

Response Paper on David Harvey's "Contested Cities: Social Process and Spatial Form"

Harvey's article is an interesting—and equally important—read to notice that, despite its ever-increasing significance, "the urban frequently disappears from our discussions of broader political-economic processes and social trends" (232). This is particularly striking considering how the urban is becoming more and more popular in every part of the world. So much so that one of the assumptions Harvey made in his article, which he wrote at the end of the 20th century, is that more than half of the world would be living in urban areas in the early 21st century. Not surprisingly, proving Harvey's assumption, UN's statistics from 2018 show that 55% of the world population was indeed classified as urban.

The keywords Harvey uses which I want to include in my paper are as follows: urbanization, the city, and community. To show why the urban must remain part of political and economic discussions, Harvey explains these terms by looking at processes and outcomes, arguing that, when it comes to cities and communities, the outcome of a process is never ultimate, instead, it continues to feed the process which keep evolving into different outcomes and the cycle keeps on going. It is never finalized, and it requires constant attention. This forms the basis of Harvey's claims. He doesn't really have what many would call evidence, he supports his claims by using quotations from Tony Leeds and Iris Marion Young. These, although logical and reasonable in nature, are not *evidence*. Harvey does not provide any scientific facts—disregarding the introductory bit about the classification of urban areas, which, even then, still lacks any sort of citation—or statistics to support his claims. Nevertheless, I would still say he drives his points home successfully, albeit without a single work cited—which would have made his arguments a lot stronger.

There is one point that I want to disagree, however. It is not to say Harvey does not make any sense as he makes his argument, it is just to point out a possible criticism to what he

says. Harvey, in an attempt to prove that the distinction between natural environment and the built environment has blurred—which is by no means irrational, I only feel that, without any facts or citations, this claim feels lacklustre in contrast to his other claims—asks the reader to “[g]o and look in a field of wheat and say where nature begins and society ends” (236), and says it’s not possible. I would say, if this question is asked to an ordinary person, who is not working in politics or urban planning or anything related to it, would be able to give an answer to it. Anything which human hasn’t touched, or anything that is not human made, would be nature to the ordinary person. Harvey claims this is because people think cities are “not part of a process” (236), and I do think this is a sound argument to make, but I am not of the belief that the public thinks cities to be different than natural environment simply because they don’t think them to be part of a process. Human-made things—or processes brought about by human influence—entail a certain alienation from nature, which is why the distinction between the built environment and the natural, for the general public at least, exists.

Nevertheless, Harvey makes a very important assumption in his paper when he claims that “the qualities of urban living in the next century will define the qualities of life for the mass of humanity” (232). And as a reader of today, we know what he claims is true. This renders his article all the more significant. Then, Harvey’s desire to include discussions of the urban in our politics alongside other subjects seems to me very plausible, in fact, as something needed. Despite some of its shortcomings—such as no citation or facts to back up his claims, and sometimes making lacklustre arguments—Harvey’s make a vital point: The urban needs to be discussed more in politics, and our understanding of cities and communities—as mentioned above—should change for a better future of urban life.