

**ROUTLEDGE RESEARCH IN PLANNING AND URBAN DESIGN**

*Making Prestigious Places* investigates the spatial dimension of luxury, both as a sector involving activities, operators and investments, and as a system of values acting as a catalyst for recent urban transformations. Luxury shares a well-established connection to the city, as a place of production, consumption and self-representation, and continues to grow despite economic difficulties. This edited collection includes case studies from Europe, North and South America, Asia and the Middle East to create a dialogue around these developments and the challenges presented, such as the tension between the idea of prestige and current values in urban planning, the discussion between academic reflections and operational practices, and how these interact with the long term economic and social dynamic of the city. With rich analysis and a preface written by Patsy Healey, this book will be an important addition to the discourse on luxury for urban planners and researchers.

**Mario Paris** is PoliMI International Fellow and Contract Professor in Urban Planning and researcher of URB&COM at the Politecnico di Milano, Italy. His research focuses on the role of luxury stakeholders in recent urban transformations and an advanced spatial analysis of current metropolitan dynamics.

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EDITED BY  
MARIO PARIS

Making Prestigious Places

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# Making Prestigious Places

HOW LUXURY INFLUENCES THE  
TRANSFORMATION OF CITIES



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 **ROUTLEDGE**

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# **Making Prestigious Places**

## How Luxury Influences the Transformation of Cities

**Mario Paris**

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**To the people I love,  
To the places I care about  
(although they are not “prestigious”)**



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# Preface

*Patsy Healey*

When I was asked to write a *Preface* for this book, I was both intrigued and worried. I was intrigued because I had been thinking about those who search for luxury and prestige in our societies in a very general way as the practices of global elites. I was worried, along with much of the academic urban literature, that these practices, and the development processes which catered for them, displaced many less fortunate folk in our cities, as well as contributing to the deeply worrying inequalities of our times. My focus, which I have tried to express in my own book, *Making Better Places* (Healey, 2010), a title echoed by this present book, has been on understanding and intervening in how places evolve in order to promote the flourishing of the many, rather than the few, with an emphasis on people's daily life concerns with how to get by in today's urban contexts.

Reading this book challenges easy assumptions about the impact of development aimed at a 'luxury' market. It has reminded me that an understanding of contemporary life and how it plays out spatially needs a rich ethnographic understanding of the evolving lifestyles and preoccupations of all groups which co-exist within urban contexts, as well as a grasp of the power which different groups can wield to realise their aspirations. The very rich, famous and influential have of course a great deal of power. This book opens up a window on the preferences and practices of such people and those who seek to shape and cater to their tastes and demands, and the complex diversity among them.

Many of the chapters in this book underline that the scale, nature and wider impacts of areas in cities where such people cluster cannot be read off from simple generalisations. As the Introduction explains, a key aim of the book is to challenge the many assertions in the urban literature about gentrification and displacement. It argues that urban scholars and planners need to look more closely at the way high status enclaves evolve within specific urban contexts, the variable ways which efforts to create such areas through redevelopment projects play out in different places and times, and how these affect the overall social and spatial patterning of urban life. The various chapters then explore whether such processes always generate adverse consequences for the rest of us. Do they always lead to displacement

and gentrification? Do they sometimes lead to innovations in lifestyles and fashion which then spread out more generally? Some decades ago, a study comparing socio-spatial change in London and Paris noticed that where dual-income professionals decided to live had a major impact on the opportunities available for other groups (Preteceille, 2000). These days, such groups are pushed out from city cores by the extraordinary hike in house prices. Are the very rich now the spatial shapers of cities?

Setting out in search of the practices of the very rich, famous and influential is however fraught with problems. All the chapters struggle with definitions. Should the focus just be on global elites, as S. Sassen (1991) has pioneered in her work? Or on just the very rich, able to buy into wherever their taste wanders? As the authors try to tie down their focus with definitions, they draw on different disciplinary traditions, from urban design, fashion and marketing to sociology and history of art. Exploring meanings of luxury, prestige and high status, some interesting tensions evolve. Long-established rich elite people prefer to avoid visibility, clustering in neighbourhoods but without much in the way of external display. Others, in the classic way of the *nouveau riche*, pursue an opposite strategy, seeking to display their wealth, and may thereby create destinations which others come to gaze at. The redevelopment projects of the 'urban renaissance' of recent decades have often sought, not always successfully, to create such destinations, using high-end shopping, 'archistar' buildings or culturally alluring arts venues.

Many of the examples described here are from Italian cities, and especially Milan, a key global centre of high-end fashion and design. Some of its development projects are positioned within this cultural awareness and intensively discussed as art forms. Some other land in its tissue gets developed, however, without any process of discussion and/or interaction with citizens. Milan seems a good example of a city in continual movement, spatially reconstituting itself, as different sets of relations rise to dominance in the city's economic, social and cultural life. As A. Bourdin, in the penultimate chapter, comments, in such a dynamic context, the search for 'the new', for the 'latest fashion', is continual. This implies that, in a rich relational way, the spatial patterning of urban areas is constantly in flux in terms of both land value and social labelling, with some areas increasing in value, and becoming more attractive, other areas becoming less attractive, and some areas left neglected or abandoned.

For urban planners and managers, the critical question is when and in what way such spatial re-patterning processes matter. Much of the critical urban literature emphasises the inequalities and social injustice of spatial processes which concentrate urban interventions in locales only accessible to the affluent and well-connected, a critique directed at both urban megaprojects and the 'new urbanism' movement. Yet is it possible that the benefits of such investment can be made to flow out more widely across a city? And do such projects sometimes act as models – for example, of more environmentally sustainable practices, which then shape interventions across a city? What

kind of governance ‘steering’ could help to maximise the wider benefits and minimise the displacement effects of investments aimed at creating ‘luxury’ locales and ‘prestige’ destinations?

Clearly, expert urban designers and planners can create social, financial and ecological value through the way existing, new and redeveloped areas of cities are designed and managed. It may also be possible to capture and redirect some of the value generated by the creation of elite destinations through the shrewd design of regulations and tax regimes. These could aim to expand and maintain public realm assets, improve general connectivity across a city, and build up resources to enable investment in parts of the city neglected by private investment interest. Many cities, including Milan, have attempted such an approach (Mazza, 2004). Such interventions inherently play a role in shaping urban land and property markets. But they tend to follow the market-shaping role of property development investment, which in turn tends to follow the movements of those setting the lifestyle trends of the affluent.

More ambitious city governments seek to locate the tools of regulation and taxation within the context of a city-wide spatial strategy. Despite all the critique of ‘comprehensive development plans’ to be found in the planning literature of recent years, city governments which seek to shape how the social-spatial patterning of their cities unfolds need some kind of overall spatially-articulated strategic concept and a strong commitment to public interest values beyond merely ‘promoting growth’ (which too often means just promoting any kind of development). Such strategies may exist in planning documents, as ‘visions’ or ‘aims and objectives’. But a strategic concept which shapes how markets evolve needs a long-term existence, and to be locked into the thinking of many actors through time (Healey, 2007). Examples of such market-shaping strategies can be found in London, where the idea of re-balancing the city’s growth to spread east as well as west emerged from the 1960s, or Portland, Oregon with its ideas of developing a more compact urban pattern, and Vancouver’s neighbourhood design approach which grew from its most prestigious neighbourhood to spread across the city, or Barcelona’s work in re-valuing its rundown city centre. In such contexts, spatial planning strategies not only shaped specific development projects over time, but also shaped how the development industry itself operated.

Such market-shaping strategies require real political courage and technical sophistication. They involve capturing value from luxury locales to invest in other parts of the city. They may also set in train a socio-spatial dynamic which withdraws value from some places, especially where there has been an overblown speculative boom in land and property prices. In some cases, it may be appropriate to let a locale lie neglected, thus creating opportunities for the bohemian insurgents so much associated these days with creative arts and culture innovations. This implies a complex balancing act between ‘caring for’ the public realm and social-spatial dynamics of all the locales

across a city and a rich awareness of the specific opportunities and challenges of each one, as they shift and change.

The essays in this book help to cultivate such awareness through its focus on a particular, but very significant, kind of locale within cities, and especially big metropolises. Urban planners and scholars need to set such inquiries alongside concerns with how the marginalised get by in cities, with the socio-spatial patterning of ‘ordinary life’ in cities (Robinson, 2006), and how these multiple daily life experiences co-exist and intersect in cities. Each city will be different in this respect, but across all our societies we face intense challenges as the financial inequalities between the very rich and the rest of us become more obvious and extreme. Addressing these inequalities is not just a matter of appropriate taxation and regulations. It is also about the bargain that is struck in every city between opportunities to promote ‘luxurious lifestyles’ and responsibility to attend to the flourishing of all a city’s inhabitants.

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