

Call for Papers: Urban Space, Commodification and Ethics (Special Issue)

Yusuf Yüksekdağ (Istanbul Bilgi University), Bilge Serin (University of Glasgow)

“A commodity appears at first sight an extremely obvious, trivial thing. But its analysis brings out that it is a very strange thing” (Marx, 1990, XVIII)

Under capitalist production relations, among other ‘things’, urban space per se has extensively been commodified while also becoming a medium for expanding commodification (Brenner et al., 2009). Within contemporary urbanization processes, commodification practices variegated from enclosure of commons and public land (Christophers, 2018; Swyngedouw, 2015) and privatization of public space and social services (Bayliss et al., 2021; Loukaitou-Sideris, 1993), to financialization of real estate and housing (Aalbers, 2016; Aalbers et al., 2020; Fields, 2018). This expansion of commodification in urban space has become visible in many cities, many districts going slower or faster, fully or partially, through processes of gentrification as “the transformation of a working-class or vacant area of the central city into middle-class residential or commercial use” (Lees, Slater and Wyly 2008: xv) in different capacities. From below, local residents might demand for improving urban space and built environment that is assumed to develop the districts, make the space more accessible, and increase job opportunities (Macleod and Johnstone 2012; Heslop and Ormerod 2019). From above, the state and the real estate industry attempt to impose the canonical triad of the political geography of development, ‘civilized’ behaviour and rule of law in transforming the urban space (Springer 2013). Urban regeneration might engender commodification of a variety of public spaces surrounding the target of gentrified locations (Springer 2010; Kirby 2012). On the face value, some individuals might seem free to access the privatised public spaces. However, profit-based management and securitization exclude substantial access of the many, in particular of marginalized groups (Lloyd and Auld 2010). In addition, the emerging smart governance might exacerbate these inequalities, given its market-driven rationale, through mechanisms such as symbolic profiling and digital exclusion (Grossi and Pianezzi 2017). In between neo-liberal urban regeneration and an alternative demand from below for more inclusive production of urban space, certain resistive mechanisms also appear in various forms of commoning practices from social service provision via mutual aid to squatting (Gibson-Graham et al., 2016; Pikner et al., 2020; Ruivenkamp and Hilton, 2017; Stavrides, 2016; Yardımcı 2020).

Ethical Perspectives on Urban Space and Commodification

Commodification, as the primitive driving force of capital accumulation, is destined to expand by turning things into market commodities. While the practice per se long remained normalised and unchallenged under capitalist production relations, its expansion to controversial areas of (everyday) life is another story. This expansion results in the creation of ‘contested commodities’ (Radin, 1996). When commodification as a practice and a process enters the contested territory such as living things, its ethical implications are more visible and imminent than, perhaps, privatisation of the grid, water infrastructure or even social services. Regardless, services and goods pertinent to urban space and the degree of commodification they endure have

been a locus of contestation. More attention is required with regards to problematizing commodification and urban space and articulating ethically relevant interests questioning the commodification in this territory.

Unlike the urban transformation and gentrification in 1990s, there is now a premise and justificatory rationale of security and healthy socialization through which urban locus is built upon - while the cities are overrun with increasing population and building densities. There is also a growing concern about commodification-smart city nexus among scholars, but this has not been reflected in the ethical literature that rather targets implications of datafication on privacy and surveillance (Zwitter 2014; Floridi et al. 2020). We argue that there is a recent growing interest in the practices like gentrification or privatisation of public space in reference to the economic factors behind these practices, their role in dispossession, and their impact on individuals' right to shelter - those practices deepening the commodification (Prudham, 2009) in urban space should be questioned to their very core regarding ethical implications as well.

These should not be investigated only in economic terms nor should housing be confined to a matter of shelter (Madden and Marcuse 2016; Zimmer 2017; Huber and Wolkenstein 2018). This is not a bandwagon approach but rather to highlight the commodifying logic of the recent urban transformation that leads to deal with the end-result of intensified commodification in urban spaces rather than discussing the very wrong of conceiving them as a commodity before they are labelled as one (Madden and Marcuse 2016).

We propose three questions to explore the commodification in/of urban space: How to conceptualize it? What are the examples of its practices and processes? What are its ethical implications?

Exploring these warrants a conceptual and empirical discussion on different processes and practices of commodification targeting the urban spaces, and decommodification in urban space together with their ethical implications and approaches.

We invite conceptual, empirical and ethical studies engaging the commodification in/of urban space and its ethical implications, broadly defined. These may be around the themes and the questions below, but not limited to:

- Conceptual perspectives and theoretical approaches on commodification (pertinent to urban spaces)
- Ethical and transgressive perspectives on contemporary urbanization practices including gentrification, smart cities, privatization or remunicipalisation of services
- Case studies on commodification and decommodification in urban space
- Commodification in urban space facilitated by new or emerging technologies (e.g. smart cities)
- Primitive accumulation/accumulation by dispossession via privatization of public services and spaces and the ethical implications attached to these practices
- Commons and commoning in urban space and their future
- Emerging commoning and mutual aid in urban space, especially during the pandemic, their potential and ethical implications
- Platforms, their potential for commoning in urban space, and their ethical implications
- Future of commodified or decommodified urban spaces, key infrastructure and practices

Format of the Publication: This call is for a Special Issue on Urban Space, Commodification and Ethics. We aim to hold an online workshop on the 29th of October 2021 (subject to change) in order to facilitate discussion among the authors. The workshop will be a medium for the authors to debate their argument with each other as well as making themselves familiar with other papers through the paper presentations. The target journal will also be decided during the workshop. After the workshop, the authors will have 3-4 months to finalise the papers (deadline: 28th of February 2022).

Please send the abstracts around 400 words to yusuf.yuksekdag@bilgi.edu.tr and Bilge.Serin@glasgow.ac.uk. The abstract should clearly state the aim, methodology and position/theoretical approach of the research. The deadline for abstract submission is the 15th of September 2021.

Notification of abstract selection results: 24th of September 2021.

References

- Aalbers, M.B., 2016. *The Financialization of Housing: A political economy approach*. Routledge.
- Aalbers, M.B., Rolnik, R., Krijnen, M., 2020. The Financialization of Housing in Capitalism's Peripheries. *Hous. Policy Debate* 30, 481-485. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10511482.2020.1783812>
- Bayliss, K., Mattioli, G., Steinberger, J., 2021. Inequality, poverty and the privatization of essential services: A 'systems of provision' study of water, energy and local buses in the UK. *Compet. Change* 25(3-4): 478-500.
- Brenner, N., Marcuse, P., Mayer, M., 2009. Cities for people, not for profit. *City* 13(2-3): 176-184.
- Christophers, B., 2018. *The New Enclosure: The Appropriation of Public Land in Neoliberal Britain*. Verso.
- Fields, D., 2018. Constructing a New Asset Class: Property-led Financial Accumulation after the Crisis. *Econ. Geogr.* 94, 118-140. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00130095.2017.1397492>
- Floridi, L. et al. 2020. How to Design AI for Social Good: Seven Essential Factors. *Science and Engineering Ethics* doi: 10.1007/s11948-020-00213-5
- Gibson-Graham, J.K., Cameron, J., Healey, S., 2016. Commoning as a postcapitalist politics, in: Amin, A., Howell, P. (Eds.), *Releasing the Commons: Rethinking the Futures of the Commons*. Routledge.
- Grossi, H., and D. Pianezzi. 2017. Smart Cities: Utopia or neoliberal ideology? *Cities* 69: 79-85.
- Heslop, J., and E. Ormerod. 2019. The Politics of Crisis: Deconstructing the Dominant Narratives of the Housing Crisis. *Antipode: A Radical Journal of Geography* 52(1): 145-163.
- Huber, J., and F. Wolkenstein. 2018. Gentrification and occupancy rights. *Pol, Phil & Econ* 17(4): 378-397.
- Kirby, A. 2012. Privatised development and the quality of urban life. *Urban Design and Planning* 165(3): 167-175.
- Lloyd, K., and C. Auld. 2010. Leisure, public space and quality of life in the urban environment. *Urban Policy and Research* 21(4): 339-356.
- Loukaitou-Sideris, A., 1993. Privatisation of Public Open Space: The Los Angeles Experience. *Town Plan. Rev.* 64, 139-167.
- Macleod, G., and C. Johnstone. 2012. Stretching Urban Renaissance: Privatizing Space, Civilizing Place, Summoning 'Community'. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 36(1): 1-28.

- Madden, D., and P. Marcuse. 2016. *In Defense of Housing: The Politics of Crisis*. London and New York: Verso.
- Marx, K., 1990. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy (Volume I)*. London: Penguin Books Limited.
- Pikner, T., Willman, K., Jokinen, A., 2020. Urban Commoning as a Vehicle Between Government Institutions and Informality: Collective Gardening Practices in Tampere and Narva. *Int. J. Urban Reg. Res.* <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.12877>
- Prudham, S., 2007. The Fictions of Autonomous Invention: Accumulation by Dispossession, Commodification and Life Patents in Canada. *Antipode* 39, 406–429. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8330.2007.00533.x>
- Radin, M.J., 1996. *Contested Commodities*. Harvard University Press.
- Ruivenkamp, G., Hilton, A., 2017. *Perspectives on Commoning: Autonomist Principles and Practices*. Zed Books Ltd.
- Springer, S. 2010. *Cambodia's Neoliberal Order*. London: Routledge.
- Springer, S. 2013. Violent Accumulation: A Postanarchist Critique of Property, Dispossession, and the State of Exception in Neoliberalizing Cambodia. *Journal Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 103(3): 608-626.
- Stavrides, A.P.S., 2016. *Common Space: The City as Commons*. Zed Books Ltd.
- Swyngedouw, E., 2015. Urbanization and Environmental Futures. Politicizing Urban Political Ecologies, in: Perreault, T., Bridge, G., McCarthy, J. (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Political Ecology*. Routledge.
- Yardımcı, Ö. 2020. State Stigmatisation in Urban Turkey: Managing the “Insurgent” Squatter Dwellers in Dikmen Valley. *Antipode: A Radical Journal of Geography* 52(5): 1519-1538.
- Zimmer, T. J. 2017. Gentrification as injustice: a relational egalitarian approach to urban housing. *Public Affairs Quarterly* 31: 51-80.
- Zwitter, A. 2014. Big Data ethics. *Big Data & Society* 1(2): 1-6.