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## IPHS SECTION
## Research from the field

# Planning and urban citizenship: suggestions from the thoughts of Henri Lefebvre

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The paper focuses on Henri Lefebvre's reflections on the city; it is argued that from these reflections it is possible to derive a particular notion of citizenship that is relevant for urban planning and design (theory and practice). In the first part of the paper, several of Lefebvre's key topics are analysed (in particular the concept of city-*oeuvre*). In the second part of the paper, the characteristics of Lefebvre's notion of citizenship are clarified and their implications for urban planning and design are discussed.

**Keywords:** Lefebvre; citizenship; planning; city; space

## Introduction: Lefebvre and planning

In recent years, Lefebvre's works have been gaining attention – in particular if compared with the disregard shown until the mid-1990s.[1] This reappraisal has particularly concerned the fields of geography, sociology and urban studies.[2] In contrast, with reference to planning (theory and practice) Lefebvre's reflections still have very little influence and, generally speaking, his thoughts are represented usually by the (often misused) 'right to the city' catchphrase.[3] This paper aims to suggest some implications of Lefebvre's thoughts for urban planning and design (theory and practice); these implications derive from a particular characterization of the notion of citizenship (urban, spatial, and active) that can be deduced from the works of the French philosopher.

The paper is divided into two parts. In the first part, I investigate some key concepts of Lefebvre's reflections on the city (with particular attention to the concept of the city-*oeuvre*); the elements that coalesce to define Lefebvre's ideas of urban citizenship are pinpointed. In the second part, I analyse the concept of citizenship drawn by Lefebvre and I suggest some possible implications for urban planning and design.

## The constitutive elements of urban citizenship

The issue of urban citizenship was never tackled directly by Lefebvre. It was briefly mentioned in one of his last works (however, his interest was focused on citizenship at a national level).[4]

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Nonetheless, as I will argue, it is possible to connect a large proportion of his reflections on the city to the theme of urban citizenship. Some scholars have already highlighted Lefebvre's contribution to reflections on citizenship. However, they have generally rested their arguments on the concept of the right to the city.[5] In my opinion, the constituent elements of Lefebvre's idea of citizenship can be found scattered across all of his reflections on urban space (urban citizenship can be seen as a meta-theme in Lefebvre's reflections on the city), even if the central role is assumed by the concept of the city-*oeuvre* (as a consequence, the right to the city must be interpreted specifically as the right to the city-*oeuvre*).

### *The city-oeuvre*

The key concepts in Lefebvre's interpretation of the city are work (*oeuvre*) and product (*produit*).[6] The *oeuvre* is something unique and irreplaceable; it is created through a process which essentially needs creativity and art. The *produit,* on the other hand, is the result of repeatable and serialized actions: it is repeatable and reproducible in itself, and it is the result of a manufacturing process dominated by work.[7]

The difference between the two concepts rests essentially in the nature of the process of space production, and on the social relationships on which the process is based. The *oeuvre* is connected with a horizontal and collective creative process. The *produit* is connected with an icily rational process which directly and automatically transforms an abstract thought into a real object (according to Lefebvre, *produit* production requires a static relationship between a 'dominant' group which defines the abstract idea and a 'dominated' group that transforms it into a real object).

In Lefebvre's opinion, for a long time, the city was characterized by the predominance of the *oeuvre* (it was the city-*oeuvre*). In the city-*oeuvre*, 'the creative capacity [. . .] is invariably that of a community or collectivity'[8]: a city cannot be *oeuvre* without the contribution of all of its inhabitants' social practices. Sometimes, these social practices are in conflict with each other (and they are rarely part of a comprehensive strategic project). Nonetheless, they all concur in the production and transformation of the urban space. The inhabitants' social practices create the city as a collective project of which all the inhabitants feel themselves to be a part. It is with reference to this concept that Lefebvre introduces the notion of style. The city-*oeuvre* is characterized by a style: the existence of a style implies the existence of a shared symbolic system related to the physical form of the city. The style is the result of the collective production of (and of the collective identification with) the urban form.[9]

It is important to emphasize that in Lefebvre's reflections, there is no social determinism: Lefebvre did not identify the *produit* with the results of the actions of what he calls the 'dominant groups' and the *oeuvre* with the results of the actions of the 'dominated groups' (or vice versa).[10] The subject does not determine the result of the process. Rather, the result (*oeuvre* or *produit*) is determined by the quality of the relationship between the groups that inhabit the city. Thus, when all the groups that inhabit the city (both the 'dominant' and the 'dominated groups') have a role in the production of space, the city produced is an *oeuvre*. In contrast, when the connection between the generation of urban space and the population of a city in its entirety is broken, the city produced is a *produit* (for instance when the city is produced only by the 'dominant groups' in their own image).[11]

In Lefebvre's opinion, the city should always be a city-*oeuvre*. This means that the city should be characterized in all its parts by a 'surplus of art', that is, by a high urban quality and architectural style characterizing the entire urban fabric. The purpose of this 'surplus' is

the creation of a sense of belonging, pride and civic affection for the city and the celebration of the city and of all its inhabitants.[12]

According to Lefebvre, the city was *oeuvre* for centuries, until the beginning of industrialization when the use value of the city was suppressed by the exchange value.[13] Industrialization generated a violent process of urbanization 'de-urbanizing and de-urbanized',[14] which led the traditional city to explode, that is, to lose its traditional character: 'Urban reality, simultaneously amplified and exploded, thus lost the features it inherited from the previous period: organic totality, belonging, an uplifting image, a sense of space that was measured and dominated by monumental splendour'.[15] The paradigm of this process was the birth of modern city outskirts in the twentieth century.[16] This birth was accompanied by two main negative consequences: first, the 'emotional detachment' of a part of the inhabitants (specifically the 'dominated groups') from the city; second, the beginning of a phenomenon of class segregation within the urban space.[17]

To specify the characteristics of the city-*oeuvre*, Lefebvre introduced the concepts of centrality and simultaneity. The city-*oeuvre* is distinguished by centrality, that is, it is the centre of both encounters and diversity (and of conflicts as well). The city attracts 'everything' ('fruits and objects, products and producers, works and creations, activities and situations'[18]); in doing so, it creates an opportunity in space through which all of these different things can come into contact with each other.[19] Simultaneity is nothing other than the quality of time of a city typified by centrality: the city-*oeuvre* creates not only many *sites* for encounters, but also many *moments* for encounters. The city-*oeuvre* generates spatial and temporal opportunities for encounters between the differences; it is literally an 'ensemble of differences'.[20]

According to Lefebvre, a city is an *oeuvre* if it is characterized by simultaneity and centrality, and it can be so only if it is produced by the social practices of all its inhabitants, and if its inhabitants can use the city as a place for encounters and conflicts. In contrast, in the city-*produit*, both centrality and simultaneity disappear: space is characterized by homogenization and segregation, and the city becomes a means to control differences and conflicts and to ensure the reproduction of dominance relations.[21]

### *The right to the city-oeuvre*

According to Lefebvre, the process of industrialization led to the dissolution of the city-*oeuvre*. In order to indicate the way in which to overcome the city-*produit* and to recreate the city-*oeuvre*, Lefebvre introduced the well-known concept of the right to the city.[22]

By the right to the city, Lefebvre meant essentially the right for everybody to take part in a full urban life.[23] However, because a full urban life can be attained only in the city-*oeuvre*, it is possible to consider the right to the city more precisely as the right to the city-*oeuvre*.

From his Marxist perspective, Lefebvre imagined that the triumph of the right to the city (and therefore the establishment of the city-*oeuvre*) would be the result of a wide revolutionary process. This process would not remain confined to the social sphere, but would have its own equivalent in the process of the transformation of the physical space of the city. The revolution must be an *urban revolution*: the urban form is at the same time both the stakes and the means for the conquest of the right to the city.

In order to better understand the concept of the right to the city, it is worth considering that it is rooted in the theme of the festival. Before approaching the matter of space, Lefebvre was devoted to the analysis of everyday life.[24] According to him, in his contemporary society everyday life

constituted the 'dull routine, the ongoing go-to-work, pay-the-bills, homeward trudge of daily existence'.[25] This mode of everyday life was one of the main means by which capitalism ensured the recreation of relations of production.[26] In this sense, everyday life and the concept of the city-*produit* are strictly connected: the city-*produit* fosters an alienated everyday life.[27]

As the conquest of the right to the city is a means to calling a halt to the city-*produit*, in Lefebvre's view the festival is a means to calling a halt to the alienation of daily life.[28] The festival is a process of continuity between 'people, their gestures, their actions, their situations and their speeches'[29] within which it is possible encounter 'the rules and conventions that determine for everyone what is true, good, that is to say both ethics and aesthetics'.[30] It is the apotheosis of centrality and simultaneity, of the encounters between differences. During the festival, the notions of community and of sharing are exalted; in so doing, the idea of a civilization resting on the participation of all the inhabitants in urban life is foreshadowed.[31] All of this is diametrically opposed to the everyday life of the 'Bureaucratic Society of Controlled Consumption',[32] which instead, like the city-*produit*, is characterized by separation, homogeneity and a lack of relationships.

This connection between the right to the city and the festival helps to confirm that any depiction of the right to the city as simply spatial is incorrect. Lefebvre did not support any sort of spatial determinism: he did not believe that once the *forma urbis* was transformed, social and productive relations would consequently be transformed also (in a kind of spatial transposition of the storming of the Winter Palace). Action over the space is very important, but it is not sufficient. According to Lefebvre, a social subject of change (for example, the 'oppressed collectivity') is always necessary: it plays an active role, transforming at the same time urban space and everyday life.

## Urban citizenship according to Lefebvre

From all Lefebvre's reflections, it is possible to deduce a particular notion of citizenship deeply rooted in the urban space; this notion has significant implications for urban planning and design (theory and practice), because it helps to clarify their nature and effects. In this concluding section, I sketch some of these implications; further analysis will be necessary to fully explore these topics and the potential of Lefebvre's thoughts for urban planning and design.

### *Citadin-citoyen*

Lefebvre's distinct notion of citizenship has three characteristics: (i) urban, (ii) spatial, and (iii) active.

According to Lefebvre, in order to be fully considered a citizen, it is not sufficient to be a *citoyen*, that is, to be part of the national community and, as a consequence, to enjoy the rights that come from this status. In order to be a citizen, an individual must also be a *citadin*, that is, a full inhabitant of the city-*oeuvre* and a part of the civilization process which takes place within it.[33] In other words, to attain full citizenship it is not enough to enjoy the civil, political and social rights connected to national citizenship (as in the well-known theorization of Thomas H. Marshall for example[34]); to attain full citizenship, it is necessary also to belong to a community, and, more precisely, to an urban community.[35] Lefebvre's idea of citizenship is the idea of an *urban* citizenship.[36]

Furthermore, as the previous analysis of the characteristics of the city-*oeuvre* and of the right to the city emphasizes, this urban citizenship has a specifically *spatial component*: it can be attained only through action over the space devoted to the production of the city-*oeuvre*. Urban citizenship must be won. The right to urban citizenship can be gained only through collective and

self-organized action; it is inherently *active*. As a consequence, according to Lefebvre, this kind of citizenship cannot be provided either by the state in general or by the welfare state in particular. As a Marxist, he claims the *conquest* of a full citizenship must be through social conflict and grassroots action. This social action has to be directed against the state (interpreted as the expression of the capitalist society) and devoted to the self-management (*autogestion*) of society.[37]

To summarize, Lefebvre argued for an *urban* citizenship that has to be won through an *active* role in society, devoted (also) to the *spatial* transformation and production of the city.

It is worth noting that such a kind of citizenship is radically different from the liberal-democratic concept of citizenship such as that proposed, for instance, by well-known authors such as John Locke or John Rawls.[38] Lefebvre's concept of citizenship is closer to the concepts proposed by thinkers who emphasize different forms of citizenship based on groups rather than individual identity and who highlight multiple memberships at the local level (based, for example, on sexuality or ethnicity).[39] However, unlike all these thinkers, Lefebvre argues for a concept of citizenship that is strictly connected with the city space (produced at the level of the city and by action over the urban space).[40]



### *Planning and Citizenship*

Even if Lefebvre's strictly Marxist analysis could be considered outdated, his reflections about the city-*oeuvre* leave us with a concept of citizenship that still has considerable implications for urban planning and design. In particular, it helps clarify the nature of space regulation and design. Eric Reade argued that in planning 'there is inevitably a *relative* redistribution.'[41] However, the question remains: a redistribution of what? Following Lefebvre's reflections, we can assert that a relative redistribution of 'urban citizenship quotas' is inevitably involved in planning.

Urban space design and regulation have an effect on the inclusion or exclusion of specific urban populations from being and feeling part of the city. For instance, we may consider the characteristics of the processes of urban expansion and transformation of the Italian cities in the decades after the Second World War. As is well-known, this process has often taken the form of the removal of the poor from the historical centres and of the concurrent construction of mono-functional high density neighbourhoods in the outskirts of the city devoted to the lower classes[42] – this urbanization process started to change in the 1980s with the beginning of rur-urbanization/suburbanization trends.[43] However, nowadays, many Italian cities still have a dual structure: the centres are inhabited predominantly by the higher classes whilst the high density outskirts (at least some of them) are inhabited by the lower classes.[44] On the outskirts, the feature of centrality-simultaneity is absent; these often are areas of social segregation and homogeneity, of (physical and social) distance and separation from the centre. As a consequence, their inhabitants are excluded from being fully part of the city. Moreover, they are also excluded from feeling part of the city because the space designed for them is a space-*produit*: it no longer has the aesthetic features (like monumentality and beauty) of the *oeuvre*; it has lost every kind of style with which people could identify.

Space design and regulation thus assume a specific influence, limited but significant: they influence the 'degree of urban citizenship' of population groups according to the place they live in. They contribute to the definition of the *oeuvre* or the *produit*, and consequently, to the quality and quantity of the right to the city which is intended for a specific settled population. Urban planning and

design are not just technical activities: they have a substantive political connotation, precisely because the handling of space always has important effects in terms of urban citizenship.[45]

## Notes on contributor

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## Notes

1. Garnier, "La vision urbaine de Henri Lefebvre: des prévisions aux révisions," 123–45. For instance, in Italy he experienced some success in the 1970s, but later he was quickly (and almost completely) forgotten.
2. Kofman and Lebas, "Lost in Transposition," 42–52. In the last two decades, many of Lefebvre's works have been translated into English. Moreover, many monographs have recently appeared as well as collective books: e.g. Merrifield, *Henri Lefebvre: A Critical Introduction*; Elden, *Understanding Henri Lefebvre*; Goonewardena et al., *Space, Difference, Everyday Life*; Stanek, *Henri Lefebvre on Space*; and Butler, *Henri Lefebvre*. With reference to the French-speaking world, see, for instance, Hess, *Henri Lefebvre et la pensée du possible*; Costes, *Henri Lefebvre. Le droit à la ville*; Deulceux and Hess, *Henri Lefebvre. Vie, œuvres, Concepts*; Ajzenberg, Lethierry, and Bazinek, *Maintenant Henri Lefebvre*.
3. See Costes, *Henri Lefebvre. Le droit à la ville*.
4. Lefebvre, "Ouverture. Du pacte social au contrat de citoyenneté," 17–37.
5. See, for instance, Purcell, "Excavating Lefebvre," 99–108; Purcell, "Citizenship and the Right to the Global City," 564–90; and Gilbert and Dikeç, "Right to the City," 250–63.
6. Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, 66. *Oeuvre* and *produit* are often used by Lefebvre as synonyms of use value and exchange value. The dualistic thinking characterizes a large part of Lefebvre's works (it is worth noting that a number of authors – in particular feminist authors – have pointed out many problems inherent in such a dualistic thinking. See, for instance, Grosz, *Architecture from the Outside*). Some of the concepts I consider here (for instance, centrality and simultaneity, right to the city and festival) are coupled to emphasize their analytical relation; they are not opposing dichotomies.
7. Lefebvre, *Production of Space*. See also Kouvélakis, "L'espace entre philosophie de l'histoire et pratique politique," 101–2.
8. Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 115.
9. See Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, 119.
10. In Lefebvre's Marxist vision, the 'dominant groups' are constituted by the capitalists (the people holding economic and political power), the 'dominated groups' are constituted by the working class.
11. Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 116.
12. Ibid., 220.
13. Lefebvre, *Urban Revolution*. See also Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, 67.
14. Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, 78.
15. Lefebvre, *Urban Revolution*, 14. See also Lefebvre, *Espace et politique*, 75.
16. See also Lefebvre, *Pyrénées*, with reference to industrial cities such as Mourenx.
17. Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*. It should be noted that Lefebvre's reflections on the city refer always to the European context.
18. Lefebvre, *Urban Revolution*, 117.
19. Ibid., 117–8.
20. Ibid., 118. It is worth specifying that, according to Lefebvre, the space *generates opportunity* for differences, but it *does not create* these differences. See Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 358.
21. Lefebvre, *Espace et politique*, 151.
22. See Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities* and Lefebvre, *Espace et politique*.

23. Costes, *Henri Lefebvre. Le droit à la ville.* For a definition of the right to the city, see Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, 179, 193–4.
24. Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life* and Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*.
25. Wander, "Introduction to the Transaction Edition," vii.
26. Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*.
27. Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, 185.
28. Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*. For some criticisms, see Gunder, "Production of Desirous Space," 173–99.
29. Hess, *Henri Lefebvre et l'aventure du siècle*, 302.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, 60.
33. See Lefebvre, *Espace et politique*. Actually, 'to exclude the *urban* from groups, classes, individuals, is also to exclude them from civilization, if from not society itself' (Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, 193).
34. See Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class* and Marshall, *Class, Citizenship and Social Development*.
35. Lefebvre, "Ouverture. Du pacte social au contrat de citoyenneté," 29.
36. See Gilbert and Dikeç, "Right to the City."
37. Lefebvre, *Du contrat de citoyenneté*, 13. About the Lefebvre's criticism against the state, see Lefebvre, *De l'Etat. Les contradictions de l'Etat moderne. La dialectique et/de l'Etat*.
38. See, for instance, Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* and Rawls, *Theory of Justice*.
39. See, for instance, the works of Seyla Benhabib – e.g. Benhabib, *Democracy and Difference* and Benhabib, *Claims of Culture*.
40. See Purcell, "Excavating Lefebvre."
41. Reade, *British Town and Country Planning*, 8.
42. Bellicini and Ingersoll, *Periferia italiana*.
43. Martinotti, *Metropoli: La nuova morfologia sociale della citta*.
44. See, for instance, the case of Milan: Chiappero, Moroni, and Nuvolati, *Gli spazi della povertà*.
45. '[Planning] has above all a political end: a (re)designing of citizenship that welds strategies of social and spatial control into a single process. [. . .] The (re)designing of citizenship is, wittingly or unwittingly, the true aim of the plan' (Mazza, "Plan and Constitution," 125).

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