rural people. These are fundamental processes of both livelihood and urbanisation that are today devalued as 'informal'. Petty capitalism and commodity production was a bedrock of the political economies of early agrarian societies (Gates 2005). They have been regularly reinvented since as a strategy of survival and prospering. Today they are the entry point of East Asian firms into global markets (Gates 2005) and we see some of this happening in Nanshan's technology boom today. But they are also the means of a wider and more everyday social production and reproduction in countless urban communities who rely on these basically urban processes.

There are dangers lurking behind this process. Haussmannisation is a strategy connected to class struggle. The gentrifying city managed for a short time to deal with its own contradictions but the urban question concerning social reproduction formulated in 1977 by Manuel Castells is replaced today by a new urban question (Merrifield 2014) which reflects a serious

crisis concerning the question of reproduction in relation to the development agenda. Part of this concerns the fact life becomes increasingly precarious in formal employment (Saunders 2016) and it is increasingly difficult for formal waged employment to be the foundation of social welfare policies. According to James Ferguson so-called informal income will be the new reality (Ferguson 2010). What we need to enhance are capacities of small-scaled productivity and non-dependent livelihood. Paris showed us that cities can do this and Shenzhen shows us cities still do it. The forces arrayed against this form of local creativity are considerable but the possibilities it offers in terms of the enhancement of ordinary lives and for the policy aims of alleviation of and managing dependency justify our continuing interest in and research on it.

## References

- AGAMBEN, G. 2004. *The open: man and animal*. Stanford Ca.: Stanford University Press.
- ARENDT, H., 1958. *The Human Condition*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 1963. *On Revolution*, New York: Viking Press.
- ARISTOTLE, E. BARKER and R. F. STALLEY. 1998. *Politics*. Online: available at <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10464116>.
- BLOOMBERG NEWS, 2015. "The Little Village That Could: Shenzhen Reinvents Itself, Set to Surpass H.K." Bloomberg.com. Online: available at <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-05-11/the-little-village-that-could-shenzhen-set-to-surpass-hong-kong>, 11 May 2015.
- CAIXIN NEWS, 2012 Online: available at [http://english.caixin.com/2012-06-19/100402262\\_all.html](http://english.caixin.com/2012-06-19/100402262_all.html)
- CASTELLS, M. 1977. *The Urban Question : A Marxist Approach*, Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press.
- CHISWICK, B. and P. W. MILLER (2009). "Citizenship in the United States: The Roles of Immigrant Characteristics and the Country of Origin." *Research in Labor Economics* 29: 91-130.
- CHUNG, H. and J. UNGER. 2013. *The Guangdong Model of Urbanisation: Collective village land and the making of a new middle class*. *China Perspectives* 3: 33-42.
- CRUMLEY, C.L. 1995. "Heterarchy and the Analysis of Complex Societies". *Archeological Papers of the American Anthropological Association* 6 (1): 1-5.
- DERRIDA, J., 1976. *Of Grammatology*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- DENG, X. 2010. *Seeding Centrality: Organic upgrading urban rural syndicate in South Beijing*. Online: available at <http://repository.tudelft.nl/search/?q=seeding+centrality&faculty=&department=&type=&year=>
- . 2015. "Interconnecting Urban Planning with Multi-Scale Urban Quality: Review of Macro Scale Urban Redevelopment Project on Micro Scale Urban Quality in Shenzhen". 29th Annual AESOP Congress, Prague.
- DE PALO, D., R. FAINI and A. VENTURINI. 2007. "The Social Assimilation of Immigrants." The World Bank: Social Protection DP 0701.
- FERGUSON, J., 2010. *The Uses of Neoliberalism*. *Antipode* 41 (Supplement): 166-184.
- GAILLARD, J. 1977. *Paris: La Ville*. Paris: H. Champion.
- GATES, H. 2005. "Petty Production: The Enduring Alternative." In: A. Smart and J. Smart, eds., *Petty Capitalists and Globalization: Flexibility, Entrepreneurship, and Economic Development*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 23-44.
- HARVEY, D. 2001. "Globalization and the 'Spatial Fix'". *Geographische Revue* 2: 23-30.
- . 2003. *Paris, capital of modernity*. New York: Routledge.
- HAZAN, E. 2010. *The invention of Paris: a history in footsteps*. London: Verso.
- JACOBS, J. 1993. *The death and life of great American cities*. New York: Modern Library.
- JOERGES, B. 1996. "Large Technical Systems and the Discourse of Complexity." In: L. Ingelstam, ed., *Complex Technical Systems*. Stockholm: Affärs Litteratur, 55-72.
- JORDAN, D.P., 2004. "Haussmann and Haussmanisation: The Legacy for Paris". *French Historical Studies* 27 (1): 87-113.
- LEFEBVRE, H., 1991. *The Production of Space*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- LEFEBVRE, H., E. KOFMAN and E. LEBAS. 1996. *Writings on cities*, Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers.

- LIN, C., 2009. *Developing China: land, politics and social conditions*. New York: Routledge.
- MA, D. 2015. "China's 20 Percent Problem: Millennial Migrants' Discontent". *Foreign Affairs* August 25, 2015.
- MA, J. 2003. "Peer Polity Interaction in the Hellenistic Age". *Past & Present* 180 (1): 9-39.
- MANNING, A., ROY S. (2010). "Culture Clash or Culture Club? National Identity in Britain," *Economic Journal, Royal Economic Society* 120 (542), F72-F100, 02.
- MAYNTZ, R. 1988. "Zur Entwicklung technischer Infrastruktursysteme." In: R. Mayntz, B. Rosewitz, U. Schimank and R. Stichweh, eds., *Differenzierung und Verselbständigung: Zur Entwicklung gesellschaftlicher Teilsysteme*. Frankfurt/New York: Campus Verlag, 233-259.
- MAYNTZ, R. and T. P. HUGHES (ed.). 1988, *The Development of Large Technical Systems*. Frankfurt: Campus Verlag & Boulder Co.: Westview Press,
- MERRIFIELD, A., 2014. *The New Urban Question*, London: Pluto Press.
- O'DONNELL, M. A. "Laying Siege to the Villages: Lessons from Shenzhen." *OpenSecurity. OpenDemocracy*, 28 Mar. 2013.
- PERELMAN, M. 2000. *The Invention of Capitalism: The Secret History of Primitive Accumulation*. Durham: Duke University Press
- READ, S. 2012. "Meaning and Material: Phenomenology, Complexity, Science and 'Adjacent Possible' Cities." In: J. Portugali, H. Meyer, E. Stolk and E. Tan, eds., *Complexity Theories of Cities Have Come of Age*. Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer, 105-128.
- READ, S., M. DE LAAT-LUKKASSEN and T. JONASUSKIS. 2013. "Revisiting 'Complexification,' Technology, and Urban Form in Lefebvre". *Space and Culture* 16 (3): 381-396.
- SAUNDERS, D. 2016. "How can the world's vanishing middle class escape an economic trap?" *The Globe and Mail*. Online: available at <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/economy/unstuck-how-can-the-worlds-vanishing-middle-class-escape-an-economic-trap/article28816064/>
- SENNETT, R. 1994. *Flesh and stone: the body and the city in western civilization*, London: Faber
- SMITH, N. 2002. "New Globalism, New Urbanism: Gentrification as Global Urban Strategy". *Antipode* 34 (3): 427-450.
- UEXKÜLL, J. von and T. von UEXKÜLL. 1992. *Jakob von Uexküll's A stroll through the worlds of animals and men*, Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- UN 2013. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs/Population Division. International Migration Report 2013
- VERTOVEC, S. 2007. „Super-diversity and its implications". *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 30 (6): 1024-1054.
- YOFFEE, N. 2004. *Myths of the Archaic State: Evolution of the Earliest Cities, States, and Civilizations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

### Note on the Author

STEPHEN READ is associate professor in the chairs of Architectural Theory and of Spatial Planning and Strategy in the Faculty of Architecture, TU Delft. His interest is in the relational structures of cities and how they support urban societies and economies. Relationality, phenomenology and the history and philosophy of technology inform his approach. His research now looks at urban development in challenging situations finding strategies to empower communities and support everyday livelihoods.

<https://tudelft.academia.edu/StephenRead>

