

The Innovative Space

Urbanisation is normally associated with exciting innovation and novelty. But this is not always true. For hidden communities in vast swathes of urban spaces, innovation and ingenuity is focused on just survival.

*Taking the theme of inclusion to another dimension, **Spannos** outlines the various dimensions of innovations and ingenious organisation of urban communities.*

*Thus, **Ghosh** tells us, Shanghai's urbanisation is not just gloss and spick and span. It contains the whole gamut of living, working and cultural spaces, and yet again - inclusive of different interests. If Indian cities need to re-create spaces like Shanghai, we need to change our mind-set from setting out to create exclusive spaces for a small section of people, to more complex networks that serve diverse interests.*

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Architecture of the New Society

Chris Spannos



Every city is a deeply interconnected web of spatial designs and patterns. From the urban to the suburban, our built environment is carved out into commercial and residential areas. Apartments, houses, yards and sidewalks all lead to schools, churches, temples, parks, grocery stores and restaurants. All woven together and mediated by noisy traffic, nauseating air pollution and aggressive advertising.

The private ownership of productive property, markets, and corporate hierarchies of capitalist cities produce and reproduce class rule, social segregation, and hierarchy. Housing is stratified by income so poor people are ghettoized, their communities living in decomposing buildings and neighborhoods. Residences with nice houses, safe streets, pleasant views, and clean parks are often reserved for rich and upper class communities. Communities from separate ethnic backgrounds often live in separate ethnic quarters. Sex and gender development in society has evolved into spatial patterns founded on the myth that the women's place is either in the home or out shopping.

Of course, not everything is bad, we can consent or resist the institutions of our built environment. Islands of community and social space have been fought for and won. Important experiments have emerged and provide valuable lessons. However, the vast majority of our built environment is not the product of our own decision making needs and desires but that of someone else's.



This essay describes a broad vision of how cities, architecture, spatial design and our built environment evolve within a participatory economy. It assumes construction and design within the context of a participatory economy and equally liberatory political, community, culture, and kinship visions.

Post-Capitalist Visions of Cities

That the institutions within our city space can produce and reproduce racist, sexist, classist, and authoritarian social relations within our society is not controversial; what is controversial is to suggest concrete values, procedures, and defining institutions about how cities of a new society might be built.

There have been proposals for what future post-capitalist cities may look like. Dolores Hayden, in her 1983 essay "Capitalism, Socialism and the Built Environment", succinctly outlines classical visions from many communitarian socialists of the 19th century where "...a return to the environmental harmony of the pre-industrial village was essential to their visions of the socialist future. Even Marx and Engels observed

the Shakers carefully, while Charles Fourier, Robert Owen, William Morris and Ebenezer Howard all shared their environmental ideals to the exclusion of much urban concern at all.”⁽¹⁾

In the same tradition, but later in the 20th century, Murray Bookchin proposed a "Communalist" vision of the city. Bookchin's Communalism is comprised of "Social Ecology" and "Libertarian Municipalism", which "...seek to recover and advance the development of the city (or commune) in a form that accords with its greatest potentialities and historical traditions.”⁽²⁾

In 1887, Edward Bellamy published "Looking Backward: 2000-1887". Bellamy imagined a socialist Boston city in the year 2000 which was technologically advanced, decadent, and where consumer goods were plenty and in abundance.⁽³⁾

From the 1950's to the 1970's social movements rose that sought to break away from older traditions in the classical Left. Among those who attempted a complete break, proposing a radical departure were the "Situationists". Inspired by the DADA and Surrealist art movements, and playing an agitational role in the Paris uprising of 1968; broadly, Situationist visions were comprised of concepts of "psycho geography" combined with workers councils, self-management, poetry and art to construct a "revolutionary every day life".⁽⁴⁾ Ivan Chitchevlov developed an early proposal that later inspired many Situationist visions of cities.⁽⁵⁾ Other Situationist proposals included the "New Babylon", a city designed by the utopian architect Constant Nieuwenhuys.⁽⁶⁾

Other visions for cities include sustainable cities, small scale cities, self sufficient cities, walking cities, garden cities, etc. Some modern tendencies include "anti-civilizationists" and primitivists who both oppose sidewalks, bicycles, cities, and almost every other construct that is "unnatural" and harmful to the environment.

Although many of these proposals provoke our imaginations about spatial design and spatial reorganization, they are vague at best since they do not specify any guiding rules, procedures, or institutions for how architecture, design or social space could be allocated in a democratic way in day to day life, they don't address better ways of organizing worker and consumer life. Some of these visions, if pursued, would mean potential human catastrophe on a grand scale. Others have lots to offer that we can learn from, there are many common values, goals, and motivations.

Parecon (participatory economy)

Building cities, by using the defining features and institutions of a participatory economy, is only one part of societal construction. Cities are not made of economics alone, but overlap and intersect into other spheres of social life.

A participatory economy is comprised of federations of worker and consumer councils, socially owned productive property and participatory planning determining which goods and services are produced according to a set of rules and procedures all accommodated by various Facilitation Boards. Workers in worker councils propose what they want to produce, how much they want to produce, the inputs needed and the human effects of their production choices. Consumers propose what they want to consume, how much they want to consume and the human effects of their consumption choices. The allocation system generates both qualitative and quantitative information used for "indicative prices." These prices are used by the Facilitation Board to update proposals for further rounds of iterations. A participatory plan is a feasible and desirable choice distributing the burdens and benefits of social labor fairly.

The Architect and City Planner

Today, under capitalism, architects and city planners go to school and get technical training. They are remunerated according to bargaining power, output, genetic endowment, talent, skill, better tools, more productive co-workers, environment, inheritance, or luck; within a participatory economy, architects and city

planners also get education, are both balanced for and remunerated for effort

Another implication of the a classless society, by will have the opportunity to positive consequence of people is the tapping of rich and practices in

Similarly, architectural private and public space is participatory planning societies needs, interests, and what is socially responsible.



training and work. However, their efforts desirability and empowerment, and they and sacrifice.

institutional context of parecon is that in eliminating class barriers, more people learn the art of architectural design. A having the profession open to more and diverse skills, perspectives, opinions architectural and city planning.

innovation would not be biased, rather, dealt with on equal footing through the process. Quality is geared towards

One final note is the concern some may have about potential corruptibility. With all planning information freely available and architects and city planners working in balanced job complexes issues of corruption, or abuse of power, is practically a non-issue. In fact, I find it difficult to imagine what incentive there would be to manipulate the built environment, much less how someone may benefit from such manipulation.

A New City for a New Life

We want a city with social space distributed fairly; we want a built environment where people have decision making input in proportion to the degree they are affected; a city that embodies and reflects the creativity, cooperation and diversity of it's inhabitants -- we want a city that promotes equity, solidarity, diversity, self-management and efficiency.

Through participatory planning, building, maintaining, and developing a city is a social process. People plan the space they use on all scales and because work is remunerated in accord with effort and sacrifice there will not be huge disparities in wealth within or between cities. Remuneration in parecon is also tempered by need, in cases where certain communities may need space, but are unable to pay for it, say a community theater, in which case they would get their request for free.

A city facilitating self management and diversity allows those who are affected to build their spatial environment. Inhabitants of one city may want work places near their homes, day cares, community centers, etc.



Inhabitants of another city may want these things spread further apart, because they like that better or for reasons that may be very practical. City boundaries and borders are defined by those affected, although this may also be an area that overlaps into the political and other spheres. Community gardens, libraries, and schools are all determined primarily by the people who use them. City

Urban vision planners, architectural designers and experts, work together with artists, construction community, and cultural members. City inhabitants plan and design their physical environment as they should, generating a diversity of outcomes

and life styles. Inhabitants of cities based on a participatory economy have concern for the well being of others in other parts of the city. A benefit of spending working, commuting, and social time, in other parts of the city is that it gives people an understanding of what life is like under those conditions.

Indicative prices also help people make informed decisions about how their choices will affect others. Information about the social and environmental cost and benefits of having skyscrapers, landfills, highways, private or public automobiles, urban expansion, etc. are included in the planning process to help people make socially responsible decisions. Highly desirable city spaces or protected areas such as coastal zones or wilderness areas, that would otherwise be expensive for private consumption, would be left public for all to enjoy.

Participatory city planning in a parecon generates an efficient spatial design mapping out road, freeway, and transit routs; utilizing societies human and scarce resources without unnecessary waste. Pollution will be limited to what is environmentally sustainable. Information based advertising will be limited to only what is necessary to communicate important information. Spatial design and the built environment embody the social costs and benefits to society distributing them fairly.

In addition to generating equity, self-management, solidarity, diversity and efficiency, a city based on parecon must also include spatial design that facilitates engagement in participatory processes. Options could be rooms in houses, neighborhoods, workplaces or communities designed specifically to facilitate an interactive flow of information necessary for democratic planning. Modern day technology allows much of the above information technology to be transported conveniently through multipurpose gadgets, which may also be made available on persons, in transportation, or in other convenient locations.

Cities are constantly shifting and changing environments. A future parecon city (Participatory City?) will have to simultaneously utilize already existing space while building new spatial designs. Transition from capitalism to parecon would have to begin with "building the new society in the shell of the old". ⁽⁷⁾ After a period of successful transition we could begin to engage in massive reconstruction projects. The creation and functioning of this kind of city deepens its inhabitant's capacity for participation in social life, tapping rich human potential that is reflected in our built environment. It is this life that is waiting for us. We only need to build it. ▶

About the Author

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The Shanghai difference

Jayati Ghosh

Although Shanghai represents the aggressively expansionist model of East Asia, its expansion rests on a more egalitarian and enlightened socio-economic base than those of the other cities in the region.

NIRUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN



A view of Shanghai city.

A century ago, it was the siren of the East in Western eyes, attracting the usual colonial mix of gold-diggers and carpetbaggers and becoming an international symbol of corruption and exploitation, ill-gotten gains and fickle fortunes. Some decades later, it was a cradle of the Chinese revolution, the

birthplace of the Communist Party of China in 1921. Today, the international gold rush is once again evident in Shanghai, as profit-seeking businesses from all over the world flock to a vastly different but even more fascinating city.

The origins of Shanghai reflected its early character of international degradation. After the Chinese defeat in the First Opium War in 1842, the British quickly used the terms of their victory to establish a trading port on the Yangtze river basin, at the site of what was then little more than a large fishing village. Other foreigners like the French quickly followed, and the city became the base for the rapidly growing trade in opium, silk and tea.

The term "den of vice" was probably invented to describe Shanghai at that time, as it became a byword for decadence. The essentially colonial foreign business presence, reinforced by the power of the European (and later American) troops positioned there, encouraged the proliferation of opium dens, gambling houses and prostitution. By the early part of the 20th century, the oppression of Chinese workers in Shanghai was worse than even the most extreme stereotype, with the persistence of child labour in slave-like conditions in the most unsavoury activities, the routine degradation of ordinary men and women and the fierce suppression of any kind of workers' resistance.

So it was not surprising that Shanghai became a breeding ground for revolutionary thought and produced many of the future leaders of the Communist Party. Radical opinion of all sorts has dominated in Shanghai - the now infamous Gang of Four had their power base here during the Cultural Revolution in the 1970s. (Even now, incidentally, much of the top leadership of the Chinese Communist Party tends to come from this city, including former President Jiang Zemin and Premier Zhu Rongji.) But now the city is the emblem of another kind of radicalism - the aggressive economic expansion that characterises the new China.

It has become the glittering and showy archetype of the results of massive state investment in infrastructure combined with active encouragement to private investment. The emphasis until recently was on manufacturing, but increasingly the city also seeks to rival Hong Kong by diversifying into a range of services, including finance.

The sheer visual impact of the city is astounding even if not beautiful, and it is clearly intended to astound. Shanghai today is a megalopolis of futuristic skyscrapers and other high-rise buildings held together by a vast network of state-of-the-art motorways. The skyline is as spectacular as that of Manhattan, and even more eager to invite the visitor's gaze. Tourist boat rides along the Huangpu river in the evenings provide images of the main centre of the city lit up in gaudy colours that highlight the outlines of the surrounding buildings, creating the impression of a city at once brash and self-confident, yet also anxious to attract attention.

And attention - of an international kind - it is certainly receiving. Shanghai is clearly the place to be for multinational capital today: it is hard to think of a major global brand name that is not jostling for space among the neon billboards or vying for offices to rent in the new edifices that are continuously emerging.

Much of the skyline is new. Most of Shanghai's recent expansion is very recent, dating from the early 1990s when the government decided to develop the hitherto barren area of Pudong which lies to the east of the Huangpu river. Pudong is now full of glitzy ultra modern buildings and commercial centres that compete with the most opulent anywhere in East Asia. Even the new public buildings in the older parts of the city - such as the Shanghai Museum - display an architectural audacity that is very 21st century. The older colonial style buildings lining the famous "Bund" along the river now seem less like the symbols of

Shanghai's complicated past, and more like dowager old ladies bemusedly watching the frenetic development disco being performed all around them.

The central area around People's Square is chock a block with shopping malls and spanking new office buildings, and the new prosperity is only too evident. The region round Shanghai has grown much more rapidly than the rest of China in the past decade, and per capita income is currently estimated to be slightly more than double the national average of \$1,000 a year. The signs of recent wealth and ballooning consumption are everywhere, from the endless and varied restaurants where huge amounts of food are routinely (and almost compulsorily) wasted by diners, to the split air-conditioners attached outside almost every window even in the workers' housing complexes, to the gargantuan cars clogging even the very wide streets, to the range of High Street goods on offer in shops that could be anywhere in the developed world.

Across the city, construction continues at a breathless pace. Local residents joke that the official bird of the region is the crane, and indeed it is difficult to turn one's eyes in any direction and avoid seeing that ubiquitous indicator of ongoing construction activity. Despite the absence of greenery, it would be wrong to describe it as a concrete jungle, since a jungle is a more messy, unplanned and varied environment. Shanghai, by contrast, is highly regulated, with little of the chaotic informal sector activity that multiplies and messes up the streets in other large metros. In fact, it is one of the cleanest cities in the developing world, reflecting not only regulation but also the greater civic sense of its residents.

The massive infrastructure expansion extends well beyond Shanghai to the enveloping regions of Jiangsu and Zhenang provinces. A trip out of Shanghai by road can extend for several hundred kilometres, revealing very little farmland and instead only

contiguous industrial areas served by gleaming motorways and filled with extensive housing settlements for workers.

If all this seems to have relatively little to do with communism as it is generally understood, it is certainly very much part of an aggressively expansionist development model that has already been experimented with, especially in other parts of East Asia.

Jakarta in Indonesia, for example, expanded upwards in a rapid fashion in the 1980s, with infrastructure growth both fuelled by and fuelling the state-led export-oriented manufacturing boom that led to a huge shift of the workforce within less than a generation. But Jakarta's growth was never as regulated, and that particular overall development strategy came to an abrupt and cathartic end during the East Asian crisis, from which the economy of Indonesia has still not fully recovered. In consequence, Jakarta's woes now resemble those of other Third World cities, with overburdened infrastructure, inadequate public services and substantially underemployed urban workforce.

So this is a strategy that involves high risks even as it delivers apparently enormous material benefits very quickly; presumably the Chinese government is aware of at least some of these risks although others can be more difficult to predict. And it is also true that the socio-economic base on which this material expansion in Shanghai is occurring is very different, with a much more egalitarian income distribution at the start of this process, and a more generally educated workforce, especially in this part of China.

The different social nature - the legacy of what could now be called the Communist past - is evident in the Shanghai Book Store, the largest book shop in the city and probably one of the largest in the world. Located on a road full of book shops, it still amazes with its breadth and range. Its massive seven floors are

full of an enviable variety of books on all subjects, including literature, philosophy and social sciences along with the more obvious technocratic disciplines, written in or translated into Chinese.

And all of these floors on a normal working day are also full of people, mostly quite young. The very fact that such a bookshop can exist, and be so full of mainly young people, is actually a wonderful comment on Shanghai society: that it has produced educated people who are willing to read books in sufficient numbers and also have the incomes to buy these books.

If this is indeed the case, then the future may hold different and more varied possibilities for Shanghai's inhabitants than are currently projected by the material expansion alone. For that to happen, of course, the life of the city will have to go beyond what seems to be its current intoxicated obsession with growth.

Towards green cities

B. S. Padmanabhan



The inevitable process of urbanisation has brought with it environmental degradation, affecting the quality of life and striking at the root of sustainable development of cities and towns. This is more pronounced in developing countries than the developed countries.

As Klaus Toepfer, Director-General of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), points out in his message for the World Environment Day, too many of today's cities are breeding grounds of pollution, poverty, disease and despair and, with careful planning, they can be turned into flagships of sustainable development. The theme for the occasion is thus both a warning and a declaration of faith in the ability of nations to turn the expansion of urban centres into an effort that would benefit all.

In fact, the economist Jeffrey Sachs views the process of urbanisation as one of the most promising aspects of global economic development. He notes that urban areas have outperformed rural areas during the last century in almost every aspect of economic development. He is not blind to the problems created by urbanisation but attributes them to poor urban planning, poor development strategies and ineffective urban governance.

More than a billion people in the developing world live in poverty and ill-health because they are denied clean water, basic sanitation and adequate shelter that people in the developed world often take for granted. In this context, Toepfer rightly argues that easing the burden of the world's poorest people will yield a double dividend - giving them a foothold on the ladder to a better life and helping to protect the environment.

He points out that providing improved sanitation to the slums will protect freshwater resources and the sea into which all rivers flow, besides helping to save the lives of many of the 6,000 children who die every day from preventable diseases associated with the lack of safe water and poor hygiene. Replacing wood fires with more sustainable energy sources will not only help preserve forests but also reduce air pollution, which causes respiratory diseases. Air pollution can be checked by cleaning up vehicle exhausts and preventing the release of toxic fumes from burning plastic and other refuse by promoting appropriate waste collection and disposal systems and methods.

"Towns and cities are humanity's home - and its future. Making that a future of peace, dignity and prosperity is the responsibility of all. We need to look forward with hope. That hope lies in Green Cities," Toepfer says.



His concept of the city of future is one where buildings use solar power and waste less because they use power-saving lighting and are well-insulated, where public transport is affordable and efficient and where vehicles pollute less because they are powered by electricity or hydrogen. With the support of the community, business and, above all, government, such cities can be created even now.

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