

Response Paper to David Harvey's "Contested Cities: Social Process and Spatial Form"

In his text on "Contested Cities: Social Process and Spatial Form" David Harvey highlights the importance of bringing the concept of the urban back into the discussion of broader political-economic processes and social trends (p. 232). The urban is not present enough in recent ecological analysis, even though it is an important factor, because "[...] the qualities of urban living in the next century will define the qualities of life for the mass of humanity."

Furthermore, Harvey addresses the issue that urban, and cities are often viewed as constituted by social processes instead of being constitutive of these social processes (p. 234). For Harvey it is important that cities are not only seen as things, but as product and consisting of processes, because in his opinion processes take precedence over things (p. 233). David Harvey mentions three main points he wants to address in his text and the first point goes hand in hand with his view of cities as consisting of processes and not being only a thing. The urban should be seen as producing space and spatio-temporality that is understood as relationship between process and thing (p. 235). Which ties in with Harvey's strongly expressed opinion of cities as part of processes and not an object, which is mentioned several times throughout the text.

In his second point Harvey discusses the concept of 'community' and how it also entails an exploration of process and thing relationship. In his opinion, community consists of social processes that can not only benefit a city but also can divide its population by dividing the upper class and the lower class into their own separate communities that do not interact with each other. To highlight his opinion Harvey cites a quote from Iris Marion Young, who explains how "[...] the positive identification of some [groups] is often achieved by first defining other groups as other, the devalued, semihuman." (p. 235) On the other hand, Harvey criticizes works by other authors like Ebenezer Howard, who had the opinion that build cities were a thing that would have the power to keep itself and the social process in a harmonious state (p. 235).

Lastly, David Harvey exclaims that it is important to make the concept of the urban and cities prominent in ecological literature, because urbanization is an ecological process and that much more positive ecological politics need to be pursued (p. 236).

Further, Harvey expresses critic on the concept of thinking that a strong economy brings money that then can be invested in get the cities right while it should be the other way around, highlighting Harvey's issue with cities being seen as an object and not part of process that can create economic change and development (p. 237).

David Harvey's argumentation for his claims appears thorough and logical and he supports them with quotes by other works on the matter. However, when talking about communities, Harvey occurs to be rather fixed on the two extremes: the bourgeoisie gated communities and the poor ghettos, without mentioning or considering anything in between. In addition, Harvey focusses mainly on comparisons to the 19th century but does not further explain how the issues he addressed will impact the future, like he touched upon before (p.232).

In conclusion, Harvey makes some strong argument that he supports with examples and quotes and opens room for discussion on the urban and its importance in an ecological context. On the other hand, Harvey could have further explained some of his claims and extend his concepts on a wider range, like including the middle class in his discussion on community.