Globalisation and liveable cities

Experiences in place-making in Pacific Asia

As cities in Pacific Asia become more tightly integrated into the global economy, issues of liveability need to be considered alongside economic vitality. While place-marketing projects may work to strengthen the economic capacities of the city, their scales and costs strain city budgets and create significant displacements of local residents and businesses. Efforts to create an attractive, themed product may bleach places of their diversity. These impacts require us to question the importance given to such ventures, and to insert the place-making efforts of local communities and agents in creating convivial and liveable urban environments into the global city research agenda. Such an approach argues for a shift in focus from examining the city in terms of its economic competitiveness to a better understanding of the local textures of the city by incorporating social and political processes.

The shared concern of the research brought together in this special edition of *IDPR* is place-making as a principal dimension of the liveability of cities. Understood as a process of transforming space into place, of giving identity, meaning and collective memory to specific locations, place-making is indispensable in creating a sense of neighbourhood and, more broadly, associational life. The overarching question taken up by the authors is how the impacts of globalisation on the built environment of cities influence local capacities for place-making. While much of the evidence suggests that, as a process of privatisation of space for extra-territorial interests, globalisation is, from a local perspective, more a process of place-breaking than place-making (Friedmann, 2007), the cases presented in this volume also reveal ways in which local actors can counter such tendencies. They also reveal tensions that are not simply local–global, but also entail cross-cutting relations between citizens and states, among social classes and across cultural divides.

A rethinking of the concept of liveability is also needed. In the context of developing countries, this concept currently focuses almost exclusively on the physical dimensions – the natural and the built environment, economic growth and urban services – and sees the social and political life of cities as instrumental to achieving material outcomes, rather than as ends themselves (World Bank, 1997; 2000; Bigio and Dahiya, 2004). To reduce the liveability of cities to their material or economic wealth is to miss the social relations needed for what Peattie (1998) puts forth as the highest pursuit of a liveable city, which is its social conviviality. In the same light, in
giving meaning and a sense of shared community life, the interaction of people with
the built environment through place-making is fundamental to the conviviality, and
thus the liveability, of any city.

When we associate place-making with liveability, we see place-making as having
the ability to create healthy social worlds that are the result of individuals and families
being active in interacting and participating beyond their homes. Place-making is
both the outcome of and a critical support for social capital and social efficacy. And
when the outcomes create increased liveability, an emerging literature indicates that
individuals enjoy better health outcomes in addition to a vibrant social environment
(Frumkin, 2003), where positive place-based social supports increase the mental
wellbeing of residents (O’Campo et al., 2008).

As the cases presented in this issue reveal, the tendency of globalisation to create
extra-territorial spaces encounters contradictory forces at the local level. The middle
class, for example, has not only been a source of demand for global commodities and
services, but has also led social mobilisation for democratic reform in Asia. Different
ethnic groups can and do cooperate with each other at the neighbourhood level and
at higher levels in the city. The state is not monolithic, and it is often observed to have
different interests within it working at odds with each other over matters such as urban
policy. Experiences in place-making in various urban contexts are brought together in
this issue as a way of exploring these and other complexities of local–global interac-
tions.

The widespread economic changes and the increasing mobility of people and all
forms of capital have fundamental socio-political implications for the city. As econo-
mies under globalisation become more interdependent and susceptible to decisions
made in other quarters of the world, understanding how urban-centred societies
organise at different levels and react to these changes is a crucial avenue for research.
Set within this multi-layered context of globalising cities in Pacific Asia, the theme of
place-making and livable cities:

• contrasts the place-marketing efforts of local authorities with the place-making
efforts of communities of residents, workers and businesses as an essential project
of the city;
• moves the analysis from transnational capital and local large corporate players as
the agents of change to the local community, local merchants and civic groups as
agents of creating viable social and economic alternatives for the city; and
• intends to discuss the issue of urban economic development alongside the issue of
liveability.

1 Capriano (2007, 650) also recognises that strong social attachments may possibly lead to harmful health outcomes
when increased involvements come with greater stress, or when involvements lead to activities that are unsafe or/
and unhealthy.
Globalising urban space in Pacific Asia

As cities in Pacific Asia become ever more tightly integrated into the global economy, shifts in global–local interdependencies become more deeply transforming in their impacts on the built environment. In the higher-income economies, urban landscapes are being restructured to allow for a transition from their former low-wage export-oriented industrial base to producer services, global consumption and ‘experience economies’ linked with tourism and global spectacles. Even in lower-income economies such as Vietnam and Cambodia, global investments in business districts, tourist areas and peri-urban new town development are rapidly filling urban areas in countries that are still substantially agrarian.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the development of cities in Pacific Asia, though certainly influenced by global forces, was largely in the hands of post-colonial states and local capital. The 1970s marked the rise of a few ‘miracle economies’ that found the right policy mix to be included in a new international division of labour (NIDL), manifested in a sudden deindustrialisation of the Fordist factory system in the global North that was enhanced by technological and institutional innovations in moving labour-intensive assembly operations to newly industrialising economies (NIEs) in the global South (Fröbel et al., 1980). The rise of the first generation NIEs (South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore) was followed to a lesser extent in Southeast Asia by Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines. China and Vietnam would open their economies to join the global factory by the end of the 1980s.

The spatial impacts of joining the NIDL focused mainly on areas that were peripheral to the urban core. Export-processing zones, deepwater container ports and other large-scale infrastructure such as hub airports and fast trains were constructed to effect direct linkages of production and assembly sites to external commodity chains contained within separate corporate circuits of production and distribution. This attention given to production sites and globally-linked transportation linkages left central areas of the city relatively untouched, and low skylines and many middle-class inner-city neighbourhoods, as well as large slum areas, continued to exist in central areas (Jones and Douglass, 2008).

In the mid-1980s, the first round of urban-industrial transformations of the previous decades, with the exceptions of China and Vietnam, were mostly in place, and in the higher-income economies of Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore, they even began to be replaced by new developments as low-wage production rapidly moved offshore, particularly to China from the late 1980s. A second phase of urban restructuring began in the form of intentional world city formation and global consumption, which appeared in Pacific Asia from around 1985 with Japan’s bubble economy, the opening of Pacific Asia to global finance, and the advent of a new era of globally-syndicated urban mega-projects. Unlike the previous manufacturing export round,
most of the investments of this era have been aimed at the urban core (in the form of
global business zones and shopping malls) to accommodate global franchises, chain
stores and name-brand outlets. Peri-urban areas were no longer just potential factory
sites but were instead targeted for huge upscale housing estates and new towns.

The greatly enhanced capacities of global investors to launch mega-projects
reached Asia from the late 1980s onwards, and proved to be particularly impressive,
with no historic precedent in terms of the scale and speed of implementation (Flyvbjerg et al., 2003; Altshuler and Luberoff, 2004; Douglass, 2007). From previous levels
of millions of US dollars in the 1970s, by the 1990s land development projects in
Pacific Asia were surpassing the billion dollar mark, and a decade later they were
over US$10 billion. Recent new town developments, such as Saigon South, are being
constructed for a million residents and are to be completed in a matter of years rather
than decades.

The grand projects are created not only for their functions as offices, commercial
outlets or living spaces. They are also intended to create symbolic value as elements
of world city status, which is now seen as a requirement for winning global investment
in an era of intensifying intercity competition across national boundaries (Marshall,
2003; Daniels et al., 2005; Newman and Thornley, 2005). By the 1990s, almost any
large city could build an export-processing zone or elevated road system, and offering
such public investments as a means to attract global capital had become only marginally successful. Governments instead found themselves compelled to devote scarce
public resources to intentionally creating physical structures and imagery for world
city status for their principal urban centres. This imperative has become so pervasive
that by 2005 Pacific Asia had 25 of the world’s 35 tallest skyscrapers, with each new
building outdoing the last, year by year.

Whether large or small, the innumerable urban development projects directed
by global investors over the last two decades combine to lead to pervasively swift
changes in urban landscapes, particularly in the largest cities of Pacific Asia. Very
tall buildings, global corporate business zones, mega-malls, sports complexes and vast
gated suburban housing estates and new towns are being intensively layered over city
regions. In the process they are replacing many of the pre-existing local small-scale
commercial areas and urban neighbourhoods. In each city hundreds of thousands
of people have been compelled to leave the urban core to make way for the new
urban projects, most of which also reflect a trend toward the privatisation of public
and community spaces.  

2 Muang Thong Thani, a vast new town promoted in Bangkok in the 1990s, was promoted as a US$1 billion
project. Songdo, a global business hub now being constructed on an ocean landfill near Incheon Airport in the
Seoul metropolis, is said to cost US$15 billion (Douglass, 2008).

3 From 1984–88, just in the early phase of the building boom in Bangkok, an estimated 100,000 people within a
ten-mile radius of the centre were displaced by high-rise commercial development (Padco-LIF, 1990). For the
forcefully evicted from their homes and neighbourhoods is estimated to be 1.5 million (Goto, 2007).

A major driver of the trends that are now being experienced in Pacific Asia, where cities are oriented toward the provisioning of global services and consumption, is the appearance and growth of an affluent urban middle class. This expansion of an economic class of consumers has opened cities to unparalleled levels of construction of shopping malls as secure, privately-owned sites for global food franchises and name-brand merchandise. Luxury housing behind high security gates fills the same perceived need to insulate new elites from the ‘chaos’ of poverty and crime, and the unplanned development of the larger urban setting (Dick and Rimmer, 1998; Douglass et al., 2002; Hogan and Houston, 2002; Douglass and Huang 2007).

The scales of these urban design adventures leading up to the turn of the century were impressive. The government of Malaysia constructed what are still the world’s tallest twin towers, Petronas. Shenzhen (on the periphery of Hong Kong in Guangdong, China) grew from a settlement of 40,000 to 4 million inhabitants in fewer than 20 years. In Jakarta, the Kuningan ‘Golden Triangle’ of office buildings was designated for special investment, and 16 new towns ranging from 500 to 10,000 hectares were completed or under construction. In Bangkok, Muang Thong Thani, portrayed proudly as a private city planned for 700,000 people, was nearly completed when it went bust with the financial crises of 1997–98 (New York Times, 1999).

After the 1997–98 crisis, mega-projects not only continued to appear but did so at ever larger scales and costs. In Southeast Asia, a new era of constructing gigantic peri-urban new towns burst onto the scene around 2000. By 2008, Ho Chi Minh City, the principal city-region in one of the lowest-income economies in Southeast Asia, was surrounded by these mega-projects. In both the urban core and peri-urban settings, the city-region of the 1960s had receded into the shadows of the globalised mega-urban region of the early twenty-first century (Jones and Douglass, 2008).

As shown in Figure 1, the new layers of the built environment take many forms, ranging from suburban housing to very tall buildings. But they all call upon similar vocabulary to describe how they fit into the city and what they see as their contribution

1988 Seoul Olympics, an estimated 750,000 people were forcibly evicted (Bread Alert!, 1998). In Jakarta in the late 1990s, a crackdown on slums and trishaw drivers by the governor, who was intent on ridding the city of the poor, caused an estimated 200,000 people to lose their houses and livelihoods (Khow, 2001). Moreover, the coverage of peri-urban land by large-scale housing development is implicated in the annual flooding of Jakarta, which, in 2008, saw more than a million people forced out of their homes.

4 Among the more well known are: Saigon South and Thu Thiem New Urban Development Area in Ho Chi Minh City; Ciputra and Star World in Hanoi, Vietnam; Camko (an abbreviation for ‘Cambodia and Korea’) in Phnom Penh; Kuta Wisata and Kuta Legenda in Jakarta; Eastwood and Megaworld’s Laguna Bel Air in Manila; and Iskandar in Johor, Malaysia (Douglass and Huang, 2007). Ho Chi Minh City alone in 2008 had at least nine peri-urban mega-projects that in total had expected residential populations of several million. From 1990 to 2008, Greater Jakarta (Jabodetabek) constructed approximately 75 new shopping malls (Jakarta Post, 2008; Tempo, 2008).
to society under the banner of a private, exclusive, self-contained, secure, new global urban culture. The result is that major aspects of the city that were once assumed to be public – streets, sidewalks, plazas, parks, and other forms of collective experiences such as cultural festivals – are suddenly private spaces that are immersed in the dynamics of commodification, simulation and new global identities explicitly programmed into the production of new urban space. This vocabulary contrasts fundamentally with the idea of a spontaneous, vibrant city; a ‘heteropolis’ of vernacular architecture and urban landscapes that are not privileged for access or use by a single class, ethnic group or authority, but are instead made by the people themselves with all their differences (Foucault, 1967[Q]). In the emergent city-region, the private–public division of urban space became inverted, with the city becoming less like a grand public sphere in which privately-owned spaces exist under the regulation of the state, and more like a huge private sphere governed by private interests with limited and marginalised

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public space and, by extension, a diminished public sphere of governance (Douglass and Huang, 2007).

As a more complex spatial matrix, the various new elements together create what Graham and Marvin (2001) term ‘secessionary networked spaces’ that rise out of the nation-state by privatising and therefore removing from the sphere of democratic governance much of what previously would have been public space: urban roads, walkways, open spaces, recreational facilities and other amenities. In other terms, these elements form ‘interdictory spaces’ that are designed to systematically exclude the citizenry who do not fit the targeted market profile desired by developers (Flusty, 2001). Where they cannot be excluded, their behaviour can be limited to uses that are desired by the owner of the space, such as shopping, through architectural design and private police (Douglass, 2007). Through exclusion and control, each of the sites is substantially removed from the public sphere of political inquiry and oversight. As such, they are each a part of a citywide ‘desocialization of space’ (Gleeson, 2006).

In addition to the sites identified in Figure 1, other mega-projects for state-of-the-art airports, superhighways and light-rail systems (as well as high-speed internet and other informational linkages) are implemented to form ‘premium networked infrastructure’ that substantially reduces the friction of space in articulating the circulation of capital through the various elements of the new urban landscape (Graham and Marvin, 2001). Most of this infrastructure is made possible through subsidies from and the involvement of governments in the form of land consolidation, forced evictions, tax holidays and other giveaways, and direct financial outlays in partnership with private sector developers.

**Place-marketing, place-making and liveability**

Within the economic environment fostered by globalisation, the changes described above comprise the new work of cities: to develop ways of staying competitive by attracting new investments, visitors and skilled personnel. And within the new work of cities, place-marketing has become a key strategy of urban management (Haider, 1992; Olds, 1995; van de Berg and Braum, 1999), with the key elements being the construction of new urban quarters, monumental spaces and buildings, and the hosting of mega-events (Eisinger, 2000; Doel and Hubbard, 2002).

Place-marketing may be seen as a dominant form of place-making by governments and tourism agencies anxious to create an enduring image of the city as a way to secure economic advantage. The unequal power of place-making agents – governments, agencies and elites on the one hand, and city residents on the other – creates a set of salient issues around the construction of place-marketing projects. Lepofsky and Fraser (2003, 129) point out that such place-marketing projects work at the cultural meaning of the city in terms of ‘who can make claims upon the city’ and ‘whom
cities are for’. Commenting on new types of urban projects, which are a response to economic globalisation, Marshall (2003, 24) points out that such projects ‘encapsulate a specific and narrow definition of urban life and culture’ and ‘this urban vision becomes the dominant urban vision by which all other urban visions must relate’. And visions shape our experience of transnational spaces in certain ways. Huang (2004, 17) observes that these spaces represent an urban glamour zone (a term she borrows from Sassen). To users, the open spaces in such zones are capable of ‘seducing them to claim the spaces for their own purposes, but the political and economic forces working behind the “open space” seldom reveal themselves to the users’ (p. 21). She concludes that ‘these walkers [the users] cannot see the dubious nature of the inflated global city: a convenient door that invites them to fantasise about all kinds of possibilities camouflages an invisible wall indifferent to their desires and dreams’ (p. 33).

While place-marketing projects may work to strengthen the economic capacities of the city, their scales and costs strain city budgets and create significant displacements of residents and local businesses (Whitson and Macintosh, 1996; Eisinger[Q], 2000). Efforts to create an attractive, themed product bleach places of their diversity (Chang, 2000). These impacts require us to question the seemingly over-riding importance given to such ventures and to use the place-making efforts of local communities in the global city research agenda. According to Lepofsky and Fraser (2003, 128), ‘place-making is participation in both the production of meaning and in the means of production of a locale’. With this as the starting point, an elaboration of the concept of place-making should take into account its social and political dimensions, the actors involved, and its different scales.

The mechanics of place-making implies a set of relationships, and diverse elements and processes. Friedmann (2007, 272) points out that place-making involves the intersection between the state (which traditionally controls the urban form in terms of design and amenities) and the people (residents, workers and businesses) who utilise these features in their everyday lives. This relationship between the state and the people is often problematic when seen in the language of rights. Residents are granted the rights to use, but they often have restricted rights when it comes to planning and design, which are reserved for the state or global corporate proxies in the form of professional community and city builders (Lepofsky and Fraser, 2003, 132).

The attempts by residents and local businesses to intervene and shape the production of locales (the second portion of Lepofsky and Fraser’s definition) brings into focus the neighbourhood as a unit of political action and governance. In answering Charles Tilly’s question of whether communities act, Davis (1991, 5) remarks that:

place-bound ‘communities’ do act – sometimes out of a common interest in improving local safety, services or amenity; sometimes out of a special interest in protecting local property values; sometimes because not to act is to acquiesce in the community’s own destruction. So often does the residential urban neighbourhood serve as a seedbed
for collective action that much of contemporary political life simply becomes unintelligible without some understanding of the interests, groups, and conflicts of the ‘homeplace’.

And in this regard as well, Kearns and Parkinson (2001, 2108) argue that ‘in a system of multilevel governance, the neighbourhood forms the foundation upon which the other levels of governance must depend’.

The local capacity for place-making can be helped with support from external linkages. Ho (2008, 61–62) provides a review of case studies to show how alliances with NGOs, professionals and other segments of urban society, as well as state support in terms of a regional governance structure involving representatives from different locales of a wider metropolitan region, can enhance the place-making capacity of communities.

If we think about place-making capacities within place-based communities, then Putnam’s concept of social capital (defined as networks, norms and trust that facilitate collective action; Putnam, 2001, 111) and Sampson’s concept of social efficacy (defined as working trust and shared expectations for action; Sampson, 2004, 108) come to mind. Place-making, collective efficacy and social capital exist as elements in a virtuous cycle in the sense that place-making arises from a high level of collective efficacy and social capital, and at the same time reinforces collective efficacy as well as social capital. These features, in turn, are very much influenced by the nature and design of neighbourhoods. At the scale of the neighbourhood, the availability of social amenities such as community gardens have been positive in building a stronger sense of participation and identity through involvement in a common collaborative activity (Kuo et al., 1998) and in developing community organisation skills (Twiss et al., 2003). According to a study by Leydon (2003), mixed-use neighbourhoods that have a range of amenities close by generate a more walkable lifestyle among its residents, and this in turn results in neighbours being more likely to know each other, being more involved socially and having higher levels of social trust and political participation.

Community place-making capacities can also be appreciated by contrasting these abilities with those of the state and market. At the level of localised actions, Bowles and Gintis (2002, 424) argue that state and market actions are more inefficient when localised actions depend on dispersed private information, and when it comes down to the monitoring of responsible individual actions. Proximity and frequency of interaction allow for information to be acquired, reduce free-rider problems and increase the incentives to behave in socially approved ways.

The elements that go into the production of meaning (the first portion of Lepofsky

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5 Sampson’s 1997 work is interesting in that social efficacy moderates the effects of social disadvantage in influencing criminal activities. In other words, while lower-income neighbourhoods were more likely to have violent crime, lower-income neighbourhoods that had higher levels of social efficacy were more likely to have lower violent crime compared to low-income neighbourhoods where social efficacy was lower.
and Fraser’s definition) are quite diverse. For the ethnic community, place-making elements include everyday rituals that are culturally derived, including ethnic festivals and celebrations and monuments that honour and commemorate (Harney, 2006). Communities have banded together to build schools and religious organisations. The presence and wellbeing of such institutions require the continued support of individuals and their families. Through voluntarism and other forms of contributions, institutional place-based histories and memories are tied to individual and family biographies, and these linkages are vital to place-making (Ho, 2006, 98).

Besides being the focus of sociability and collective action, places can also become repositories of memory when historic events and monuments mark out specific sites of social importance. Place-based memories may transform places into crucibles of opinion by allowing for the formation of a common set of attitudes associated with particular locations. As Cox (1999, 21) points out, these elements can act as symbolic anchors or markers of territorial ideological currents. Through design and history, public squares and open spaces can also contribute to an amplification of action through the ability of such places to provide culturally powerful settings for collective action (Kuper, 1972; Hershkovitz, 1993[Q]). In summary, the formation of such place-based relationships can promote an ability to mobilise and sustain participation by building a support base beyond the local community. This requires government to take such actions seriously (Ho, 2008, 58–9).

If we bear in mind Relph’s (2000, 34) injunction that ‘places have to be made largely through the involvement and commitment of people who live and work in them; places have to be made from inside–out’, we begin to understand the value of this bottom–up process in creating a city that is diverse, strong in generating social capital at the neighbourhood level, and has an active urban-based civil society at the level of the city. This connection between scales (neighbourhood, city, region, nation) is of vital importance. The ability of place-making to generate social capital creates positive externalities for larger regions and compelled Bolton (1992) to argue for a ‘place prosperity’ approach to public policy and expenditure. Thus, while place-marketing is advanced within the paradigm of growing the urban economy and bringing jobs to people, place-making has to be encouraged for its value in strengthening the social fabric of the city, region and the nation.

**Introduction to the papers**

Global versus local tensions are most clearly seen in the papers by Lui on the West Kowloon Project and Chang and Huang on the Singapore River, where place-marketing is contrasted with place-making. Both articles feature attempts by state development agencies to market specific sites for tourism. The absence of local elements in these two projects point our attention to how global competitive discourses have
dominated our attempts to make places through the incorporation of a set of easily identifiable internationalised elements, and in the process we forget that the local is what makes places interesting and memorable: authentic (because it is established through everyday practices and/or celebrated through community participation), creative (because ideas do not come from the same repetitive discourse), and diverse (because many different actors from different segments are involved in the process).

This commercialising tendency in remaking places is also dramatically captured in the article by Hee, Schroepfer, Su and Li. They show how the art community’s attempts to create its own places has commercialising implications beyond the original intentions of the inhabitants, as vibrant art spaces in Shanghai and Beijing face gentrifying pressures from other agents keen on appropriating trendy art spaces for other commercial purposes.

The competitive pressures that cities face make local authorities the willing partners of real estate development agencies in reshaping the city in order to host a range of transnational services activities. Communities are often left out of the picture. Zabiel-skis’s article on Penang in Malaysia indicates that communities might not be against the redevelopment of local areas. Their involvement in the development process, plus their knowledge of place, can allow for a greater sensitivity to place histories as well as a better integration of a new project into the surrounding environment. This paper also reveals how local place-making can overcome potential ethnic and religious divides in social collaboration to present a common front towards external forces. In so doing it gives hope to the possibility of multicultural coexistence through spontaneous place-based social mobilisation.

The process of local involvement in place-making is clearly spelt out in Huang’s paper on the Qing-tien heritage neighbourhood in Taipei. Her analysis shows how residents’ attempts to prevent large-scale gated housing development focused initially on preserving old trees and expanded to incorporate the protection of Japanese houses as heritage assets. The article highlights the interplay of actors involved in the place-making process: NGOs, students, academics, residents, media and local government.

The relative power of different groups to engage in place-making should also be considered, especially when place making attempts are directed at the more visible and symbolic sites of the city. Lim and Padawangi’s analysis of the main square in Bandung shows the shifting political, commercial and religious character of Bandung’s most iconic site. They show how, through a number of renovations, the Masjid Raya (Grand Mosque), which is located at one side of the square, has increasingly come to dominate what has historically been an open civic space, and in the process has displaced different groups of people who used to use the square. This is a cautionary tale about unequal powers within the layer we term ‘civil society’, and the potential conflicts of interest within this heterogeneous sector.

This set of articles provide a significant contribution to the globalising cities liter-
ture by pointing to dangers involved in the uncritical adoption of place-marketing techniques. More importantly, the collection illustrates the vital and complex collaborating (as well as conflicting) roles that states, economic agents, civic groups and communities play in creating cities that are inclusive and diverse. Such features make cities liveable not just as a realised end-product of material gains, but equally as an ongoing process of community and civil society engagement in place-making.

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