

Research

The Seed in the Cityscape

A study of the property development mechanism and its influence on the growth of cities

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Abstract

Property development transforms the face of our cities, and is responsible for many of the physical shells that form our skylines and their sometimes grandiose building forms. The property developer is a significant transactional actor in this phenomenon, the often un-popular gatekeeper who commands the mechanism, and a member of our society who primarily holds a key to a growing channel through which much of our cities must pass, to change and grow. As such, despite it being the realm of what is seen often as remote, romantic and even dangerous 'archetypal' characters, this mechanism enjoys a powerful and unique position in our urban creation and associated societal processes. Local authorities and their urban planners therefore, still continue to rely substantially on private commercial developers to provide new supply in housing and other building markets- a continuing point of contention in the planning and associated arenas.

The mechanism, its actors and drivers are represented in a transactional model which explains its catalytic effect on the proliferation of buildings in cityscapes, which have become obsolete or dilapidated, and in turn are rejuvenated in context with the fabric of the city that surrounds them. Such proliferations are proposed to be caused by the mechanism and its transactional elements.

Study Objectives

To explain the influence that the property development mechanism has on the growth of buildings in our cityscapes. The proposed model explains the dependency of our cities on the mechanism as a means of building supply, the outcomes of which are not always as envisaged in city plans and visions. The research provides a greater understanding of this phenomenon and informs future urban and growth theory of our cities.

Data Support

The explanatory model is built based on the writer's collection of data from his involvement in the mechanism across several case examples over three decades, in obsolete/dilapidated and dynamic cityscapes.

The model is supported further by data collection through two contemporary case studies in Townsville. In one case (The Palmer St Precinct) the mechanism resulted in semi-obsolete land being changed into an active hotel and eat street precinct and the other case, (The Railway Land Precinct) activation did not proceed substantially, and the land remained partly undeveloped. The reasons for the latter are analysed to show the model's relevance and dormant nature as a phenomenon 'in waiting'. The mechanism in effect is proposed to act like a seed in the cityscape.

For further details

See our research web site: www.jondrane.net/research
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Please note that this research process is undertaken based on the principles noted in the UNSW Faculty of Built Environment Human Research Ethics Advisory Panel.

Should you require further clarification independent of the researcher, you are able to contact the ethics panel independently. More details are provided on the following web page:

<http://www2.fbe.unsw.edu.au/futurestudents/PGRresearch/HREAP/>

Case Study Townsville 2012

A study of the proliferation of buildings in the Palmer Street and Railway Precincts, Townsville, Far North Queensland, Australia

Townsville is a regional city in Far North Queensland Australia. It is often described by Queenslanders as 'the capital of the north', and enjoys a multi-sector economy which includes, government, defence, tertiary education, resources and tourism, together with one of the major ports in Australia.

In 2003 to 2007 two cityscape precincts in Townsville were subject to intense development stimulation. The Palmer St precinct on one hand was transformed into an active eat street and hotel precinct, whilst the Railway Precinct saw patchy development in the same period, although both precincts were the subject of city visions and stimulus by local authorities.

In this case study, the ensuing phenomenon of 'prolific building growth' in these dilapidated cityscapes is explored and explained, by what is proposed as the central force of change - 'the property development mechanism'.

An explanatory model of the 'property development mechanism' is created in the setting of dilapidated cityscapes which are seen as a 'field of activation' for the mechanism and its actor 'the property developer'. The reasons for the different levels of activation are explored, and the findings both support and strengthen the model, and form a basis for future exploration and development of the model.