TIMESCAPES OF URBAN CHANGE

HOW TIME IMPACTS

PLANNING AND LIVING IN THE CITY

www.sensescitiescultures.com

Dr Monica Degen

Brunel University London

BRITISH ACADEMY
for the humanities and social sciences

TABLE OF CONTENTS

◆

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

◆

Monica Degen

This research aims to contribute to debates around the role of time and temporal relations shaping urban redevelopment and urban living. The report brings together insights from a variety of academic disciplines alongside discussions with urban practitioners and community groups. It identifies and examines how different temporal features, such as the temporal constraints and pressures of political and administrative cycles and the different tempos associated with these multiple cycles, affect the planning of cities. The report explores how these temporal dimensions interact with the times inscribed in the built environment by the personal attachments that develop with places through people's everyday lives and rhythms. These findings stem from my own research projects and reflections gained from my longitudinal study of over 20 years of the regeneration of the neighbourhood of el Raval in Barcelona. Added to these are the insights from the discussions and presentations that were given in two workshops and public events, that took place in London on the 29th of November and in Barcelona on the 12th and 13th of December 2016, as part of a British Academy Mid-Career Fellowship.

Aims of BRITISH ACADEMY Fellowship

The fellowship is granted to outstanding academics in Britain to pursue a year of independent and original research. In my case I chose to research and promote to the general public the ways in which time and diverse temporal aspects underpin the planning, implementation and experience of urban development projects.

INTRODUCTION

Richard Sennett (1994) has famously argued that the city is made out of flesh and stone, or to put it simply, people and buildings. This research finds that there is a third element in that equation, namely that which mediates the relationship between buildings and people: feelings, senses and time to mention a few. Such understandings, perceived through our sensing bodies, punctuate our activities and both provide a sense of - and are made sense over - time. For example, when a derelict building we walk past daily is suddenly covered by hoardings as developers announce its future demolition, our daily walk is disrupted. We are interrupted physically as we are forced to cross the road, but also a range of temporal experiences arise in us such as sense of loss of the memories the building might evoke in us, the disruption of our present day walk and our imagination of future redevelopment plans. This is what could be described as the 'soft matter' of the city, which mediates the more abstract realm of urban policies and politics in everyday life. This 'soft matter' shapes and frames how the 'hard matter' of the city, the city of stone, is planned and built. It also influences how it is experienced in situ over time by the many bodies that inhabit it.

Photo

Monica Degen
La Filmoteca Del Raval

Photo next page

Casper Laing Ebbensgaard
Newham lighting

THE CITY AND TIME: AN OVERVIEW

The city as a human made environment can be understood as the materialisation of the passing of time where different building styles reflect architectural trends or periods, from medieval churches in Barcelona, Palladian architecture in Bath or contemporary glass buildings such as the Shard in London. The buildings that are kept or destroyed at any given time and how the city is planned, such as Haussmann's redesign of Paris in 1853-1870 or Cerda's implementation of the Eixample in Barcelona in the 1850s, reflect and reify power relations and social dynamics of that society at a given moment, made visible in the built environment.

Since the 1980's writers have argued that both time and space are created by and shape social life. The built environment and the spaces of the city are transformed in both space and time, but equally act to frame and transform our embodied perceptions of both space and time. As Massey (2005) has contended, there has been a persistent dominance of work which explores the passing of time within a spatial order, thus containing time within space rather than exploring the interdependence of the two.

If we look to the daily life of the city we understand that time is essential to the lived experiences of people. Time structures the city through the rhythms of work, travel and leisure. Institutions such as schools or churches structure patterns of time at the scale of the day, the term or the year and affect how we relate to the city in different instances. The effect of these differing orders of time causes a wave through all strata of society as, for instance, office hours or public transport timetables structure the life of the city.

Our embodied selves also relate to the city differently throughout our lifespan. The young body and the aging body move through the city and experience the speed of the city differently. The ways we relate to the built environment and experience urban space is linked to memories, current states of mind and future expectations. For example, moments of stasis or of high energy mean that we form a different relationship to the spaces and places surrounding us, we may use different parts of the city or different services and institutions. And, other people may relate to us differently at different times of the day or night, thus affecting their time too.

Time has a past, a present and a future but they are not experienced discretely. This experience can relate to personal times and the times of the physical city of buildings. A present-day walk is often imbued with cultural and personal memories as well as future fears and expectations (Degen et al 2020).

FINDINGS

This section summarises the principal findings from my own work and group discussions that took place between a variety of academics, urban practitioners and community groups in 2016 and 2017, and particularly in workshops held in London and Barcelona in the winter of 2016.

Findings from the project suggest that we need to think of different scales and registers of time when we study urban change. Planning is an anomaly in the ways it brings together time and space, it has the power to change the social and personal time that exists in places.

1. LONGITUDINAL ANALYSIS OF URBAN CHANGE

Much analysis of urban change tends to foreground the impact of the restructuring of space and invokes time as a residual feature. Doreen Massey (2005) has famously argued that most disciplines have attempted to capture the passing of time within a spatial order. Hence, history of a place or a society is often represented as being inscribed in space through key buildings or monuments that provide a linear and chronological timeline of a particular social group, often a privileged group, rather than the reality which is the production by divergent, often overlapping times and events shaped by

> "
> **Quote**
>
> *A long-term analysis shows that urban regeneration is far from a chronological continuum but a process that gets digested, reconfigured and experienced over time through a diversity of temporal modes that can involve acceleration, waiting, stagnation or expectation to mention a few.*
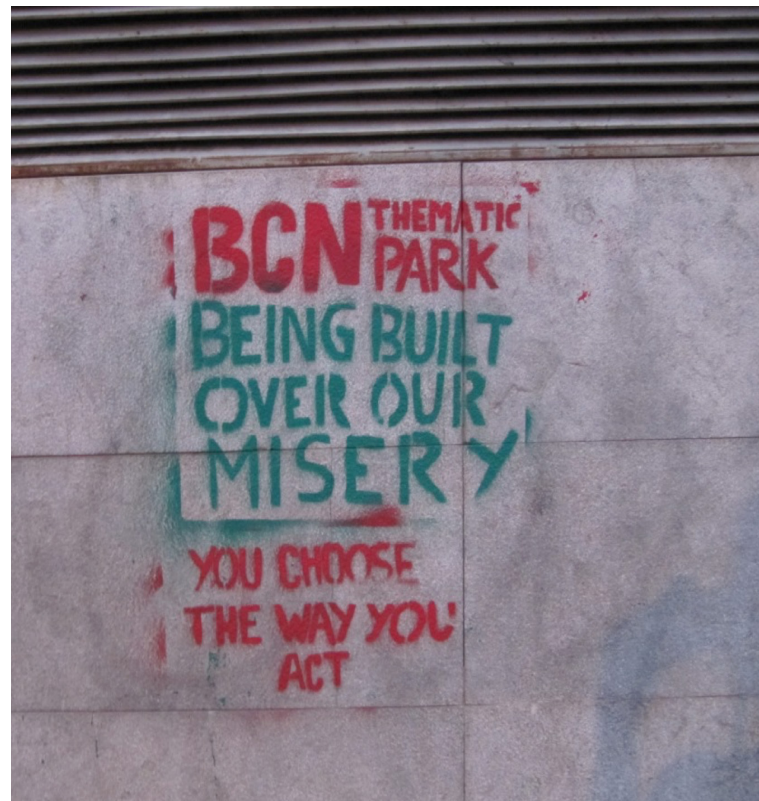
Photo

Alan Cochrane
Traces of Expo Shaghaii

various interest groups. Similarly, academic studies of regeneration projects tend to focus on a specific time in the remaking of a neighbourhood and draw conclusions from this limited timeframe. A long-term analysis provides different insights: it shows that urban regeneration is far from a chronological continuum but a process that gets digested, reconfigured and experienced over time through a diversity of temporal modes that can involve acceleration, waiting, stagnation or expectation to mention a few (Degen 2018).

As several speakers argued, the way time is understood, evolves and is used in planning and the times of people living, working or visiting places often do not coincide. A longitudinal analysis would provide closer insights into how these processes play out in the identity of places and people's place attachments. People living in an area might have different temporal scales and needs to those of the developers, for example, residents live on a day to day basis to cover their essential needs while a development looks at long term outcomes in the future that are not relevant to individual's personal lives now.

Moreover, a longitudinal study of urban change focusing on temporal relations can, according to Maliq Simone (Max Planck Institute), provide insights into the different speeds and temporal gaps between different ways of organising everyday lives and how they link to a changing urban environment.

Photo above
Clare Colomb

Photo below
Ester Fernandez Castelo

2. THE TIMESCAPES OF CITIES

Adam's notion of the timescape (1998) refers to the ways in which every landscape has different temporal layers such as the time of nature, the time of buildings, of individuals and so on. This is a useful term to highlight the multiple layers of time and temporal dynamics that converge and conflict in urban redevelopment schemes. Regenerated urban spaces are built, shaped and experienced through a diversity of temporal dimensions: tangible phenomena such as the actual built environment operate at their own range of temporalities while people's individual and group activities have their own rhythms. Further, broader intangible political, social, financial or environmental processes all impact on the space of the city with their own rhythms. To put it simply: diverse temporal relations converge in the built environment which are shaped by institutions, the built and natural environment and subjective experiences.

In my research (Degen 2017, 2018) I suggest linking this notion of timescapes with Lefebvre's (1991) tripartite concepts of conceived, perceived and lived space. It is important to point out that while Lefebvre applied his framework to space he was also aware that the production of space and time need to be conceptualised together. Lefebvre argued then that to understand how space is socially produced, and therefore inflected with power relations, we need to analyse three moments or dimensions of a space:

"

Quote

Regenerated urban spaces are built, shaped and experienced through a diversity of temporal dimensions: tangible phenomena such as the actual built environment operate at their own range of temporalities while people's individual and group activities have their own rhythms.

Photo

*Cathy Ross
E2 Street Sign*

a) how it is conceived mentally and represented by planners, architects and the media through photographs, maps or documents and in our own conceptions of place; b) how it is perceived by examining the observable, the actual physical and social arrangements of a place, for example who uses a space and for what purposes; c) how a space is lived in, in other words how people using this space subjectively experience the place. The lived space encompasses the conceived and perceived through personal perceptions, and is the intimate, direct relation we have to the street.

Bringing Adam's and Lefebvre's concepts together provides us with a helpful tool to differentiate between how different temporalities interact in and with one space. As for example:

• the conceived 'temporalities of planning' which tend to be long-term and project urban futures and imaginaries;

• the perceived 'temporalities of the built environment' which encompass the observable present temporal relations in the built environment and everyday practices in places; and

• the lived 'temporalities of everyday life' which refers to the subjective temporal experiences that individuals develop through their everyday use patterns, temporal experiences and memories, where time plays a crucial role in situating us biographically and constructing place attachments or detachments.

3. PLANNING AND REGENERATION

The work of Mike Raco (The Bartlett, UCL) suggests that the timing of regeneration projects and their delivery are often dependent on competing interests over time between developers, planners and local communities (Raco et al 2008) which raises questions such as: when and why do regeneration projects accelerate and stagnate? Whose time gets prioritized in regeneration processes both in the built environment and in the life of neighbourhoods? How do locals experience the timeframes of urban change, that can be either too fast or take years to complete? How are planning times linked to global/national economic cycles?

As planners in both London and Barcelona argued, local government's and city council's greatest challenge from an urban redevelopment perspective has become how to intervene in the fabric of the city without pushing out the existing population. The London Plan or Barcelona's Metropolitan Plan tend to be designed with a 20 -25 year timeframe in mind which are then continuously revised yet are not very agile in responding to demographic, social, global, political and economic changes. Thus, some planners and urban policy makers are starting to suggest looking at planning from a range of diverse timescales: To look at both the short term and the long term, as well as to think of planning in a more flexible

Photo

Marion Roberts
Open Air Nightclub Brixton London

way as 'temporary', and cities as adaptable environments in constant change that need to focus on current necessities while also planning for future developments.

As Nuria Benach (University of Barcelona) and Carmen Gual Via (Foment de Ciutat) pointed out, temporal matters can be understood as a constraint for urban policy in that each political mandate is under time pressure to show off their

achievements within a limited time to prove their effectiveness. This is further linked to the timescales and relationships between those that design and implement the urban changes – architects, developers, construction firms, consultants, financial institutions to mention a few. Yet some urban interventions would clearly benefit from a longer process of consultation and careful implementation over an extended period of time.

Moreover, as some planners conceded, in a global entrepreneurial urban climate, developers are increasingly powerful and the public sector has to respond rapidly to their needs. However, we should not only conflate neo-liberal capitalism with a speeding up of urban development cycles as developers and private finance also have the power to 'slow down' developments. In some instance this can be to reduce local conflict, while in others it can be to reduce their social obligations, such as providing social housing, or to wait for land values to increase during the stagnation of a project. However, Euan Mills (Future Cities Catapult, former GLA Urban Design and Planning), was also keen to stress that local council's were also keen to develop planning processes which 'slow down' urban change by building consultative relationships with communities, and focusing on adaptability, rather than future planning, as a driver of urban change.

Photo above

Victoria Habermehl
Vila Autodromo destruction and Rio Olympic development

Photo below

Carolina Vasilikou
The Urban Evolution of a compact City

4. THE POLITICS OF TIME

As the presentations by Nuria Benach (Barcelona University) and Simone Abram (Durham University) emphasized, time is an ideological device (Abram & Wezkalnys 2011). It is often used to legitimate present changes by drawing on past histories of a place, such as a narrative of heritage, to protect certain buildings. It also sets future expectations for transformative change as, for example, the potential socio-economic gain to be made from new transport facilities such as new tube stations which will improve access to an area. Speakers agreed that the speed of urban change is increasing as economic cycles are speeding up. Isaac Marrero (Goldsmith College) on the other hand argued that while the temporal logic of the capitalist city is linked to financial capital, movement and fast speeds, the stagnation of an urban development project might also provide the opportunity, or in his words 'respite', for different temporalities to emerge that challenge the temporal logic of capitalist development, such as squatted buildings or empty plots used for community gardening. An interesting question that emerged from Clare Colomb's (The Bartlett, UCL) presentation was how cities should deal with transient city users such as tourists, absentee landlords or foreign investors – few cities have a regulatory system that takes this temporal dimension into account, although they are beginning to regulate certain aspects such as AirBnB (Berlin) or foreign property buyers (New Zealand).

The politics of time in the city also comes to the fore when we analyse how different times are interpreted: the past is often regarded as 'closed', static or obsolete, while the future is seen as dynamic, positive and full of hope. The past is relegated to history, yet often used for future branding purposes, while the future is negotiable and used for economic and political speculation. Mari Paz Balibrea (Birbeck) pointed out how capital has a tendency to fix time and gave the example of how urban branding campaigns and movies capture the lifestyle rhythms of locals to sell these as consumable experiences of being in particular cities. Discussions in the workshops and my own research pointed to the importance of being aware of how different actors in the city have different temporal rhythms which refers to the times and ways individuals use the city which create particular patters such as the school run as opposed to the arrival of tourist buses; and different temporal registers. Referring to how individuals perceive and judge their surrounding environment from different situated personal temporal perspectives.

For example, a tourist might be on the look out for important historical buildings, while locals might notice the change of design of a street or buildings that has inscribed personal memories. An example is the transformation of the Ramblas in Barcelona from a space used mainly by locals to its redesign as a tourist venue since the 1992 Olympic Games. Hence new residents in a neighbourhood, whether these are locals, migrant communities, transient populations such as Erasmus students or tourists, will have different practices, routines and alliances of place which might sometimes collide with those already there.

> **"**
>
> **quote**
>
> *New residents will have different practices, routines and alliances of place which might sometimes collide with those already there, or enrich and expand them.*

Photo previous page

Marie Paz
Derribos 1989

Photo this page

Clare Melhuish
Digital visualisations in Doha

CONCLUSIONS

◆

1.   Time is social, shaped by beliefs and ideologies and can serve to order and control social life. The reflections of the various speakers show that different professions, academic disciplines and individual's work with different conceptions of time and terminologies. For example, time can be understood as a linear process in urban development; as a repetitive dynamic in the cyclical processes of urban politics and policy; temporality can refer to different qualities of time that individuals perceive whereas tempo can refer to the speed of time, to mention just a few. The different speakers at the London and Barcelona workshops examined how different temporal terms are understood by their professions and academic disciplines in relation to urban change. We can see that place making is a complex temporal achievement organised and materialised through the interactions between multiple and diverse temporalities such as those of urban decision-makers, the built environment and its users – all characterised by particular senses of time, timeframes and modalities of time.

2.   Time structures people's emotional relationship to a sense of place. Time is both a socio-technical institution imposed upon individuals, and simultaneously an embodied and lived experience. It is useful to think about how personal temporal attachments to the city relate to city life and it's transformation. Moreover, we relate differently to the city throughout our life-stages with changing experiences and memories of place. A teenager will view and use the urban landscape differently to a mother or an elderly person. Progressive planning should take

into account these different embodied relations to place. Lastly, it is important to acknowledge that often the temporalities of those living in places are different to the temporalities of planning.

3.   Economic and political temporal sequencing of global and local events affects the planning of cities For example, as Balibrea argues, rather than thinking of Barcelona's urban regeneration in the late 1980s in preparation for the Olympics in 1992 as a 'model' for urban planning, it might be more fruitful to think about it as the confluence of particular global and local historical-temporal factors within a specific space and time that led to Barcelona's particular type of social-democratic planning.

4.   Temporal considerations underpin decision making in the planning of the city. Time intervenes in urban policies and shapes particular approaches in the city. Different temporalities such as changing political mandates, deadlines or financial years intersect in the planning and building of cities. These temporal dimensions have their own timeframes such as the 25 year timeframe of planning, the 4 year political cycles or the 12 month financial year for example. Time is used to exert political constraint, demanding speed of action and demonstrable results within particular timeframes as well as deliver on boosterist promises of economic benefit.

5.   Temporal dimensions shape the daily rhythms of urban life. Everyday practices by residents and users shape the dynamics of public spaces in cities and have an important influence in the feel of places. An interesting dimension is added by the phenomenon of 'transient users' of cities and which has led in cities such as Barcelona to social contestations around the increase of tourism, or in London by foreign investors in the housing market.

6.   Time as a historical and mythical device. As some of the urban planners explained, place myths and the material traces of history in buildings are an important element in the redevelopment of neighbourhoods. On the one hand, they provide branding narratives, but these can be simplistic and make invisible other narratives of place. Negative place myths can also be detrimental to the redevelopment and resignification efforts of places.

7.   Time and temporal relations in the city are political. Institutional, cultural and economic arrangements produce specific tempos and temporalities for different populations in the city. These differential relationships to time organise and perpetuate urban inequalities. Focusing on the timescapes of urban change helps to bring together individual's experiences of a city with broader structural changes and power relations in the urban environment, exposing the social framing and experiential implications of urban planning as a continuously evolving timespace. There is an unevenness to temporal relations and scales in the city that needs to be interrogated: whose times are prioritised in the built environment of the city and in urban policies?

SPEAKERS AT
THE EVENTS

◆

Simone Abram (Durham University), Eva Alfama (Barcelona City Council), Bob Allies (Allies & Morrison Architects), Nuria Benach Rovira (University of Barcelona), Oscar Esteban (TOT Raval), Issac Marrero Guillamon (Goldsmith College), Carmen Gual Via (Foment Ciutat S.A., Barcelona), Chris Horton (Tower Hamlet Council), Clare Melhuish (Urban Lab London), Euan Mills (Future Cities Catapult), Miquel Fernandez (Barcelona University), Mike Raco (The Bartlett UCL), Mari Paz Balibrea (Birkbeck), Abdou Malik Simone (Freie Universitat Berlin), Clare Colomb (Bartlett, UCL), David Bravo (CCCB), Maria Dolores Lopez Fernandez (Comisionada de Inmigracion, Barcelona).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

◆

REFERENCES

◆

Abram, S., & Wezkalnys, G. (2011). Anthropologies of planning: Temporality, imagination and ethnography. Focaal – Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology, 61, 3–18.

Adam, B. (1998). Timescapes of modernity. London, UK: Routledge.

Degen, M., Lewis, C., Ward, I. & Swenson, A. (2020) "Urban change, sensory identities and temporal flows: an analysis of Smithfield Market, London". Urban Studies, in progress.

Degen, M. (2018) "Timescapes and Urban Change: the street". Sociological Review. Invited contribution to special issue,Vol.66 (5).

Degen, M. (2017) "Urban Regeneration and Resistance: Foregrounding Time and Experience". Space and Culture 20 (2) 141-155.

Sennett, R. (1996) Flesh & Stone: the body and city in Western Civilisation, N. Y, W. W. Norton & Company.

Massey, D. (2005). For space. London, UK: Sage.

Raco, M., Henderson, S., & Bowlby, S. (2008). Changing times, changing places: Urban development and the politics of space-time. Environment and Planning A, 40, 2652–2673.

Photo   *Old Oak Park Royal Development Corporation area, from Genesis and QPR, Oaklands*

Email

Monica.Degen@brunel.ac.uk

Website

www.sensescitiescultures.com

www.sensorycities.com