COVID-19 AND THE SPATIAL-ECONOMIC CONFIGURATIONS OF CITIES

A collection of essays by the students of the Urban Geography elective MSc course | 2020
Preface

MAKING URBAN GEOGRAPHY TOPICS TIMELY AND RELEVANT

The Urban Geography course is motivated by the desire to introduce an analytic and cross-disciplinary approach to urban complexity in the faculty’s education portfolio. Student of the built environment and related disciplines share an interest in cities, and their future work, either as academics or practitioners, will contribute to shape and influence urban spaces. But the major questions facing cities today are far from settled and their answers must include spatial, social, environmental, political and economic perspectives. This multiple and integrative approach to urbanisation is best captured by the broad lens of Urban Geography.

The course provides an introduction to the massive problems and promises of contemporary cities, allowing students to better frame their work into larger discussions. They gain valuable insights on the key debates happening today in urban research and learn to analyse, criticize and gather evidence about processes of urban transformation, as well as to develop a research approach to explore them, in order to become more relevant agents of change.

In recent months, no other topic has framed our attention, constrained our activity and defined our lifestyle as much as the Covid-19 global pandemic. As thousands of papers, news articles and opinion pieces written about it attest, there is hardly any area of society that the pandemic does not touch upon. And there is hardly any explanation or implication that is not geographical somehow - Covid-19 is very much about the past, present and future of (urban) spaces, and their economy, networks, social relations, and governance at every scale. Therefore, as our students have to complete short weekly assignments on topical urban issues, nothing more natural that asking them to consider the impacts of the current pandemic in our cities.

We did this through the lens of the urban economy and the spatial configurations of economic activity in contemporary cities (in so-called advanced capitalist settings). In the lecture given by Dr Arie Romein, we discussed four such configurations that have emerged at the intersection of globalisation, capitalism and technology: (1) cultural and creative industry clusters, (2) advanced business services districts, (3) urban innovation districts, and (4) the ‘city as theme park’ trend driven by the tourism and entertainment industries. All are deeply embedded in global flows of people, knowledge and capital, as much as they are dependent on qualities typical of urban space, such as density, concentration of infrastructure and amenities, and the possibility of intense and continuous face-to-face contact. These configurations are now in a process of change, as Covid-19 exerts its impacts both on the intensity and shape of flows and on the qualities and use of spaces.

The assignment was thus given to the students (see opposite page) and in a few days they were able to produce some insightful, whilst speculative, ideas about whether and how these spatial configurations of economic activity in cities will change. Creativity is in full swing here, and sometimes takes over careful evidence gathering, but that type of freedom and openness to unknown futures is precisely the purpose of the essay. By gathering the essays in this small publication, we value the work of TU Delft master students, showcase their creativity and skills as urban thinkers and celebrate the Urban Geography elective course, which ran successfully this time under the most unusual circumstances.

Thank you to all the students who joined this initiative and to all the lecturers and guests who made Urban Geography 2020 such a great experience.

Rodrigo Viseu Cardoso - July 2020
THE CURRENT COVID-19 PANDEMIC IS GIVING US A GLIMPSE OF WHAT A SOCIA LLY DISTANT ECONOMY COULD LOOK LIKE. FIRMS AND INSTITUTIONS ARE LEARNING THAT WORKING AND LEARNING FROM HOME IS A VIABLE SOLUTION, ONLINE SHOPPING IS ON THE RISE, ENTERTAINMENT HAS ACCELERATED THE MOVE TO HOME-BASED DIGITAL ENVIRONMENTS, MEETINGS HAPPEN VIRTUALLY ACROSS THE WORLD. EVEN IF WE RETURN TO BUSINESS AS USUAL, WE NEED TO CONSIDER THE IMPLICATIONS OF THIS REGIME TO THE SPACE OF THE CITY IF IT WERE TO BECOME THE NEW NORMAL.

CHOOSE ONE OF THE FOUR SPATIAL CONFIGURATIONS WE DISCUSSED IN CLASS AND USE WHAT YOU LEARNED FROM THE DISCUSSION TO REFLECT ON WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN TO THOSE SPACES IN SUCH A SCENARIO: WILL THEY ENDURE, WILL THEY DISAPPEAR, WILL THEY TRANSFORM THEMSELVES? AND HOW WILL ECONOMIC ACTORS USE THEM?
CULTURAL AND CREATIVE CLUSTERS

Anne van den Berg

AFTER COVID-19, CULTURAL AND CREATIVE CLUSTERS NEED TO NURTURE CREATIVE MINDS, SPACES AND DESIGN CHANGES.

In this reflection, the spatial consequences of the socially distant economy will be discussed, especially the consequences for the cultural and creative industry, which is a leading economic sector in many countries. How will this industry spatially change over time in cities, if we continue living in a 1.5 meter distance economy?

FOUR INDUSTRIES
In a socially distant economy, our homes will be more and more important. People work at home, do sports at home and spend their free time at home. Many urban-based industries are (temporarily) adjusting to the new conditions. Advanced business services can easily function with decentralized and remote working spots, while the tourism and entertainment industries shaping ‘theme park cities’ find their way mostly by social media and virtual reality experiences. More difficult is the adjustment of urban innovation districts and cultural and creative clusters in order to fit into this economy. These industries are functioning partly because of their location. To preserve them, the spatial environment should be improved to fit the new rules and habits, whereby the location itself can remain and people can fully function and interact.

CULTURAL AND CREATIVE INDUSTRY
Since 1990, the role of cultural and creative activities increased within the urban economy. Cultural and creative industries can be described as “those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent which have a potential for job and wealth creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property” (Creative Culture & Education, 2001). Jobs in art, media and design are part of this industry and influence social, political and trading functions (Hutton, 2005).

GLOBAL TO LOCAL
One of the characteristics of the cultural and creative industry is global markets and cooperation networks. Because of the lack of travelling and other safety circumstances, this global attitude might change towards more local markets and networks. Products and events will be more individualized and personal, tailor-made to smaller groups. Only by using social media platforms can the global market be reached. Creative areas like libraries, podcasts, gaming and design are very suitable for this. Other sectors like architecture, museums and film depend more on their surrounding built environment to perform.

THE CREATIVE MIND/the process
Next to that, culture and creativity are important economic assets for countries. For individuals, creativity plays an important role in handling imposing situations. It helps the mind to go through or to let go emotions and events. Because of the changes in work habits, and education models caused by the current pandemic, more spare time may become available, and the greater the need for distraction, the more creativity arises (Figure 1). Therefore – and as people return to the street once lockdown measures are softened - the demand for creative and cultural locations will increase and directly influence the spatial planning of cities.

NEEDED SPACE/consequences
Cultural and creative clusters tend to settle in industrial heritage sites and similarly iconic areas. This type of location plays a key role in the development and identity of these clusters (Hutton, 2005). Cultural events, such as museums and festivals are, as mentioned before, also dependent on their location, and the ‘new normality’ of a socially distant economy may mean a partial loss of these industries. To preserve them, we need to change the design of urban spaces in order to fit the socially distant economy (Figure 3).

CHANGE OF DESIGN
Museums, for example, can change their routes to guarantee 1.5 meter distances and a limit of visitors. Small cultural and creative work areas can also be organized differently. More space between flexible working spots, separated ateliers and studios are some ideas that need little adjustment to preserve the industry (Figure 2). Working at home could also be a solution, meaning that working areas in homes will be a more important part of their design. The landscape itself can also be seen as a cultural and creative place and will become more important in this new economy. People will have greater need to retreat outside, and the spatial planning and design of natural places plays a key role. If there is an excess of abandoned office areas, there may be an opportunity to redevelop them into green areas.
AESTHETICS

Besides functional design, also the aesthetics are important for the cultural and creative industry. Spending all the time in the same house or area is not inspiring, and inspiration is the ‘food’ for creativity. People need to regularly switch locations. But improving the aesthetical quality of a place can minimize the need to move to another location. The spatial image of the city, especially the areas where cultural and creative activities take place, is therefore important and cannot be limited to a home.

CONCLUSION

Most industries can be adjusted to the ‘new normal’. However, this is hard for the cultural and creative industry. This is because of its location-based identity in specific urban areas, and reliance on human interaction vis-a-vis the growing need for people to stay at home or in the same place for a long time. By encouraging home ateliers, socially distant studio spots, and rules and regulations for cultural activities, both for producers (creative artists) and consumers (visitors) the cultural and creative industry can remain in its current locations, albeit under a renewed functional and aesthetical organization.


The coronavirus changes the world temporarily. Almost all physical global contact is standing still and plans to go abroad are either postponed or cancelled. It is unknown how long this non-normal situation will last, and, when the virus makes no victims anymore, whether the world will change to the previous ‘normal’ as, say, a year ago. But was that world that normal? Why do we see that as normal? The world a year ago was totally different from the world twenty years ago. In the past decades many things have changed in relation to globalisation and people movement and connectivity; millions of tourists over-flow the world’s major attractions, many students study abroad and academics meet at conferences everywhere, and the cultural world is more and more interwoven. Twenty years ago, there were no smartphones and global connections were not as prevalent as today. So, maybe rather than talking about returning to ‘normality’ after corona, we should think about what we regard as normal.

I’d like to focus on the CCI (Cultural and Creative Industries) clusters in large global cities, for example Soho (London), Prenzlauer Berg or Kreuzberg (Berlin), Amsterdam Noord (NDSM, NL) and so on. These cities exert a high attraction over people, events and investments and their creative clusters are thriving. But what happened in recent years? Many of these clusters started to look more and more the same, although these areas ought to be the most creative ones and, I’d say, creativity is related to originality and uniqueness. A funny example is this quiz in a Dutch newspaper where you have to guess where a cafe is located (https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2016/11/24/wereldwijd-zien-alle-hipstercafes-er-hetzelfde-uit-dit-is-waarom-a1533414). I got almost all wrong, because hip cafes in Bangkok, Berlin and Moscow look almost the same. It’s just a gamble to find out where you are in this way.

Of course, creative industries are not limited to following trendsetters, but in the globally connected CCI world conformity with global trends happens easily, especially in fashion, urban or interior design. I believe this conformity will decrease in future, because during this corona crisis we all need to focus more on our local surroundings. Our plans to visit a trendy neigbourhood in, say, Barcelona are unsure and we start to pay attention to the social and economic value of local creativity. In a post-corona setting, CCIs are likely to use their high creative potential to improve their available connections on the local and regional scale. And, as a result, ‘average Joes’ will also value the CCIs more. The creative qualities of people who are currently not connected to the creative industries, will add an additional creative value to these industries, probably not by being fulltime engaged, but by increased visiting, connecting and working together.

This, I predict, will happen in combination with increased consciousness and changing lifestyle because of climate change. Urban farming, local customs and social integration will have a more central role. Global CCI interaction will remain, but this will be mainly via digitally sharing inspirational contents and the further development of VR for exchange of ideas. Of course, there will still be some physical interaction between CCIs globally, but this shall not be en masse as was ‘normal’ a few months ago.

The spatial effects that may become visible in the next decades are fading boundaries between the CCIs and other neighbourhoods and rapidly increasing green, mainly sustainable agricultural, areas in CCIs. This may be economically not very efficient, but if there is one group that is typically not focused on making (a lot of) money, it is the cultural sector (Banks, 2017). Besides, in economic harsh times, like those we are starting to experience now as a consequence of the coronavirus crisis, the cultural industries are very vulnerable to austerity policies, both directly (less subsidies) and indirectly (people spend less).

Local sometimes has an old-fashioned connotation, but this will change. The local will be the new normal, still creative and culturally interesting, but with another focus. The CCI clusters will remain, but with looser boundaries, they will rediscover the local potential and inspiration and will be more interwoven with average Joes. This will happen globally and result in more unique CCIs, leading therefore to the ‘globalised local normal’.
Which one is Bangkok, which Berlin, which Moscow? And which one is located in the most creative cluster? (NRC Handelsblad, 2016)


THE CITY AS A THEME PARK

Boris Baars

WILL WE REDISCOVER THE LOST SOUL OF CITIES ONCE MASS TOURISM HAS BEEN TEMPORARILY INTERRUPTED?

As I write this essay at the (first) peak of the Covid-19 pandemic, it is unlikely that the current situation of distancing and isolation would at any point become the norm, especially if we look at the little willingness of citizens to endure this type of isolation for a long time and how many people are struggling in a massive way to deal with this situation, both economically and emotionally. As a response, policymakers are doing their best to accelerate anti-lockdown measures.

However, if this were to become the new normal, the spatial configuration among the four discussed in the urban geography course that would have the most trouble to adapt - and exist at all - would be the so-called ‘city as theme park’. This type of configuration, based on the commodification of large parts of the city to service the tourism and entertainment industries, almost by definition requires huge influxes of people, money, and expertise from the rest of the world converging into a very small physical area. Many cities have in the past tried to become these places, notably Amsterdam and Venice, but we have seen, especially in the past decade, that residents become more and more frustrated with this type of intensive use of urban space. Frustration is usually associated with the idea of a certain ‘lost soul’ of the city when a huge influx of tourists come into the city. The perception is that not only certain spaces and places are being commodified but the whole city and its residents – through changes in economic activities, urban amenities, policy priorities - are also part of that commodification.

These spatial configurations cannot exist without a globalized and constant influx of tourists and visitors, which has now all but stopped. There are of course still ways that these spaces could still, at least partly, endure. During the current pandemic many museums, theatres and other event spaces have found interesting ways to continuing to serve the public in online settings, but it is difficult to see how people could experience the whole city – its heritage, culture, food, experiences and attractions - in this way.

However, this may not be such a bad thing. We see that in many cities that have huge tourist temporary populations, local governments and residents are becoming increasingly frustrated with the downsides of mass tourism and many cities are already putting policies in place to try and reduce the number of incoming visitors, or at least regulate their use of amenities, accommodation, transport and public space. Once the world opens up again, and if it returns to business as usual, with removed travel restrictions between countries, it will have to be seen if these policies will be effective and if the preferences of the public have meanwhile changed.
The year is 2023. Three years into the Covid-19 pandemic. Three years of alternating emergency measures and minor outbreaks popping up around the world. When the pandemic started in 2020 the cultural industry was the first sector that got hit very hard in this unprecedented health and economic crisis. The cultural sector is especially relying on face-to-face and skin-to-skin contact. The sector’s initial reaction to the crisis was quite innovative, sometimes even enthusiastic as to how much the digital world could enable new cultures: virtual concerts, Instagram dance parties and virtual reality museum exhibitions (Feinstein, 2020).

However, shifting between emergency measures and changing contact rules, half-filled concert halls, endless queues at the front doors of museums, no lucrative congresses and business meetings, much of the sector did not survive. The online organized concerts and gatherings dwindled in popularity and eventually the urge to come together and express oneself was stronger and the first illegal cultural gatherings started taking place. Illegal pop culture, reminiscent of earlier punk movements with their characteristic illegal travelling raves. The global music industry, in most recent decades earning their money mostly with concerts, split in two, either continuing filling online spaces with music or following other movements in illegality and contributing to the new global phenomenon of the illegal off-the-grid concert industry.

Creative minds working in the tech sector initially thrived well in the global pandemic crisis. Originally already used to working in online environments, they were the ones to quickly adapt to the new normal. However, as Edward Glaeser states in his book ‘Triumph of the City’ (2012), cities depend on the concentration of talent, physical contact and subsequent innovation for their global economic success.

“Our social species greatest talent is the ability to learn from each other, and we learn more deeply and thoroughly when we’re face to face. The ideas that emerge in cities eventually spread beyond their borders and enrich the rest of the world. Massachusetts rise or falls with Boston just as Maharashtra rises or falls with Mumbai.” (Glaeser, 2012, p. 218)

This strong connection was almost entirely severed in the last three years of our existence. Eventually in our developed urban economies innovation started to decline globally because of the inability to have free and unlimited face to face contact. Initially a lot of the lost momentum could be picked up with online meetings and online referencing. The importance of trust, however, was overlooked altogether in this new situation. Old ideas, collaborations and corporate networks, still having some traction painstakingly built up before the crisis, were eventually depleted and exhausted. New ideas need fertile ground to build on, and the virtual now seems less fertile than physical ground, as common trust and collaborative environments between unfamiliar groups and people are very difficult to build in a virtual world.

Accidents don’t happen anymore in the sterile and controlled environments that our cities have become.

A study concluded in 2016 by Nylund and Cohen, called Collision density: driving growth in urban entrepreneurial ecosystems, found a direct correlation between the amount of unexpected meetings and successful innovation in highly urbanized contexts. As a result of the emergency measurements, much of the current innovation and entrepreneurial experimentation moved from highly urbanized and unorganised environments into innovation enclaves, almost completely corporate controlled, where physical access, health testing, food and water basics, and everything companies and individuals need is being centrally controlled and distributed.

Completely on the other side of things, the free-minded artist and the old-fashioned geek moved to rural off-the-grid settings, or newly born urban anarchistic waste-lands, out of sight from powerful urban and national authorities and their restrictive emergency measures. In often primitive circumstances they’re searching for new ways to live their life outside of the restrictive environments created by fear-driven democratic governments, often coming up with surprising cultural and social innovations.


Due to the current coronacrisis, different governments around the world have implemented a partial or total lockdown, and as a result online shopping is on the rise and home-based digital environments have became the work and leisure norm for a big part of world population. There is the possibility that in the coming years people around the world will have to acknowledge a new normality where social distancing becomes standard. The new normal will have huge consequences on cities transformed into ‘theme parks‘ in which parts of urban space are commodified to serve the tourism and entertainment industries. I think that specifically urban tourism will change if the pandemic remains for a very long time and therefore the spatial configuration of these cities will change as well.

First of all, in the last decades mass tourism has had a big effect on cities around the world, such as Amsterdam and Barcelona (Burgen, 2020; de Vries, 2020). As seen by many of their residents, these two cities have lost their character and traditional populations as a consequence of mass tourism (Burgen, 2020; de Vries, 2020). The tourism industry claimed a large part of the urban space and changed its social fabric, as well as shops and restaurants. However, due to the coronavirus and the economic crisis which will probably follow, together with new social interaction rules and evolving travel restrictions, mass tourism as we know it today might not be possible anymore. Airlines will have to raise their prices by 50% if the social distancing rules remain, due to the fact that fewer people will be able to fly on one plane (Durbin, 2020). Because people around the world are losing jobs and the prices of flights will be higher, it might be that mass tourism will disappear and replaced - as in the past - by a more elite tourism for people that can afford to travel. This might allow more space for the inhabitants of cities like Barcelona and Amsterdam to retake possession of the parts of their cities which had been taken over by mass tourism. It might be that the local cultures and identities will flourish again (Durbin, 2020).

Another reason might why tourism might change if social distancing remains, is that right now borders are closed and it might be that governments around the world will keep it like this, or have to close again regularly as more pandemic waves arrive. The consequences of this might be that travellers will travel more within their nations (Welle, 2020). Although this might be a good thing for the reappropriation of cities by the locals and the alignment of urban amenities with local needs, this would be in my opinion a negative aspect of the transformation of tourism as people might become more closed towards other societies and nations – a dimension of cosmopolitanism typical of large cities with be at risk.

In any case, the tourism industry is likely to see the current crisis as an opportunity for a change from quantity to quality – provided they can still ensure a profitable business. This might lead to changes in the spatial configuration of cities and their amenities, such as cultural and heritage sites, entertainment districts, etc. with locals taking precedence and tourists as guests (Welle, 2020), rather than the current commodification to serve tourists first.

To conclude, the potential consequences of the coronavirus crisis on cities conceived as theme parks for visitors are multiple, from the disappearance of mass tourism and therefore a reappropriation of urban space by the locals and a rediscovery of the local culture in cities so far experiencing excessive tourism. But it might also mean that travel and leisure, especially international, will be again more for the societal elite and within their own countries for everyone else, which might result in a decrease of interest in, knowledge of, and openness to different societies and cultures around the world.


Jackson Kariuki Gathanga

ARE URBAN INNOVATION DISTRICTS IN THE POSITION TO CREATE THE POST-COVID TECHNOLOGIES THAT ACCELERATE THEIR OWN DEMISE?

Because of their ability to attract a diverse group of young, highly skilled individuals and a large influx of capital, urban innovation districts have gained popularity over the last decade as productive city geographies. Innovation centres and research parks are no longer working spaces located in remote and isolated landscapes away from core cities, but are situated well within mixed-use lively urban neighbourhoods. Here, professionals can easily interact with each other and with the rest of society for whom they produce innovations. These environments are also able to create an attractive brand of the new ‘technological culture’ born from large tech firms, SME’s, new startups, scale-ups and innovative local businesses. This attracts huge capital flows and subsequently raises the economic potential of the neighbourhoods where they are located. “Innovation districts help their city and metropolis move up the value chain of global competitiveness by growing the firms, networks, and traded sectors that drive broad-based prosperity.” (Katz & Wagner, 2014).

In the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic we will see an increase in technological start-ups trying to solve challenges brought about by the newly-found freedom of workers who choose to work remotely. The increase in online shopping and working coupled with the greater need for online entertainment might require a repurposing of private space as we currently know it. There will be great demand from technological companies to apply technology to other traditionally structured industries such as healthcare, entertainment and media. Public spaces, however, will suffer the biggest brunt with increased surveillance and monitoring of individual actions and movements, raising serious questions about the balance between privacy rights and the management of public health.

The recent move of innovation districts to mixed-use inner-city neighbourhoods provides efficient spaces that blend the traditional work environment with the more relaxed, new ‘home-work’ environment that is developing in this Covid-19 scenario. In that sense, the effect of the current conditions on the development and popularity of urban innovation districts might just be the boost that the Industrial Revolution 4.0 required.

Therefore, urban innovation districts have a potential for growth in a post-Covid-19 scenario. However, they will have to embrace a homely mixed-use environment if they are to cater for a large demography of users, other than the young, tech-savvy graduates that they are perceived to attract. Their environments must accommodate the changing stages of their users personal values as they progress through various stages of life, especially considering the needs of this new working environment. Traditionally built on the backbone of physical and economic assets, there is a need to invest more on networking assets through principles such as placemaking. This will ensure that the districts continue to attract diverse groups of people especially after the Covid-19 pandemic and also retain them through improved standards of living. “The trend is to nurture living, breathing communities rather than sterile compounds of research silos.”(Katz and Wagner, 2014)

Urban innovation districts have been incubators of smart city design concepts and experiments that are being implemented in countries across the world. Through collaboration with large tech organizations situated in these urban sites, authorities are quick to use innovations and data collected from these companies to develop surveillance states that monitor their urban citizens. These emerging grey areas around how large tech firms and authorities collect and use people’s data creates grounds for social discomfort and resistance. We now witness the quick embrace of surveillance measures by governments around the world on its citizenry during this Covid-19 pandemic period. Countries like China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea & Israel have announced a wide range of measures they are using to monitor their citizens.

The unregulated use of mass surveillance could easily slow down the gains made by urban innovation districts if there is no proper communication and engagement with the inhabitants of urban neighbourhoods where these measures are practised, and if the technologies developed and applied in urban innovation districts reduce their attractiveness and liveability. This could easily lead to resistance and social retaliation from the citizens who are critical about privacy rights. If this is the direction taken by many technological companies, the main products developed in urban innovation districts could easily be the pitfall that accelerates their slow demise!

THE CITY AS A THEME PARK

Jin Rui Yap

THE ENTERTAINMENT CITY WILL ENDURE THE PANDEMIC BUT THE OPPORTUNITY TO TRANSFORM IT RELIES ON POLITICAL WILL

As the month of April draws to a close, it has become abundantly clear that the catastrophe of the Covid-19 pandemic will resonate for a long time and in virtually all facets of governance and daily life. The pandemic has seen cities abruptly shut down as social distancing measures are called for, while many people fully undertake work and learning from home. As the potential of a socially distant economy increasingly weaves itself into our collective futures, one wonders precisely how our cities will be adapted to the times. Here, I reflect on the impacts of such a transition on the City as a Theme Park ("Entertainment City") spatial configuration of economic activity.

The typology of the Entertainment City can be recognized by the commodification of urban space and urban life to cater to the tastes of short-term visitors and tourists, driven by the tourism and entertainment industry, as well as specific segments of the resident population. Focusing on the latter, these segments consist of people who are mostly young, usually foreign to the city itself, and often highly-skilled and highly-paid. Their lifestyles and preferences are also typically different from their local counterparts, the long-time residents of the city in question, and these differences potentially exacerbate issues related to socio-spatial segregation and inequalities.

To attract and grow such a population, urban spaces are transformed via the provision of amenities, driven by the thrill of consumption of products, entertainment and experiences. The urban life centered around this type of consumption has ground abruptly to a halt alongside the pandemic management measures. After all, these cities do not provide experiences and entertainment designed to be consumed at home. The question is whether the configuration of an Entertainment City will be permanently altered, even after the pandemic has reached manageable levels.

My view is that the configuration of the Entertainment City will, for the most part, endure into a post-pandemic future. This is because the success of Entertainment Cities is based on economic, political and cultural status quos that will likely survive the pandemic. Certainly, the degree of endurance will depend on many factors, one of which is the kind of workforce in the city itself. While many high-skilled workers will be able to effectively work from home, a flourishing service-based industry promises that there will remain a sizable employee population who will, by design, be unable to perform their jobs from home. Additionally, given that this service-based industry comprises a substantial portion of the urban economy, there will be political impetus to avoid the decimation of consumer demand that gives life to the service sector, once it is safe to do so.

Beyond the economic sources of inertia, it is more likely that people would alter the way they consume such services, rather than forgo the consumption entirely. Take the example of dining out at restaurants. Perhaps the space used by eateries will increase instead, as dining tables are set farther apart from one another to avoid overcrowding. Perhaps these eateries will spill out onto streets and outdoor spaces, thereby increasing distancing between groups of patrons while avoiding customers basking in stale air-conditioned air indoors. This space may even come from repurposed urban functions as a result of the pandemic. For example, reductions in daily commuting traffic (from those who are able to work from home) may lower demand for motorized travel, perhaps opening up space for roadway conversion into well-spaced eating spots, pedestrian walkways and green space.

Ultimately, the processes that give form to Entertainment Cities sound remarkably like gentrification, and makes me wonder if the Entertainment City is simply an evolved, decades-long version of cultural and creative industries (CCI) clusters (e.g., Williamsburg in New York City, Newtown in Sydney), gradually more focused on consumption than production. Regardless of the past, what is clear is that the type of political will about what an Entertainment City should be will shape the city's post-pandemic recovery. Perhaps the deciding factor of whether the Entertainment City endures will rely less on public health circumstances and more on the political impetus of mayors, planners, and designers to either reduce or perpetuate socio-spatial segregation and to realize the shared priorities of both privileged migrant and expats and local communities.
Changes in public space arrangements. Source: author
Joep Bastiaans

THE TOURISM INDUSTRY IS NOT AS POPULAR AS IT USED TO BE. WILL URBAN DWELLERS USE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO TAKE CONTROL?

How will the spatial-economic configurations of future cities look? This essay will reflect upon the city as an urban theme park, focusing on the future of historic metropolises that attract a large number of tourists and that house a diversified experience economy. Will these cities endure, disappear or transform?

Let’s travel back in time for two months, to the city centre of Amsterdam. The centre is crowded, people taking pictures of the monumental buildings and visiting the attractive canals that are listed as UNESCO world heritage. With more than nine million yearly tourists and an increasing number of 13.8 million international overnight stays, the city is ranked ninth as a destination in Europe. Since the 2008 crisis, Amsterdam focused on attracting more tourists to give the economy an impulse. Increasing globalisation and technology has opened up the tourism market in many countries, such as Russia and China, and also attract high skilled migrants to Amsterdam. In the neoliberal market, new entertainment concepts target the experience economy for tourists. Tourism is still an growing economic sector with an expenditure of almost 90 billion euros and almost 800,000 jobs in The Netherlands in 2018 (RTLZ, 2019).

Milikowski (2018) describes the downsides of globalism and mass-tourism for the city regarding livability, amenities and housing prices. Many inhabitants move away from the overcrowded city centre, where drunk or stoned party animals keep streets awake the entire week. Not only inhabitants left, but also many local shops were forced to close since they weren’t able to pay the increasing rents. Shops change to those that can pay the high rents by selling products for tourists: waffles, souvenirs, tickets and fast-food. Shopping streets, cafes and restaurants become more monotonous and are not serving the locals anymore. The city follows the flow of the money and regulation comes much later. Also the housing market is affected by increasing global competition. Developers built for the highest bidder, that can be an expat from London or an investor from Saudi Arabia. Therefore, housing is increasingly focused on a high-end market as Amsterdam is competing in the global market (Milikowski, 2018). The storyline above is an example from Amsterdam, a city that is still known for strict regulations and is therefore magnified in cities like Barcelona, Rome, Paris and so forth.

Currently, the inhabitants see what their inner city can look like without mass tourism: beautiful, quiet streets without nuisance. Municipalities question if the BC situation (before Corona) was preferable. Amsterdammers already joke that they would rather remain as they are now! Every joke has a sense of truth and this one shows the sacrifices that were caused by the increasing tourism in terms of nuisance, prices and an unlivable city centre. On the other hand, it becomes clear how interwoven the city is with mass tourism. The Municipality of Amsterdam expects a decrease in tax revenues of 125 million euro due to the declining tourism tax (Parool, 2020). Tourism decline also has effects on the economy, employment and social aspects. This shows us how interwoven tourism has become with the spatial, economic and social urban structures.

The crisis allows for some breathing space. Or, as Churchill said, “never waste a good crisis!”. To implement a change, three components are needed: 1) space 2) public support and 3) momentum. People feel like it is time for ‘a new normal’ after COVID-19, and this resembles the momentum needed for a change (Gebiedsentwikkeling.nu, 2020). In politics this is known as ‘window of opportunity’: “major disasters have the potential to change dominant ways of thinking and acting, [...] and a change encompasses formal and informal responses to disaster events and their direct and indirect impacts” (Birkmann et al., 2010, 1).

How can this disaster change the course of action? Tourism remains a very liberal market where demand is determined by the consumer and supply is determined by the market. Mass tourism started to peak after the SARS-virus, the main reason why no actions have been taken earlier. However, when the nuisance overshadows the economic impulse, actions are taken in cities like Venice, despite the effect on market profits. When using the framework of Van Bortel (2020) (Figure 2), it becomes clearer how formal and informal interventions might change the city as tourist attraction. Formal interventions can be policies, changed organisational structures or even restrictions. This might be possible in countries with
a strong and interventive government like The Netherlands or France. On the other hand, informal interventions could be a response when a less interventive government is in place. In more liberal countries, like the United Kingdom, such informal actions could take place. For example, individuals might protest, and the civil society might start initiatives to block mass tourism.

Due to its economic relevance, I predict that mass tourism will not disappear after corona. Globally, more people are becoming wealthier and travelling is one of the luxuries that go with this: the consumer has an influence on what is offered by the market. But in places where mass tourism has had enormous effects on urban livability, this crisis could provide the momentum for citizens and politicians to take action. If there is a majority of public support, it is likely that changes will be made. To make this more concrete and locally embedded: Amsterdam doesn’t want the nuisance of tourists anymore, and now focuses on giving back the city to the inhabitants (Parool, 2020). Here, the majority agrees that the disadvantages overshadow the economic benefits. But a city like Rotterdam, where liveability is not yet damaged, might take a part of Amsterdam’s pie. In cities with higher unemployment rates, weaker economic numbers and less resident involvement in local politics, I assume not much will change. In metropolises like Rome, Lisbon or Athens, the public and political opinion is arguably not strong enough to use this moment for a transformation of their theme park cities.


Will Urban Innovation Districts Still Be Able to Lead the Transition from Traditional to Digital Infrastructure?

Jurriëne Heijnen

The current Covid-19 pandemic forces many people to work from home and digitization makes this new normal a viable solution. On the one hand, these regulations can be seen as a catalyst in the time-space compression. A lot of people can do their job and connect to the global economy from anywhere, and are not bound to proximity, which is economically more efficient for individuals and firms. On the other hand, this high level of global connection is exactly what makes us vulnerable to crisis such as the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, the long-term implications of the socially distant ‘new normal’ need to be considered, specifically for the case of the spatial configurations of contemporary cities.

The Urban Innovation District

Urban Innovation Districts are geographic urban areas where leading-edge anchor companies and institutions cluster and connect with start-ups and business incubators and accelerators (Katz & Wagner, 2014). In these areas, research and educational institutions are the economic drivers. Characteristically, they operate on the global market, attract highly skilled expats and thus depend on global connections and a so-called global ‘buzz’. This buzz can be described as the (physical) interaction of different actors which spark innovation, for example between user and producer or between local and global actors (Lundvall, 2016). The intertwining of the local state government, corporate and research institute actors is typical for the UIDs and strengthens their economic position. Deregulation of information flows and dissemination of knowledge as a result of this adds to the buzz, interaction and exchange that causes innovation and drives the economy.

The New Normal

The TU Delft campus and the RDM campus in Rotterdam are examples of Urban Innovation Districts. Research and education institutes strongly interact with corporate and government actors. This interaction, which is often physical and happens is designated areas of the city, is very important as it brings forth new technologies and companies. When considering the potential consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, the regulations of a socially distant ‘new normal’ are a barrier to this deregulated innovation environment. Random interactions between (international) researchers, policymakers, corporations and students are less likely to happen in this scenario. Governments might have different approaches to the new normal and the social distancing culture, such as different travel restrictions, which can be problematic as the UIDs thrive on the presence of high skilled expats. Nevertheless, the UIDs can be key factors and exemplary sites in developing the new normal ways of working. Reconsidering and redefining globalization, combined with the power of the triple helix (academia, industry and government interactions), UIDs make for potentially vigorous areas in terms of cultural and social innovation. They are the breeding ground for experimenting and developing new technologies that can facilitate socially distant economies.

Conclusion

Within a socially distant society scenario, UIDs such as the TU Delft campus or the RDM campus have the opportunity to transform their configurations and be drivers for larger change. As UIDs have a deregulated character (namely under neo-liberalism models), the new regulations that come with the new normal can be problematic. The synergy between local and global can be weakened because of this change in regime, as these areas depend on the global buzz and global pipelines that are weakened by socially distancing and travel restrictions. As UIDs are important nodes in global networks and thus operate within the network of many (global) actors, intensive interaction, even if socially distant, is needed in these areas in order to preserve their economic value an innovation capacity. Proximity matters, but it is limited in a socially distant economy. This might mean re-shifting the pressure from traditional infrastructure to move and host people and goods towards the information and knowledge (digitized) infrastructure – a transition for which the UIDs themselves are key producers of innovative technologies. If well-developed digitalization can offer alternatives for the physical interaction which is needed to create the so called ‘buzz’ upon which the UID depend, and if UIDs stay at the forefront of these innovations, they can remain as economic drivers in the future.


Figure 1: The interactive RDM campus in Rotterdam
Karlou Westerbeek

CULTURAL AND CREATIVE CLUSTERS WILL PERMEATE THROUGH URBAN AREAS FORMING BUBBLES OF OVERLAPPING ACTIVITIES AND SPACES

A SWITCH FROM MASS PRODUCTION TO CUSTOMIZED PRODUCTION

In the industrial era, large factory plots with adjacent housing estates facilitated the economy of cities. These state-driven developments boosted national economies. The transition from an industrial to a financially-driven economy went along with a new ideology: neo-liberalism. Developments became more market-driven, leading to local and individual transformations. The emergence of the Internet has facilitated the growth of a new economic sector, the digital economy. Information, communication and creative businesses are related to this new economy.

The new digital era consists mainly of a demand-driven production, which means that consumers decide what needs to be produced and in what amount, instead of consuming mass products. The use value is becoming less important and the symbolic value is gaining more attention: you are what you use. As the western society is getting wealthier (Institute for Policy Studies, 2019), the demand for specialized, innovative products increases. The economy and a part of culture are becoming more global and interdependent because of the digital world. But a countermovement is visible, as cities and countries try to promote their local cultures within the global network. Local production traditions are combined with global contemporary appeal towards innovative products.

CCI CLUSTERS

The European Commission (2011) states the following, concerning the new economy sector: “Creative and cultural industries are those concerned with the creation and provision of marketable outputs (goods, services and activities) that depend on creative and cultural inputs for their value.” The creative and cultural development companies related to this new production system tend to settle together in urban areas, often in the vicinity of industrial heritage. These locations provide spatial and functional flexibility, as well as inspiration, for the development of creative and cultural industry (CCI) clusters. Businesses enjoy cross-over effects and knowledge exchanges in proximity to each other. They can also share resources in order to minimize costs (Kind & Meier zu Köcker, 2012).

Competitiveness between cities is no longer in the hands of large companies, but also depends on the amount of creative and cultural activity (Kind & Meier zu Köcker, 2012) and attracting creative human capital to the city (Hospers & van Dalm, 2005). Therefore, city governments are promoting certain urban areas to attract creative entrepreneurs, who act often as pioneers to regenerate abandoned urban areas that need a lively boost.

HOW WILL THESE PLACES TRANSFORM?

Because of digitalization and urbanisation, current live-work environments are changing fast. Employees no longer move to businesses, but businesses move to people. They move towards their target groups. Next to that, more people work from home, since they only need their laptop, Wi-Fi and power supply. Also, an increasing amount of people work independently and are not bound to a certain company, location or standard working hours. A central location for creative businesses seems not necessary anymore, because of digitalization and work from home. But it is still necessary for knowledge exchange, cross-over effects and social interaction (Kind & Meier zu Köcker, 2012). In my perspective, social interaction is crucial for creative thinking. As a student in the current Covid-19 situation, I notice that studying from home is comfortable, but not desirable. I miss being in touch with my fellow students, seeing what they are working on and inspiring each other. I expect that in the future more work will be done from home facilitated by the digital sphere, but we still need to meet and interact to generate ideas and create better solutions. Cross-overs between different sectors can lead to more complete and innovative ideas and products. For example, sustainability is a common goal that is strived for in each sector in the future production system. But the sustainability of the whole system is interdependent rather than sectoral, from products produced locally to distribution on a global scale (Scott, 2000).

SPATIAL CONFIGURATION OF CLUSTERS

In figure 2, four configurations of cultural and creative clusters are presented. In my opinion, the ‘cloud pattern’ should be preferred. The different bubbles represent residential, retail and business functions, but also different companies and sectors. They overlap with each other and this is where cross-overs can happen. The cluster should be an integrated and flexible whole. Currently, most of the clusters are housed in former industrial
areas in inner cities. In my perspective, an interesting challenge could be to look into the opportunities that outdated suburban business parks and vacant office buildings could pose.

HOW WILL THEY BE USED?
The CCI clusters in historical parts of cities may become part of ‘the city as a theme park’ concept, promoting local history while showcasing innovations. These areas may become part of city branding efforts in international competition. In the future, they will not solely focus on production, but also on consumption. Production sites can be complemented with retail, food venues and housing, making them vibrant urban districts. Live-work relations will be flexible, with the possibility of working from home and only moving to the central gathering location to interact or meet with other creative businesses. More actors will be involved, such as companies, research institutions, financial actors, policymakers, user groups, media and residents (Kind & Meier zu Köcker, 2012).

CONCLUSION
The existing CCI clusters will keep on expanding and new clusters will arise. Business parks and vacant office buildings will be new potential locations. These areas will be places of production, but also of consumption, as city branding will lead visitors to these destinations. They will become mixed use areas, with new live-work concepts, compatible with post-Covid-19 safety needs but also with creative and cultural innovation.

EU OMC. (2012). How can cultural and creative industries contribute to economic transformation through smart specialisation? Brussels: European Union-SSP


In this special situation caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, daily life has changed a lot, shifting from reality to the virtual world in almost every aspect of working and living. Even if the situation gets back to normal, daily life in cities will be more dependent on the internet, and the possible outcomes of this transition are somehow already posed and glimpsed in these days. This change will cause transformations of the spatial configurations of cities, which will gradually unravel in the future.

As regard to those areas of cities often conceived as ‘theme parks’ for visitors, such as Amsterdam, which not only receives millions of tourists from around the world, but also provides good standards of living for local residents, transformations will happen. What follows are two wild guesses about the changes.

On one hand, the so-called ‘new normal’ can make the city as theme park much more focused on pure entertainment than before. If people in the city spend much more time in the virtual world for their daily work and life, this could enhance the demand for both greater quantity and quality of real-life, face-to-face leisure in their already limited time. With the explosive availability of information about travelling to cities with high-level entertainment, people who can afford it will spend more time travelling to those cities around the world, once the restrictions are softened. Therefore, cities with good urban or geographical resources to develop tourism will thrive to another level.

On the other hand, this new normal can help the leisure and entertainment spaces and amenities at more local scales develop to a higher level. With more and more time spent on the internet for daily life and work, less time will be spent on commuting, shopping and going out for everything that so far had to be done in the physical world within the city. In this new situation, as mentioned before, people would have higher expectations and requirements for their limited leisure and entertainment time outdoors, and appreciate it more, and this includes those daily amenities not far from home. To meet this demand, spaces for leisure and entertainment of local scale would have an incentive to become highly developed both in quantity and quality.

Based on these two possible changes, a synergy might happen that contributes to a transformation of some urban spatial configurations, strengthening the functions, spatial quality and services of the ‘theme park city’ locations both at the urban scale and the local or neighbourhood scales. However, there is a possibility that the facilities serving the city scale, such as libraries and cinemas, will be gradually replaced by much more diverse and specific amenities gathering at the center of local communities. This might cause the accelerating decomposition of large city centres aimed at global entertainment into more decentralised clusters around these new spatial components, which might be called “super communities”.

In conclusion, with more time spent online and more demands met by the virtual world, the configuration of cities as theme parks will change functionally and spatially, at metropolitan as well as city and neighbourhood scales. This might represent the end of the large, unaffordable, globally connected and hyper-diverse theme-park city centres as we know them today.
Figure 1: Possible transition towards “super communities” in the urban configuration caused by the synergy (Source: Author)
This theme reminds me in some ways of my design studio research question, which is “How will we live together?” during and after the coronavirus global outbreak.

Some students do not believe significant changes will take place due to the coronavirus pandemic, but I have another assumption, especially at the economic level. I believe that many entertainment and luxurious facilities will disappear and other functions will come to the city instead. Also, some functions will be transformed. The ‘city as theme park’ spatial configuration that we know from before the coronavirus will disappear for ever and Covid-19 certainly comes as an accelerator to these changes. The consequence will be a city that resists different kinds of future shocks like coronavirus more strongly.

NEW SORT OF STREET LIFE AND DISAPPEARANCE OF LUXURY STORES

The big online retail stores (such as Amazon in America and Alibaba in China) will replace the street retailers in their countries during the Covid-19 outbreak. Therefore, many luxury stores, as well as simpler pop-and-mom shops will disappear from the city, either promoting their services online or even, unfortunately, declaring their bankruptcy. But luxury stores in particular may be affected because they rely a lot on face-to-face contact and a personal relationship with the buyer.

That leads us to another point which is the future of street life, because when we talk about street life we necessarily consider buying and selling goods and services from retail stores that are mostly located on the ground floor in high streets, as well as in shopping centers/malls that are now stagnating due to a lack of consumers. Thus, we have to adjust the cities - I mean here the spaces emptied out of functions- to the new reality. So, what will happen to these empty spaces? Of course, real estate developers will take advantage of the empty unused spaces and build houses in order to fill the deficit that already exists in the market in many cities. And as soon as the pandemic is over, the demand for the restaurants and bars will be unbelievably high, because one of the things that coronavirus taught us, is how fundamental the enjoyment of restaurants and bars is in our social life.

In my opinion, the general overview of the street life in the city will be as follows: more personal care clinics, as people become more interested in health and well-being, more restaurants and bars, as people highlight the value of social gatherings, former traditional retail sites partly occupied by dwellings, and much more areas for parking due to the increasing demand in home delivery services.

LEISURE TIME OUTSIDE AND INSIDE

Another, more general, question may be asked: How will people spend their leisure time? Here we can distinguish two levels of activity:

1. Inside the house: where the entertainment will be more individual and internet oriented;

2. Outside the house: where the role of the local parks and outside spaces in general will be increased remarkably.

And that is, also, because outside spaces - in this case, parks - will promote the social distancing and a safer social life, which makes the city more flexible to withstand another potential public health shock. This may affect the existence of traditional facilities of indoor entertainment such as cinemas or theaters. The best example is Netflix, where with just a click of a button and for a small monthly amount of money, you can enjoy watching the new movies or series safely at home.

TOURISM LOCATIONS AND FLOWS

I do not believe that permanent changes will reach this sector because of the pivotal economic significance of tourism to cities. By changing or adjusting the function of these locations, policymakers would risk excluding urban tourism, both national and international, which is a major source of income for many countries. Therefore, by changing the design of airplanes or other forms of public transportation in order to respond to the implications of the present crisis, we help the continuity of tourism, maintain the functionality and use of heritage buildings and cultural sites, and, as a result, the economy of the city.
Figure 1: Empty mall in Utrecht Hoog Catharijne (Source: https://www.stedenbouw.nl/artikel/nieuw-hoog-catharijne-utrecht/)

Figure 2: Social distance: Gym group spreads out in Wintersmith Park (Source: The Ada News, Oklahoma)

Figure 3: The proposed “Janus” aviation seat proposed by seat-design firm Aviointeriors (Source: https://thepointsguy.com/news/airplane-seats-coronavirus-new-design/)
MODERNIST BUILDINGS WERE ABLE TO ACCOMMODATE FUNCTIONAL RENOVATIONS. ARE OUR CURRENT BUILDINGS EQUALLY FLEXIBLE?

The Covid-19 pandemic may lead to a revolution at various social, economic, industrial and cultural levels. Just like other major global shocks in the past, which led to major changes in lifestyle and routines, and naturally affected the types and functions of buildings designed for public services.

For example, the Van Nelle factory in Rotterdam, which was established in 1931 as a new way to provide the best conditions for workers, with air, light and space considered as key points during the design process (Molenaar, 1985). This was based on philosophical principles, on the one hand, as well as on fundamental developments in (American) construction techniques for high-rise buildings. The building served the goals of the factory and provided optimal conditions for workers, whereas other factories were aiming only to increase production and achieve material profit (Molenaar, 2005).

However, and despite the fame and success of the new factory in the field of industry, and its later inclusion as an icon of twentieth century modern architecture in the list of UNESCO world heritage, the factory was exposed to periods of economic crises that made it stop working. It has become inefficient to reopen the factory again to produce coffee, tea and tobacco. Therefore, some parts of the factory have been transformed into various technical ateliers, design and architectural offices and art galleries, given that the building offers all the architectural ingredients for a flexible transformation. In this way, the factory was transformed from an industrial production unit into a centre for creativity and cultural production and renamed as a design factory (Claessens, Geers & Concorde, 2003).

Likewise, in our time (and, we can argue, since immemorial time), the term ‘face-to-face’ has meant meeting in the physical space to learn, share and produce innovation, but this meaning has changed in the twenty-first century, even before the corona revolution. A new and expanded definition accommodates two meanings, the first being still converging in a physical space and the second meeting in a virtual world where everything happens on the Internet.

In this setting, which the corona pandemic has accelerated, there would be lesser need for large spaces for meetings and offices in commercial and office towers in cities dedicated to advanced business services. Due to their limited use in light of the current technological development, such spaces can be better employed for other purposes. The pandemic brings an opportunity to convert some parts of those buildings that will become unnecessary into new spaces that contain novel functions commensurate with the original building structure, as in the example of the Van Nelle factory.

To illustrate this with another current example, in the Netherlands more than a quarter of office space is unused. Consequently, in The Hague there is a new strategy for transforming office and ministerial buildings that contain many vacant spaces into hybrid buildings so that they remain efficient around the clock as much as possible, through transformations to contain residential, commercial and educational functions. This can be complemented by providing these buildings with flexible spaces where small firms and associations can rent offices for meeting and workshops. Thus, these space will not only serve corporations and employees but also the public.

Many buildings currently underused due to the Covid-19 pandemic could be transformed to contain public services, residential areas or places for small companies. Instead of demolishing or neglecting them, the future plans of the institutional buildings of the Netherlands can achieve the principles of sustainability and preservation of heritage values, just like in the case of the Van Nelle factory. We should not demolish such towers and buildings in large cities due to their distinct historical and social value, on the one hand, and, on the other, their ability to be renovated and transformed to contain new functions that are appropriate for new socioeconomic contexts.
Figure 1 - The van Nelle factory (UNESCO, 2020).

Figure 2 - Current workspaces at the van Nelle factory (UNESCO, 2020).


Sebastiaan Beschoor Plug

FAR FROM REPLACING CLUSTERING IN INNER CITIES, CAN COVID-19 OPEN UP A PARALLEL DIGITAL PATH FOR CULTURE AND CREATIVE INDUSTRIES?

In “The New Economy of the inner city”, Thomas Hutton describes the industry clusters that define the spatial configurations of the inner city. He studies their morphology in the light of the new economy, resulting from turn of the millennium developments, including computer graphics and imaging, software design, and multimedia industries (Hutton, 2004). Much like these technologically shocks, the current COVID-19 pandemic may enable a new urban space-economy that will affect urban industry clusters. This piece will focus on the effects of the current situation on one of them: the cultural and creative industry. Scott (2010) describes such clusters as not only places where cultural institutions and businesses are located, but also where originality, imagination and cultural insights are actively generated from the systems of production within the inner city.

The main actors interacting in this space - such as performing artists or those that rely on visitor flows - see events as central in their business model, which makes them uniquely vulnerable to the social distance reality. Specifically, the vulnerabilities are (1) the cancellation or postponement of events and associated fees, (2) the limited travel ability of visitors, staff and organizers, and (3) the uncertainties of planning, as it is still not possible to predict when certain kinds of event will be able to take place. This forces the cultural and creative industry to be resilient. The Staatsoper Unter den Linden in Berlin, for example, has performed “Carmen” on the 12th of March in front of an empty hall and made it available on livestream. Phoebe Waller-Bridge performed her one woman show ‘Fleabag’ and also made it available to stream for four pounds (figure 1). Museums are also adapting, for example the British Museum is offering Virtual Reality (VR) tours of their institution on YouTube (figure 2). Art schools are also implementing distant learning. These are all cases of established actors in this industry, but smaller players are also embracing the new virtual playing field, as small shops integrate e-commerce and the online marketplace to a larger extent.

It seems that the cultural amenities (galleries, museums, exhibition spaces) that make up the “spatial concentration of [cultural] knowledge” of the inner city, as described by Peter Meusburger (2000), have extended to the virtual realm. However, this cyber push has existed before. With the recent technological advances, Graham and Marvin note that “the creative small firms that dominate Internet software, digital design, and World Wide Web services, far from scattering toward rural idylls, seem in fact to be concentrating into a small number of gentrifying metropolitan information districts” (Graham & Marvin, 2000: 78).

This links back to Hutton, who noted a similar embrace of technology by creative and cultural workers: “[...] workers embrace the advanced technologies that dramatically enhance the creative possibilities, imaginative scope, and speed of their tasks, but a large proportion of this cohort also emphasise the centrality of cultural and design influences to their work.” (Hutton, 2004). With this, Hutton suggests that the agglomeration dynamics that build these cultural and creative clusters is still dependent on the unique (built) environment of the inner city.

However, the difference between the 2000s technology impulse and the current involuntary transition is the added dimension of social interaction and exchange in contemporary technology. Hutton’s interviews in cultural clusters have shown this to be an integral aspect of creative processes, the production of cultural products and services, and innovation in general. Inner cities are attractive for the cultural sector due to their “micro-scale ways of working, socialising, and labour market access” (Hutton, 2004). This scale has been replicated on Zoom, Skype and a plethora of other platforms. Simultaneously, the ethnic and cultural diversity of the inner city, that Florida (2004) describes as beneficial to the potential for creative activity and innovation, is promoted by the inherent democracy and availability of the virtual realm by way of the internet.

Students will return to classes, structures will continue to stand and the intuitions they house will survive. However, this pandemic has stimulated established players of this cluster to open their previously geographically exclusive content to the world, and loosen the physical constraints of social interaction. Returning to Scott's definition of the cluster, originality, imagination and cultural insights are still from their local systems of production, but may be produced outside the
inner city. Therefore, Covid-19 could usher a parallel spatial evolution of the cultural industry, spatially divergent from its prior clustering. However, I believe that clustering will remain, as it is inherent to the cultural and creative sector. This dynamic is best described by the work of Lorenzen and Frederiksen (2008) as they explain how the ‘cultural’ and the ‘creative’ sectors actually differ economically but still need the city to prosper.


Corona shows how fragile our society is and always has been. Pandemics and other natural disasters not only impact our health or environment but our very way of living. History repeats itself and each time a crisis comes to the fore it has an impact on our future. Especially in cities it is hard to contain and manage a disease that has the potential to rapidly spread. It reminds me very much of the bubonic plague: although we are a lot further in medicine and hygiene, we still seem unable to deal with new diseases without them spreading like wildfire. As the global map of transmissions shows, this spreading effect is multiplied by the global interconnectivity between cities, especially those acting as transportation hubs connecting even the most remote areas of the world with the rest.

In a financialized economy, not only urban space in general but private space is an increasingly valuable commodity. We have been moving closer and closer together to efficiently occupy space, arguing for compactness and density, and now that closeness is once again a health risk. The most obvious response would be to abandon cities and spread people over a larger area to minimize the danger of the pandemic. Although I don’t think that will happen on a large scale, this is still an opportunity to rethink how cities are configured and operate.

Comparing the four spatial configurations that were introduced in the economy geography lecture – advanced business districts, urban innovation districts, city as theme parks and clusters of cultural and creative industries - I think the concept of ‘city as theme park’ will be affected the most by this pandemic. The others will not come off this unscathed. But they will fare better in adapting if a new “normal” is introduced. Some economic sectors are already operating on a global scale with offices spread across the globe and cooperation with people on the other side of the world. The ‘theme park city’, however, is uniquely dependent on an inflow of people from outside the city or country. Those flows have now obviously stopped. Brick and mortar stores were already under pressure because of online shopping and many of them are now closed. Luckily, they have been able to reopen – for now - but still have to limit the number of visitors and introduce strict rules of use, from gift shops to hotels and many other urban amenities designed for the tourism and entertainment industries. Supporting services in the sharing economy, such as Airbnb, Uber, Felyx, Urbee, Flickbike, etc., some of which were already under pressure from policymakers and residents due to their unregulated nature, are currently a health risk. If a virus can survive on some surfaces for up to 17 days, sharing suddenly does not seem an appealing idea anymore.

The term ‘city as a theme park’ is not just a description of a spatial configuration but a reality of everyday life of cities, as we see queues in front of (luxury) retail stores and other tourist amenities, much like you would encounter in an actual theme park. Now, however, more and more space is needed in cities to adjust to the new normal. This is the case not in stores, hotels, restaurants, theaters, etc., as they struggle to have the same number of visitors or guests to reach the same profits, but also in our streets in order to safely accommodate the people traversing the city and the ones waiting in those endless lines. If this situation continues for an extended period, it will affect the spatial planning of cities. Densification of inner cities and the needs of the new normal are diametrically opposed – urban space is already a scarce and expensive commodity and this trend will increase. Similarly, public transport could become more expensive if fewer people are allowed to travel.

Although this pandemic will have negative effects on some spatial configurations, it also offers new opportunities. If people must study or work more from home, they might not be satisfied with certain homes. The spatial quality of housing must be higher, allowing for more space and diverse uses, because we spend much more time there. Some people were happy with a room of 6 m² before the crisis but now must spend almost all their time there. This is the case especially for those who would accept lower housing standards or higher prices because of the need to be close to work, for example. If location and proximity are no longer reasons to live in a certain city while being a spacious home out in the countryside.
What the Corona pandemic does make very clear is that a city that is too focused on the theme park aspect in terms of spaces, functions, people and economic activities – i.e. dependent on the tourism and entertainment industries - will be most affected economically and spatially. It will need much more space to accommodate the same amount of people and activities under the new normal, as well as a whole new level of expensive logistical management of spaces and amenities. Other spatial configurations will be affected too, but they can adapt to working and collaborating remotely more easily. It will be interesting to see what direction we will be heading, whether no change at all after a vaccine or cure is found, a different strategy for urban planning, or a new way of living.
Due to the new Covid-19 pandemic, a lot has changed in our society. It has become – at least temporarily - a socially distant economy in which working and learning from home has become important for a lot of disciplines (especially jobs which are not considered vital), online shopping is becoming dominant in the retail industry, the entertainment industry has shifted to home-based devices, and meetings take place virtually instead of physically. During this time, staying at home has become a crucial solution to deal with the spread of the virus. We are currently living in a time of uncertainty as we cannot predict when this pandemic will be over and when society and economy will return to normal. However, there is also the possibility that things will not return to what we were accustomed to before, and the current situation becomes the new normal: a socially distant society and economy. If this actually happens, a lot of changes will occur in the space of the cities we know. Take for instance the configuration known as ‘city as a theme park’. In this spatial configuration urban space is allocated and commodified for the entertainment and tourism industries, luxury retail, etc. If this new regime imposed by corona continues, what would it mean for a city as a theme park?

The use of amenities (whether natural, entertainment or cultural) is essential for the functioning of the city as theme park; these amenities are used to attract new residents (for instance highly skilled migrants) or tourists to the city (Clark, 2003). Clark (2003) categorizes the different amenities into two types: natural and constructed amenities. Examples of natural amenities are hills, beaches, rivers, canals, temperature, mountains and forests. Attractions categorized as constructed amenities are operas, concert halls, museums, specialist cafes, cinemas and music events, among others. The presence and use of amenities are so important in theme park cities that they have even become public policy concerns for cities in the US and Northern Europe. However, if the current situation happens to continue for very long, the use of these amenities will have to change. First, due to the fact that the Covid-19 virus has made traveling to other countries difficult or impossible to avoid further spreading the virus. Consequently the amount of foreign visitors coming to a certain city will decrease tremendously, not only tourists but probably also new residents (migrants and expats). This change will have a serious impact on the urban economy of cities reliant on the theme park model, because their revenues will probably decrease due to the shrinkage of tourist and visitor flows. Instead of new markets opening due to globalization, tourism and travel will probably decrease.

Another reason why the use of urban amenities will have to change is the new social distancing society mentioned above. Because of the need to practice social distancing, gatherings including many people (10 people is now even considered a lot) in one place are not possible. Hence, the functioning of many amenities as an attraction for people will disappear. This is especially the case for constructed amenities such as music events and festivals. This could also mean that the provision of constructed amenities in cities will diminish: especially in indoor spaces, if less people are allowed to attend (due to the new 1.5 meter culture) less revenues will be obtained while expenses are still the same. The resulting financial difficulties could lead to a decrease in the number of events and other cultural amenities. In the case of natural amenities there will be no changes in the amount provided, however, social distancing will also have to be practiced there.

To conclude, if this new regime due to the Covid-19 virus becomes the new normal, the spatial configuration of the city as a theme park will have to change a lot. There will be a shift from the use of amenities targeted at large flows of people, foreign tourists and visitors towards smaller, local amenities used to only attract a limited amount of visitors and residents from within the country. Consequently, policymakers now building upon the theme park city economic model will have to change their policies and review their expectations. In the end I believe that if the current situation happens to stay as it is, the city oriented to tourism and entertainment as we know it will probably disappear; the attraction of tourists will not remain as important as it is now and there will probably be more attention given to amenities that ensure a good quality of life for local residents and bring in new highly skilled talent from within the country.
CANCELLED?

Paredes de Coura, Portugal, 2019 (Rodrigo G. Cardoso)

I really liked and enjoyed this course!

This is a super nice idea. I would like to participate.

Thank you for your enthusiasm and drive to let others enjoy our discussions as well!

Even though we use Zoom, it feels that we have a safe ground for the discussion.

I really enjoyed the set up. It was nice to see how you and your colleagues created an interactive virtual environment. This was the first time I saw this many students speak!

I am very excited to see the end result of all the work together!

To be honest, I really did enjoy and learn a lot from this subject, it was so interesting.
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COURSE CODE: AR0049
ECTS: 5
STARTS IN: PERIOD 4 (W4.1)

The Urban Geography poster 2019-2020