

Place Production in the Era of Globalization: The Vectors of Intentionality Model

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INTRODUCTION

In order to explain why places look the way they do, it is critical to understand the dynamics of its transformation and the forces that shape it. These forces are either physical as climate, topography, natural resources and existing architectural and urban heritage, or non-physical as economic, cultural and political forces. The key issue to understanding how these forces interact and negotiate the production of place, is identifying both the power and intention of each. In this sense, these forces could be perceived as vectors that together lead to an urban resultant.

In this paper, I propose an analytical model which I call *The Vectors of Intentionality Model* that provides a better understanding of the dynamics of urban transformation through unfolding the forces or vectors that shape it. I am arguing that forces which contribute to the process of place production can be categorized into four main groups or agents. First is *state*, and I mean by state the form of government, bureaucracy and other institutions that have the right to exert power in order to retain order. It is the ruling structures in any urban domain not limited to the modern political systems, but also the ancient and medieval. Second is *market*, or the arena of exchange and commercial activities with its institutions that govern trade and flows of capital. Third is *locale*, which includes all forces emerging from place reflecting its physical and nonphysical features, and the interests and intentions of its people. Traditions, culture, urban heritage, geography all fall in this category. Fourth is the *global domain* or the non-local context from which foreign ideas, money and people flow to the place. It is worth noting here that the notion of global

flows is not limited to contemporary globalization. It refers to all forms of foreign cultural, ideological, economical and political influences that tend to shape the process of place production.

No doubt that the relation between these four agents is extremely complicated. It is almost impossible to identify the exact range of influence of any of them. Besides; locating a particular vector in one category or the other could also be debatable. However, I intend by this schematic model to explicate a better understanding of the process of place production and the dynamics that shape it. This model doesn't attempt to quantify all the forces that contribute to the process of place production nor exactly measure the power of any of them. The main objective of the research is to shed light on some issues that are relatively ignored in many of the discussions on place in the era of globalization.

In the Vectors of Intentionality Model, I assume that each of the four agents is represented in the process of place production by a set of vectors that vary in power and intentionality. The notion of intentionality or direction is so critical in this process. To emphasize its importance, we can imagine a set of vectors at the point of interaction. It is possible that two very powerful vectors with opposite intentions might eliminate each other leaving a less effective force to lead the process. In some cases, it is possible that a single powerful vector might neutralize the influence of many others and deflect the whole process towards its intention. In other cases, a group of weak vectors might form a coalition that can stand in face of a single powerful one. There are endless possibilities of interaction. However; what really matters is the fact that same resultant could be reached

through different forms of interaction. Besides, the process of interaction itself is always in a state of transformation since over time, some forces disappear from the scene and others emerge. The proposed Vectors of Intentionality Model not only focuses on the power and orientation of interacting vectors, but also the angle of diversion between them. This angle reflects the degree of homogeneity between the interacting forces. The more diverse and heterogeneous the interacting forces are, the larger this angle, and the more complicated is the process of negotiating a resultant.

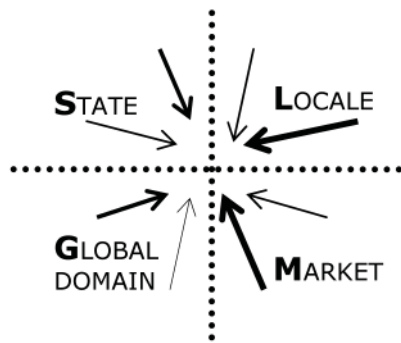


Figure 1. Schematic diagram of the Vectors of Intentionality Model with the four main agents with some interacting vectors with diverse powers and directions

THEORETICAL CONTEXT

Places are always exposed to forces which make them in a continuous state of transformation. Users' needs and intentions are among the most dominant forces that tend to reshape places. Henri Lefebvre calls this process "diversion" or re-appropriation where places are reshaped to fulfill the continuously changing needs and interests. He argues that "Every space is already in place before the appearance in it of actors... seeking to re-appropriate it" (Lefebvre 1991, p.57). The concept of diversion is very important in the field of urban design and in particular in the study of historic settings. Understanding the complexity of these settings requires the unfolding of the strata of diversion that took place over time. Besides, this concept emphasizes the power of locale and its capability to re-appropriate the so called 'generic spaces.'

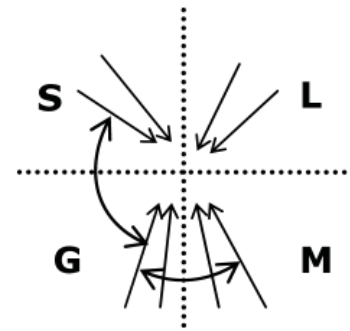


Figure 2. The angle of diversion as an indicator of the degree of homogeneity of intentions between interacting vectors

In literature on urbanism and globalization much emphasis is usually given to the notion of global flows being capital, ideas, people or information and its impact on the spatial organization of globalizing places. These *flows* (see Castells 2000) or *agents* (see Dear and Flusty, Sassen 2002 & Pizarro et al. 2002) or *scapes* of influence (See Appadurai 1990) are perceived as forces that tend to reshape places in order to fulfill global interests. The focus on the role of global flows has contributed to the emergence of a stereotype that generalizes the expected impact of globalization on cities (See Augé 1995, Ritzer 2000& Barber 1996). It assumes that the more powerful and intense global flows are, the faster and more dramatic is the expected urban transformation. The role of any forms of local contribution or resistance in the process of place transformation has relatively been ignored.

Narrowing the focus to only the impact of global flows overshadows many critical urban issues that deserve further investigation. For example, are places that feature dramatic transformation in response to globalization, necessarily exposed to more global forces than others? In fact, local forces could play a significant role in neutralizing the impact of global forces, which makes some places seem relatively static despite their exposure and interaction with intense global flows. This raises another critical question. Do all places have the same tendency to change? In other words, do some relatively static places have more inertia than others? In the following section I will discuss with more depth the notion of place inertia in the

era of globalization using the proposed analytical model.

UNDERSTANDING PLACE INERTIA

It could be argued that any spatial transformation is a response to changes in either the power or the orientation of one or more of the forces applying on place. Transformation could also be attributed to the introduction of a new vector. In this sense, places that don't experience significant transformation are in fact either not exposed to forces that intend to change it, or are under the influence of powerful forces that simply neutralize the impact of each other. In the latter case, those places hold what could be described as static energy that can lead to dramatic spatial transformation if one of the major forces is withdrawn from the place.

To put this discussion in the context of globalization, we may look at a city like Dubai for example. Since its origin, Dubai has relied on trade benefiting from its location as a port. The city has been exposed to enormous external cultural, economic and political influences especially during British occupation. Till the 1950s, Dubai, like many of the Arab Gulf states, has retained its conservative indigenous identity. Local traditions and religion were the major forces that kept the place in a relatively static shape. Religious ideals and tribal traditions were the constitution that governed Dubai and are still shaping many other cities in the region. They gained their power through colliding with the ruling authority or the state. In other words, the state and locale formed a collision of resistance in face of global flows. Once the state in Dubai decided to embrace a relatively liberal economic and social approach during the 1960s, a dramatic transformation began to take place. Global flows supported by state policies simply dominated the process of place production. The disengagement between the religious institution and state has led to the collapse of local resistance which retained Dubai's indigenous identity for centuries. Religious forces were shifted from the scope of the state to the underrepresented locale.

The example of Dubai reflects how changes in the relations between interacting vectors can lead to dramatic urban transformation. The new ruling paradigm as stated by Sheikh Rashid Al Maktoum

the ruler of Dubai (1958-1990) became "what is good for business is good for Dubai". His statement clearly emphasizes the collision between state, which he represents, and market capitalism.

It worth noting here that the case of Dubai is significantly different from what happened in some major Chinese cities like Shanghai or Beijing for example, where dramatic urban transformation could be attributed to the empowerment of market forces supported by global flows on the expense of state control. In other words, when the state forces that controlled the market for decades in China have diminished, the energy in the place was capable of triggering dramatic changes. Laurence Ma and Fulong Wu (2005) discuss the transformation of Chinese cities in response to the post socialism reform. They describe the socialist Chinese cities as "seats of administration that anchored the state territorial power... Their urban form contained symbolic elements designed to glorify socialism" (Ma & Fulong 2005 p.5). So once this state control began to relax, at least in some areas, a process of urban transformation started to take place. The economic reform that featured relative decentralization of authority and the right of individuals to lease land has allowed market, and in particular market capitalism, to play a significant role in place restructuring. According to Ma and Fulong (2005), new places like urban high-tech and financial districts, glittering shopping malls, chain stores, fancy restaurants and gated communities have spread in major Chinese cities (Ma & Wu 2005, p.7). These projects construct the image of global market capitalism that was hindered for decades under the socialist system.

The distinction between the globalization of Dubai and Shanghai emphasizes the problem of simplifications made by some scholars who perceive global flows as the major agents of urban transformation in the era of globalization. Dubai and Shanghai might feature some similarities like their high tech skyscrapers, business headquarters or what Wolff calls "citadels" (Friedmann & Wolff 1982) that separates upper classes from the lower levels in the class hierarchy. They are both world cities according to Peter Hall's definition, since they are national centers of trade, great ports where exchange of goods take place, sites of leading finance centers and headquarters of trading banks and insurance organizations (Hall

1966, p.7). Like other world cities, they are production sites for the leading service industries (Sassen 1991). These cities, as argued by Sassen, feature a concentration of "infrastructure and the servicing that produce a capability of global control" (Sassen 1995, p. 63). They are hubs of international networks of capital, information and communications flows. They also provide a quality of life that attracts the skilled immigrants (See Simon in 1995, p. 144). However; it could be argued that despite all these similarities, the two cities were not shaped only by global flows. There are other forces unique to each city that significantly contributed to the process of place production. This leads me to another dilemma that has been widely discussed in the literature on cities and globalization. It is the loss of identity, the emergence of the so called "generic cities" all over the world. In the following section, I will discuss the notion of genericness and whether there is a generic city or not.

INVESTIGATING THE NOTION OF GENERICNESS

By the end of the 20th century, the nature of the so called generic cities or places became the core issue in many studies. Castells and Hall describe the generic nature of contemporary cities as "a series of low, discreet buildings, usually displaying a certain air of quiet good taste, and set amidst impeccable landscaping in that standard real-estate cliché, a campus-like atmosphere... in every dynamic urban area in the world" (Castell & Hall 1994). Contemporary generic cities are different than those of the 19th century in the way they are supported by the rapid progress in information technology. Images of western ways of living are influencing developments across the globe. Rem Koolhaas discusses the homogenization of cities, asking: "is the contemporary city like the contemporary airport - 'all the same'? Is it possible to theorize this convergence? And if so, to what ultimate configuration is it aspiring?" He argues that after some time "the generic quickly becomes specific" (Koolhaas 1996) or in other words, it is localized in response to the forces in the place. Koolhaas argument emphasizes the hybrid nature of places in the era of globalization. As argued by Anthony Appiah (2006), globalization can contribute to the hybridity of some places, however; it can also overwrite others' unique

identities and impose some sort of genericness on places. According to him, "Globalization can produce homogeneity, but globalization is also a threat to homogeneity" (Appiah 2006).

Much of the criticism of the so called generic cities focuses on the visual product or the resultant which as discussed earlier in the paper could be achieved by infinite forms of interactions. In this sense the question should be: Is Beverly Hills, Cairo or Orange County, Beijing has been shaped by the same forces that created the ones in Southern California? In other words, are the economic, political, technical and cultural forces in these places identical? Are the four agents performing the same exact role in the process of place production? I am arguing that they are not, although the resultants might feature some visual coherence. What really matters is the process not the end resultant.

This leads us to the dilemma of the loss of identity in the new global order. Many scholars have argued that places are losing their authentic identity in response to global flows. In *Cultural Complexity: Studies in the Social Organization of Meaning* 1992, Ulf Hannerz describes the western domination of the process of cultural flows that feature globalization saying "when the center speaks, the periphery listens, and mostly does not talk back" (Ulf 1992). His argument ignores any local contribution to the process of place production. In *Jihad vs. McWorld* 1995, Benjamin Barber made the argument that McDonald as the icon or agent of globalization can homogenous world cultures, their ways of life and intentions. He argues that with its 20 millions customers around the world every day, "Macdonald is creating a universal tribe whose members share interests and ubiquitous needs" (Barber 1995, p. 23). But is this the case today? In fact, McDonald menus are different almost everywhere. It offers Halal meat in Islamic countries, and kosher for Jews. It replaced the Big-Mac with Mac-Arabia in the Middle East and introduced Mc-falafel in Egypt. Even its facades and interior decoration now reflect many of the local features or at least respond to place restraints. In other words, the most powerful icon of globalization, as argued by Barber, is now responding to local forces and adapting itself to fulfill people's diverse interests and intentions. Is this a defeat of globalization? Or

is it the emergence of new vectors from the locale that managed to reshape some of the impacts of global flows. Quoting Manuel Castells "resistance confronts domination, empowerment reacts against powerlessness, and alternative projects challenge the logic embedded in the new global order" (Castells 1997, p.69).

The rapid and dramatic transformations across the globe are not indicating that we are moving towards a more homogenized universal society. The same conception was experienced many decades ago when modernism was expected to promote more cultural homogeneity across the world through the standardization of solutions and the universality of ideas. By the beginning of the 20th century, Max Weber argued that the role of rituals and religious beliefs in shaping people's decisions is now diminishing and being replaced by the modern rationality that is based on science and technology (Abrahamson 2004, p.12). His argument, to a great extent, could be contested today by the rise of religious fundamentalism even in the West. The agents of modernism being state authority and science might have managed to impose some sort of genericness in the beginning. However; many case studies have emphasized the power of local forces and its capability of reshaping the impact of the imposed forces. Macleod (1991) describes this process and the shift towards local traditions saying: "turning in the direction of traditional symbols, customs, images and behavior forms an important countertrend in a modernizing world" (MacLeod 1991).

The emergence of what Castells call "resistance identity" could be explained as a result of contradiction of intentions of local and the global forces. In this sense, the early stages of contemporary globalization featured one-way forms of interaction that tended aggressively to penetrate the boundaries of many indigenous societies and reshape its identity. However; this is not the end of the process. If same attention is given to the other agents that contribute to the process of place production, it will be obvious that new vectors are joining the course. As argued by Frank Lechner (2004), fundamentalism is a response to the invasion of global culture. "It is an attempt to restore the sacred traditions that is threatened by greedy universalizing ideologies" (Lechner 2004). Hall (1992) argues that local

identities usually strengthen in response to the process of cultural globalization (Hall 1992).

It seems that globalization as noted by Schuerkens (2004) "is achieved by the domination of a given system elements at the expense of others, or by common acceptance of global standards" (Schuerkens 2004). I would add that this process is dynamic and in a continuous state of becoming. The role of local forces emerges when the global standards do not fit into the place. A process of localization whether by filtering or translating the influence of the global forces becomes essential. Local cultures can no longer be seen as "a realm of reproducible practices and dispositions" (Schuerkens 2004). I would argue that the one-way form of interaction is diminishing in favor of the locale.

The same concept of understanding place as a continuous process of interaction of vectors rather than an end resultant, applies on the arguments regarding the diminishing role of the nation state in the era of globalization. In the following section I will discuss this dilemma using the vectors of intentionality model in order to provide a better understanding of the role of state as a major agent in the process of place production.

MODERNISM, GLOBALIZATION AND THE NATION STATE

The power of state is in fact coercion to protect individuals' rights from those who tend to violate order. As noted by John Rawls (1993), "government alone has the authority to use force in upholding its laws" (Rawls 1993, p. 136). It could be argued that the concept of state interference in the process of place production is as old as early civilizations. The notion of the state has passed through many phases of transformation through history. The ancient and medieval monarch system provided rulers with absolute power supported by either their religious role or association with the religious institution. In this sense, a significant portion of the forces enforced by state like codes and regulations simply reflected the religious ideals and ethos in the place. It is worth noting here that in many places like North Africa and Spain during the medieval times for example, religious forces were simply global flows of ideas. It was either introduced to the place by missionaries and travelers or was

enforced by armies and occupation. This note is critical in order to emphasize how same forces can shift between from one agent to the other over time.

The rise of the modern state represents a critical shift in the concept of the state. The break between state and church in Europe significantly influenced the absoluteness of its authority. Many of the modern philosophers like Locke for example, rejected the way religion dictated laws for the state (Locke 1955, p.17). "Liberalism developed in opposition to dogmatic religion, arguing that all form of knowing, including religious knowledge, should be subjected to rational" (Opello & Rosow 1999, p. 94). Max Weber states that "modern society is characterized by the dominance of rational action... and the rejection of traditional beliefs in favor of independent reasoning" (Sitton 2003). The belief in progress and the empowerment of reasoning and rational thinking have supported the revolution in science and technology. Rational, scientific and objective became the virtually identified ideals that shaped the epistemology of modernity (Schrag 1992). Science simply replaced religion as a major force that shapes state decisions. Calvin Schrag (1992) argues that "it was modern philosophy that issued the birth certificate for the off spring of rationality" (Schrag 1992). Liberals believed that "science would perfect human morals and social life by providing a critique of all irrational belief systems" (Opello & Rosow 1999, p. 112). The role of the state was again empowered by reasoning and science instead of religion. It became more centralized and on the scale of urban planning, has exercised a relatively absolute power. Philosophers like Hegel perceived the state as the ultimate agent for change in any society (See Hegel 1942). The absolute authority of the state represented by its planners and architects was described by Le Corbusier saying: "authority must now step in... the authority of a father concerned for his children" (Rowe 1995). Le Corbusier's statement reflects this new emerging form of authority backed by science, since agents who had scientific knowledge were the ones given the authority.

The revolution in communications and networking during the era of globalization managed to reshape the role of the state. As argued by Castells, "state control over space and time is

increasingly bypassed by global flows of capital, goods, services, technology, communication and information (Castells 1997, p. 243). Castells refers to Anthony Giddens definition of the nation state as a "bordered power-container, the pre-eminent power container of the modern era" (Giddens 1985, p. 120). According to Castells, the problem of the state in the era of globalization is that the borders are broken by global flows and the containers are becoming contained themselves (Castells 1997, p. 244). Castells identifies three main challenges that face the nation state. These are "globalization and interlocking of ownership, flexibility and pervasiveness of technology, and autonomy and diversity of media" (Castells 1997, p.254). These three challenges, which according to Castells, have managed to overpower the nation state are in fact new vectors that joined the process of place production. However; the impact of these vectors on the role of the state cannot be generalized on all places. As argued by Edward Soja (2000) the conclusions made by scholars regarding the end of the nation state and the emergence of borderless world "are not just gross exaggerations but a deflection away from making practical and theoretical sense of the significant changes triggered by globalization" (Soja 2000). The state of Dubai again is a perfect example of states that were actually empowered by globalization. In 2006, Dubai Ports World, a company own by the state of Dubai was able to win a contract to operate six major U.S. ports. This actually emphasizes the power of this state and its role in the global economic arena, not to mention the locale. Although the economy of Dubai mainly relies on global capitalism, many of the projects in the city are in fact owned by the state. Political rulers who envisioned Dubai as a global city played the main role in the process of place production. The process of development in Dubai mainly focuses on creating a global image, something that makes the city known across the world. Iconic projects that can create this image were given the priority. Dubai as a place lacks the historic charisma that features other world cities like Rome, Tokyo or Cairo. It doesn't have the political influence as New York or Beijing, or the cultural importance as Paris or London. Accordingly, in order to make the city famous, the idea was simply to build the most luxurious, most expensive, tallest and largest buildings in the world. The vectors representing the state

in the process of place production were simply homogenous with global and market intentions. In other words, the angle of divergence between the three agents was minimal. This in fact came on the expense of the locale. The state embraced western ideals of capitalism but rejected those related to democracy and civil rights. In other words, it filtered the flows of ideas to the place allowing only the ones that can empower its role. Labor unions are not allowed in Dubai. Freedom of speech is limited and press is monitored by the government. Women are still excluded from the political arena although many of them are active in the field of business and trade. Political leaders and official are not elected by the people.

The case of Dubai actually emphasizes the importance of contextualizing the notion of state and its relation to the other three agents. Identifying the changes in the intentionality and power of forces emerging from each of the four agents is critical to the understanding of the dynamics of urban transformation. It is obvious that place really matters and global flows are not the only forces that shape the process place production and transformation. It is a process of negotiation where the role of other actors ought to be acknowledged.

CONCLUSION

The main objective of this paper is to challenge the stereotyping approach embraced by some scholars to describe the nature of the process of place production in the era of globalization. Much emphasis is always given to the notion of global flows of capital, people and ideas and their impact on place. These flows are perceived as the major forces that shape globalizing places. This approach actually justifies the stereotyping of the impact of globalization on different cities. It ignores the role of any other forces in the process of place production.

The paper proposes the Vectors of Intentionality Model which is a device that allows the unfolding of other forces that shape place. It introduces a different approach to understanding the role of state, locale, market and the global domain in the process of place production and transformation. These four agents are represented in the process by vectors, each having a power and intentionality.

The interaction of these vectors is simply the negotiation of place production or the urban resultant. Understanding the role of these agents and the relation between their vectors is critical to recognizing the actual impact of globalization on place. The model also provides a better understanding of some urban dilemmas discussed widely by scholars as the generic city, the end of the nation state and the distinction between modern and postmodern urbanism.

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