



Delft University of Technology

The Right to the City

Rocco, Roberto

Publication date
2021

Document Version
Final published version

Published in
A Manifesto for the Just City

Citation (APA)

Rocco, R. (2021). The Right to the City. In R. Rocco, C. Newton, L. M. Vergara d'Alençon, A. van der Watt, G. Babu, G. Caradonna, N. Tellez, J. Subendran, L. di Gioia, & I. T. Pessôa (Eds.), *A Manifesto for the Just City: Cities for All* (pp. 28-29). TU Delft OPEN Publishing.

Important note

To cite this publication, please use the final published version (if applicable).
Please check the document version above.

Copyright

Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download, forward or distribute the text or part of it, without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license such as Creative Commons.

Takedown policy

Please contact us and provide details if you believe this document breaches copyrights.
We will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Cities for All

A MANIFESTO FOR THE JUST CITY



TU Delft Urban Thinkers Campus

Edited by Rocco, Newton, Vergara, van der Watt, Babu,
Subendran, Tellez, Caradonna, Di Gioia & Pessoa

A MANIFESTO FOR THE JUST CITY

**URBAN
THINKERS
CAMPUS**
THE CITY WE NEED



The event upon which this book is based took place online over four days: 9, 16, 23 and 30 November 2020. Representatives from 101 universities around the world took place in the discussion, and 43 groups from 25 universities submitted a Manifesto.

This is the third UTC organised by TU Delft. The first UTC took place in 2017 and was titled "Education for the City We Need." The second UTC took place in June 2020 and was titled "The New Normal: Urbanisation in the Global South post COVID-19." The results of all TU Delft UTCs are available at: <http://www.globalurbanlab.org>

Published by TU Delft OPEN

TU Delft Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment | The Global Urban Lab
© 2021 The authors and the Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment |
The Global Urban Lab.

Edited by:

Roberto Rocco
Caroline Newton
Luz Maria Vergara d'Alençon
Anja van der Watt
Ganesh Babu

Gabriele Caradonna
Natalia Tellez
Johnathan Subendran
Lucas di Gioia
Igor Tempels Pessoa

TU Delft is a Partner of the **World Urban Campaign**, an advocacy and partnership platform coordinated by **UN-Habitat**. The opinions expressed by the partners of the **World Urban Campaign** do not purport to reflect the opinions or views of **UN-Habitat**. The designations employed in this publication and the presentation of material therein do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the **UN-Habitat** concerning the legal status of any country, area or territory or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

ISBN/EAN :978-94-6366-367-0
<https://doi.org/10.34641/mg.14>



Every attempt has been made to ensure the correct source of images and other potentially copyrighted material was ascertained, and that all materials included in this book have been attributed and used according to their license. If you believe that a portion of the material infringes someone else's copyright, please contact R.C.Rocco@tudelft.nl.

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). CC BY 4.0

ROBERTO ROCCO, DELFT UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY.

It was French sociologist and philosopher Henri Lefebvre who in 1968 coined the phrase *Le droit à la Ville*, ‘the Right to the City’ (Lefebvre, 1968).

For Lefebvre, this right has simultaneously a more abstract and a more concrete dimension (Aalbers & Gibb, 2014). The abstract dimension is the right to be part of the city as an ‘oeuvre,’ as a collective endeavour. It is the right to belong to and the right to co-produce the urban spaces that are created by city dwellers. In other words: “the right not to be alienated from the spaces of everyday life” (Mitchell & Villanueva, 2010, p. 667).

The concrete dimension Lefebvre alludes to is a “claim to integrate social, political, and economic rights, the right to education, work, health, leisure, and accommodation in an urban context that contributes to developing people and space rather than destroying or exploiting people and space” (Aalbers & Gibb, 2014, p. 208). In its abstract symbolic dimension, the Right to the City is “like a cry and a demand” and “can only be formulated as a transformed and renewed right to urban life” (Lefebvre, 1996, p. 158). In other words, the Right to the City is a powerful idea, and a call to action. More recently, this call has been revisited and redefined. Today, it seems more relevant than ever.

David Harvey, for instance, redefined the Right to the City as the power to shape people’s living environment to their wishes and desires: “To claim the Right to the City in the sense I mean it here is to claim some kind of shaping power over the processes of urbanisation, over the ways in which our cities are made and re-made and to do so in a fundamental and radical way” (Harvey, 2008b, n.p.). Harvey continues: “From their very inception, cities have arisen through the geographical and social concentrations of a surplus product. Urbanisation has always been, therefore, a class phenomenon of some sort, since surpluses have been extracted from somewhere and from somebody (usually an oppressed peasantry) while the control over the disbursement of the surplus typically lies in a few hands. This general situation persists under capitalism, of course, but in this case, there is an intimate connection with the perpetual search for surplus value (profit) that drives the capitalist dynamic. To produce surplus value, capitalists have to produce a surplus product. Since urbanisation depends on the mobilisation of a surplus product an inner connection emerges between the development of capitalism and urbanisation” (Harvey, 2008a, p. 24).

“We have, however, yet to see a coherent oppositional movement to all of this in the twenty-first century. There

are, of course, multitudes of diverse social movements focusing on the urban question already in existence – from India and Brazil to China, Spain, Argentina, and the United States – including a nascent Right to the City movement. The problem is that they have yet to converge on the singular aim of gaining greater control over the uses of the surplus (let alone over the conditions of its production). At this point in history, this has to be a global struggle predominantly with finance capital for that is the scale at which urbanisation processes are now working. To be sure, the political task of organising such a confrontation

is difficult if not daunting. But the opportunities are multiple in part because, as this brief history of capitalist urbanisation shows, again and again crises erupt either locally (as in land and property markets in Japan in 1989 or as in the Savings and Loan crisis in the United States of 1987-90) or globally (as in 1973 or now) around the urbanisation process, and in part because the urban is now the point of massive collision – dare we call it class struggle? – between the accumulation by dispossession being visited upon the slums and the developmental drive that seeks to colonise more and

more urban space for the affluent to take their urbane and cosmopolitan pleasures” (Harvey, 2008b).

“One step towards unification of these struggles is to focus on the Right to the City as both a working slogan and a political ideal, precisely because it focuses on who it is that commands the inner connection that has prevailed from time immemorial between urbanisation and surplus production and use. The democratisation of the Right to the City and the construction of a broad social movement to enforce its will is imperative, if the dispossessed are to take back control of the city from which they have for so long been excluded and if new modes of controlling capital surpluses as they work through urbanisation processes are to be instituted. Lefebvre was right to insist that the revolution has to be urban, in the broadest sense of that term, or nothing at all” (Harvey, 2008a, p. 40).

Harvey sees the Right to the City from a Marxist perspective, and focuses on the control of ‘surpluses,’ that is, from the extraction of value from labour and from land. This value extraction is part and parcel of capitalism, but in the last decades it has become both exacerbated and increasingly unfair. Land speculation and land rent have sky-rocketed in some places, making housing all but unaffordable for the great majority of people, while labour has been made ‘precarious,’ that is, people have been stripped of labour protections and salaries are kept low by the ‘gig economy’ (Tower-Clark, 2019) and by formulas like ‘uberisation’ and

THE RIGHT TO THE CITY

'zero-hour' contracts, forcing people to have several jobs to make ends meet.

It is useful for us to see the Right to the City from a democratic perspective. In the democratic perspective, citizen participation, co-creation and co-control are elements of justice, insofar they allow vulnerable voices to be heard and to be taken into account in decision-making. Since the making of the city is intertwined with the making of a public sphere, including people in design and planning processes contributes to making better democracies as well, as citizens feel their demands are being heard and their trust in institutions grows. This requires a radically different way of planning and designing, in which designers and planners act as facilitators in co-creation processes and purveyors of expert knowledge, with which citizens can make better decisions.

References

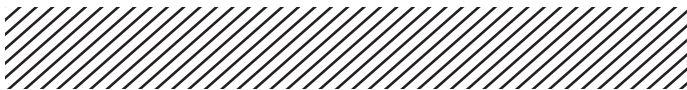
- Aalbers, M. B., & Gibb, K. (2014). Housing and the Right to the City: introduction to the special issue. *International Journal of Housing Policy*, 14(3), 207-213.
- Harvey, D. (2008a). The Right to the City. *New Left Review*, Sept/Oct.(53), 23-40. Retrieved from <https://newleftreview.org/issues/ii53/articles/david-harvey-the-right-to-the-city>
- Harvey, D. (2008b). The Right to the City (online version). Retrieved from <https://davidharvey.org/media/righttothecity.pdf>
- Lefebvre, H. (1968). *Le Droit à la Ville*. Paris: Anthropos.
- Lefebvre, H. (1996). *Writings on Cities*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Mitchell, D., & Villanueva, J. (2010). Right to the City. In R. Hutchinson, M. B. Aalbers, R. A. Beauregard, & M. Crang (Eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Urban Studies* (pp. 667-671). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Tower-Clark, C. (2019). The Uberisation Of Work: Pros and Cons Of The Gig Economy, *Forbes*, July 8, 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/charlestowersclark/2019/07/08/the-uberization-of-work-pros-and-cons-of-the-gig-economy/>

HENRI LEFEBVRE

**THE TRANSFORMATION OF
SOCIETY PRESUPPOSES A
COLLECTIVE OWNERSHIP
AND MANAGEMENT OF
SPACE FOUNDED ON THE
PERMANENT PARTICIPATION
OF THE "INTERESTED
PARTIES," WITH THEIR
MULTIPLE, VARIED AND EVEN
CONTRADICTORY INTERESTS.
IT THUS ALSO PRESUPPOSES
CONFRONTATION [...].**

*THE PRODUCTION OF
SPACE, OXFORD/CAMBRIDGE
(MASSACHUSETTS),
BLACKWELL, 1991.*

H.L. at the AULA of the Old Lutheran Church of Amsterdam. Photo by Verhoeff, Bert / Anefo. [1] Dutch National Archives, The Hague, Photo collection Algemeen Nederlands Persbureau (ANeFo), 1945-1989, CC BY-SA 3.0 nl, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=27290525>



ISBN/EAN: 978-94-6366-367-0



THANK YOU.



CONTACT

Address

**Faculty of Architecture & the Built
Environment/ TU Delft**
Julianalaan 134, 2628 BL, Delft,
The Netherlands

Email

r.c.rocco@tudelft.nl

Online

Websites: <http://www.globalurbanlab.org>
<https://utctudelft.org>
<https://spatial-justice.org>
