

Response Paper to David Harvey: “Contested Cities: Social Process and Spatial Form” in *The City Reader* (2016 edition), p. 230–237.

David Harvey’s essay *Contested Cities* addresses the importance of including cities as a category in the discussion about broader economic processes and contemporary politics, given that “[t]he twentieth century has been the century of urbanization” (p. 232). Thus, he offers three main arguments in how to include the urban and the city in the discussion.

Firstly, he argues that thinking about cities as processes rather than mere things is necessary for a better understanding of the relationship between processes, e.g., liberatory impulses or contemporary politics, and the nature of things produced in the past. “The urban and the city”, according to Harvey, “are not simply constituted by social process, they are constitutive of them” (p. 234). In other words, the nature of things constructed in the past (e.g., a nuclear power plant) constrain the contemporary politics (processes) and therefore are constitutive of them.

Secondly, Harvey argues that many community-constructing projects are “a recipe for isolation” (p. 235) since they base on the devaluation of the other. Therefore, he proposes a dialectical view on community and its relationship to process and criticizes earlier thinking which equalized the construction of community with a particular “moment in a process” (p. 235). He sees the main error of this thinking in the assumption that proper design would be able to “keep the process forever in harmonious state” (p. 235) and thus that the same power is attributed to a fixed community over the process. His argument is opposed to other urbanists who argue that good design can help communities to function better. In my opinion, both views hold valid points and are inseparable linked to one another. Although good design can be a driving factor for the thrive of communities, it needs to be seen not only as a fixed ‘thing’ but a moment in urban process that needs and shapes further cultivation and social process. Taking into account Sandoval-Strausz’ *Latino Landscape* and his analysis of the community of Oak Cliff, Harvey’s criticism of community construction projects as “a recipe for isolation” (p. 235) gets challenged. The revitalization of Oak Cliff through community projects of immigrant and migrant Latinos can be seen as an example not for a recipe for isolation and devaluation of the ‘other’ but as a way of community-activism with a positive outcome. Moreover, the design of space, particularly la yarda, has a positive outcome since crime rates in Oak Cliff decreased,¹ which again challenges Harvey’s view on the impact of good design on the function of community.

Cliff, Harvey's criticism of community construction projects as "a recipe for isolation" (p. 235) gets challenged. The revitalization of Oak Cliff through community projects of immigrant and migrant Latinos can be seen as an example not for a recipe for isolation and devaluation of the 'other' but as a way of community-activism with a positive outcome. Moreover, the design of space, particularly *la yarda*, has a positive outcome since crime rates in Oak Cliff decreased,¹ which again challenges Harvey's view on the impact of good design on the function of community.

Thirdly, he criticizes the artificial distinction between "cities as anti-ecological" (p. 237) and nature. Although he agrees with earlier views that everything relates to one another, he scrutinizes the separation into a natural and a built environment. As a possible explanation he points the reader to the ecological modification process, in which ecosystems are dependent on money flow and would otherwise change drastically. Applying these ecological transformations on urbanization, it is also an ecological process and thus inseparable from nature. In conclusion, Harvey demands to link together the world of ecology and of cities more strongly.

¹ Cf. Andrew K. Sandoval-Strauz, "Latino Landscapes: Postwar Cities and the Transnational Origins of a New Urban America," *Journal of American History* 101.3 (2014): 804-831, p. 820.