
TRANSFORMATION OF EXPOSITION SPACE AT AN URBAN SCALE

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International expositions began to gain popularity in late 19th century, particularly in Europe, and in time came to influence both architecture and urban planning, affecting their historical development. Expositions serve as a means of displaying architecture, particularly since industrialization, and have an influence that can transform their surrounding metropolitan areas in different ways. These influenced areas extend way beyond their own scales, and even if they no longer exist today, and have the potential to transform the urban space in which they are located. This study analyses the case of the Great Exhibition of 1851, in London, United Kingdom, which can be considered as the world's first international event, and which played a significant role in the transformation of the Kensington site. Although the exhibition space itself was temporary, it transformed the Kensington site on which it was located at an urban scale. This part of the London has changed following the reorganization and redesign after the exhibition was over, and the exposition space has developed into an integrated part of the city by taking on a set of additional functions, with the additional influence also of such neighbouring institutions as museums and later exhibition spaces.

Keywords

Urban transformation, urban design, exhibition, exposition, and temporary architecture

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INTRODUCTION

Since the inception of world fairs in the 19th century, expositions have spurred many opinions, debates, and discussions of their many roles and cultural meanings, as well as analyses of their impact on the historical development of architecture, urban planning and urban form. Expositions have come to serve as a means of displaying architecture, particularly since the industrialization, after emerging first in the mid-19th with the 1851 Great Exhibition in London, and then spreading to Europe and North America. Expositions have the ability to influence, transform and change their surrounding metropolitan areas in different ways. Eric Hobsbawm, a British historian who charted the rise of industrial capitalism, socialism, and nationalism, defines these organizations as ‘great new rituals of self-congratulation’ and he points out that these ‘new’ celebratory events are related mainly to the development/transformation of the economic order.

During the first half of the 19th century, industrialization developed more rapidly than the market for industrial products. With the advances in modern communication systems, however, the capitalist economy grew to encompass the globe.¹ Zeynep Celik mentioned in her book that universal exposition contributed greatly to the export of the industrial revolution to the rest of the world based on their promotion of the products of industry and technological progress, and their ability to display the entire human experience in a microcosm.² These architectural programs serve not only for the representation of architecture, but also the economy, industry, and technology. This study focuses in particular on the effects of the Great Exhibition, the first such international event, and its role in the urban transformation of the Kensington site. The aim of this research is to investigate and discuss the roles/potentials/influences of the Great Exhibition at an urban scale based on an analysis of the relationship between the expositions and the urban space, and to analyse the results of this relationship.

The expositions held particularly in the 19th century and brought with them the powerful potential to change and transform their surrounding metropolitan areas in various ways. Although inherently transitory, ephemeral, and temporary, their effects have been long lasting, becoming an expression of the nations both architecturally and mentally within the urban context. They play a role in the interaction of their surroundings with urban development, while representing also their symbolic character. Expositions affect the cities through their need for infrastructure in such fields as transportation, accommodation, and catering, and this brings about a transformation/reorganization of the context of expositions at an urban scale. They are not only part of the urban environment, having influences also on the re-formation of the urban in which they are located in the transformation process.

These kinds of mega events have a significant impact not only on the development of the city, but also on the revitalization of the economy around the world. In recent years, urban theorists have debated this impact and have underlined the results on the urban reality. Expositions have a great international significance, driving investments in infrastructure development, urban planning, and revitalization strategies that aim to bring ‘new’ images to the urban, while also spurring the transformations of contemporary urban society in the fields of urban research, socio-historical study, and economic development research.

Neil Smith claims that the rise of the international exposition can be the key to the urban revolution, identifying a long historical shift from agricultural to industrial, and lastly, to the urban world.³ Expositions have also played a crucial role in the paradigm shift in the internal territorial form of the city, from the political city into the mercantile and then industrial, and also representing a ‘critical phase’ of the city. In such shifts, the form/the organization of the city and its internal relationship transform, as does the concept of the urban.

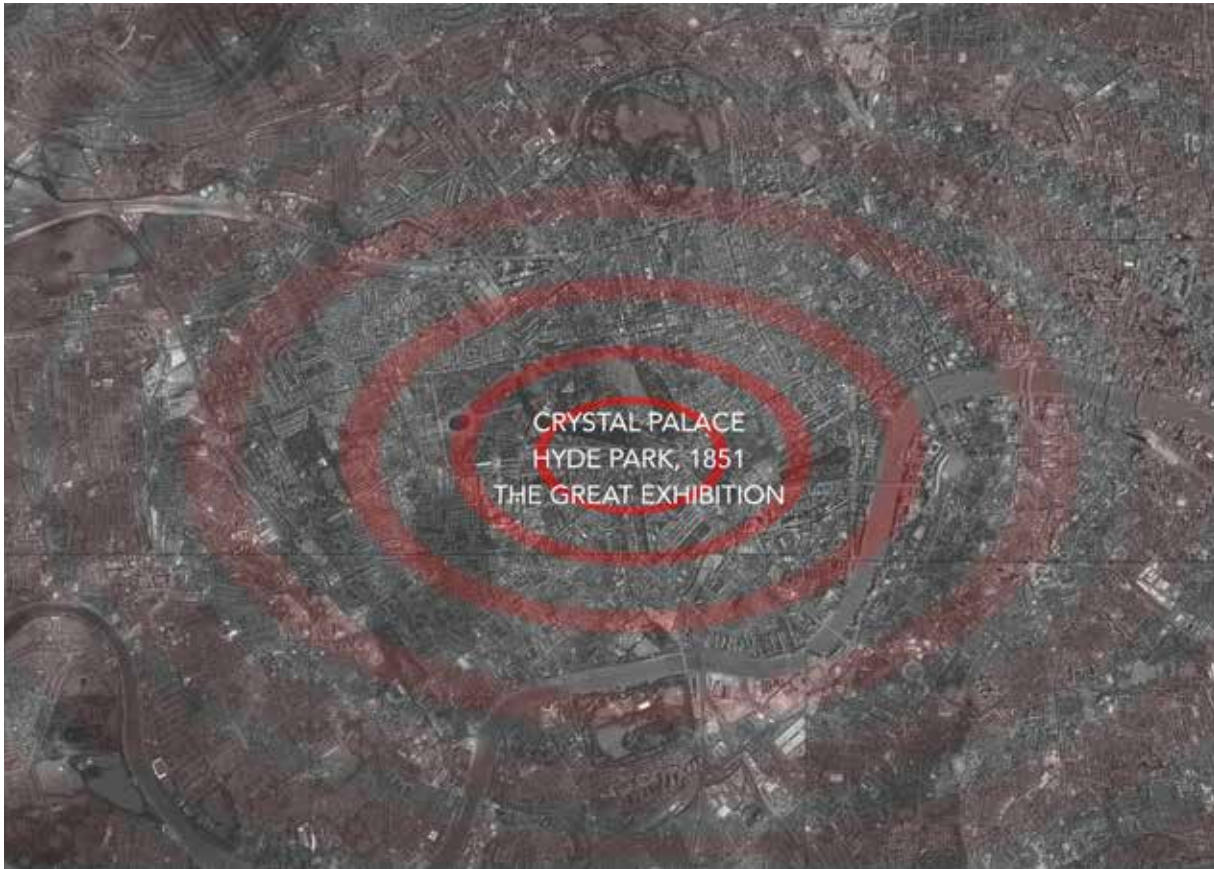


FIGURE 1 Raindrop Analogy on the Great Exhibition, London and its effects on the urban

As Smith points out in the foreword of the ‘The Urban Revolution’, space may be more often synonymous with rigidity; immobility and stasis, and space became a blind field in the early-20th century. At this point, exposition space could be considered the key to a radical break from the transitory, temporal and ephemeral nature of architecture. Even though these structures are time-limited, they have a potential to transform the urban space in which they are located. After they have gone, the space cannot take on the same identity it had before the exposition. In this regard, they have a crucial effect on the transformation of the urban and are ruled this effect out by architects/designers/urban planners (technocrats), although the state may use this potential as a representation of their power.

RAINDROP ANALOGIES

Henri Lefebvre suggests that classical cities have several functions, being political, administrative, commercial and productive. Characterizing these functions, he claims that they have two-folded character, one of which is related to the territory and the other to the city itself. The character of a territory, he claims, is based on the fact that ‘urban centres administer, dominate, and cover with networks’⁴ and the city is the part of ‘administered, dominated, and integrated with networks of production and distribution’.⁵ The urban is formed by these dual functions and the relationship between these functions, although this may be changed/transformed over time. The character of the urban can be redefined based on the relationships between the city and territory and that may vary according to different modes of representations, such as overlapped, juxtaposed, superimposed or dominated.

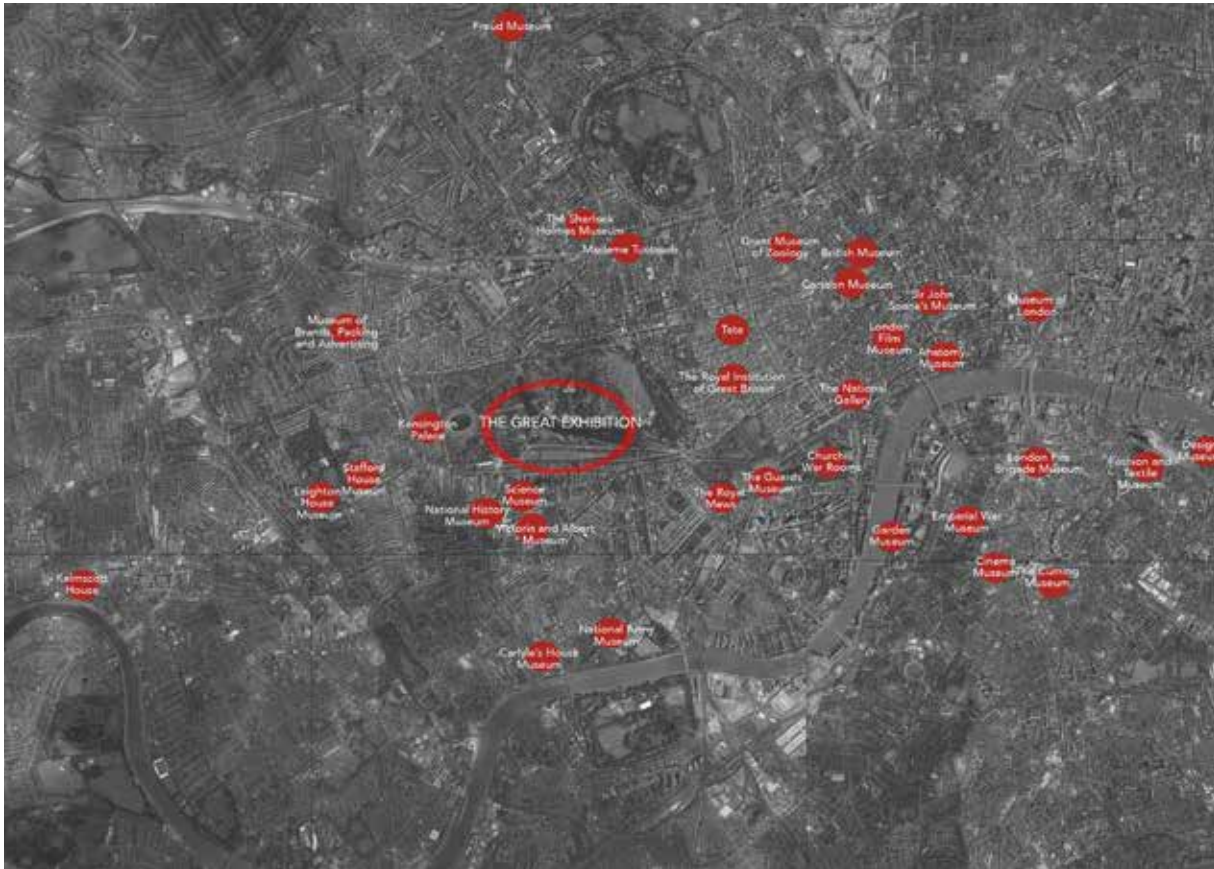


FIGURE 2 The Great Exhibition and the location of museums.

Lefebvre questions the centrality of the urban phenomenon, which can be defined as the conjunction with the dialectical movement that can result in either creation or destruction. Lefebvre also questions the relationship between the periphery and the centre, the character of which can be changed over the years, and also defines the nature of the centrality and poly-centrality. He defines centrality as ‘distinct modes of production, different productive relations’⁶ and the poly-centrality as a ‘rupture of the centre dispersion’⁷

The relationship between the periphery and centre can be associated with the raindrop analogy. Each raindrop will create its own circle when it reaches to an accumulation of water, although the nature of the circle can be changed based on the size of the raindrop and other factors (e.g. wind, the falling off the other raindrops etc.). The centre of the raindrop indicates the power and the circles show the affected area of the raindrop associated with the periphery. This polycentric analogy makes apparent also different relationships, in that raindrops can juxtapose, overlap or draw apart from each other, and these kinds of relationships can change, transform and redefine over the time. If such an analogy is to be drawn, it will refer only to be a section of the Lefebvre’s timeline. In each section of the timeline, the diagram of the raindrop analogy is redrawn, the relations of the periphery and the centre are redefined and the domination of the centres changes.

The relationship between the urban and the exposition can be explained using the same analogy. Technocrats decide upon the location of an exposition while analysing the transformation network, accommodation, and infrastructure. The process begins with the construction of the exposition as a raindrop and the creation of its first circle. This circle effect gives it energy to the urban, and larger circles occur. The nature of the circle can be changed based on the accessibility and internationality of the organization, in that if it attracts more and more

guests, the rain circles reach further distance at an urban scale. This analogy gives us an idea of how the urban form develops, even after the exposition has gone. In the timeline of Lefebvre (from political city to critical zone), this relationship can change/become enriched, and causes different time sections over time. For each section of the timeline, the diagram of the raindrop analogy is redrawn, the relationship between the urban and the temporal exhibition space is redefined and the character of the centres also changes.

THE GREAT EXHIBITION, LONDON

The urban transformation of the Kensington Site of the Great Exhibition can be analysed and explained in terms of this analogy. There were two great exhibitions in London, in 1851 and 1862 that led the Kensington site to become the exhibition centre of the city. Several institutions were established in the area after the 1851 Great Exhibition, including the South Kensington Museum, the Natural History Museum, and the Royal Albert Hall. The exposition then moved to the northwest, and the following fairs were located further towards periphery to the southeast (Sydenham, today in the borough of Bromley), and then to the west and northwest (Earl's Court, Olympia, White City, Wembley). The closing of the Great Exhibition had both a direct and indirect effect on London, including the removal and reconstruction of the exhibition structure on Sydenham Hill and use of the surplus funds to create cultural infrastructure in South Kensington. Following the Great Exhibition in London, the international exhibitions had an impact on where they were located. The precinct of the South Kensington is to be related 'to the furtherance of the industrial pursuits of all nations' and to include a library, lecture and meeting rooms, and an exhibition space.⁸ As was the case with the Great Exhibition, other international exhibitions had a lasting impact on their locations, with an area of influence that went beyond their own scale when they were gone that was evidence of their potential to transform the urban space on which they were located.

At the level of projects and plans, there is always some distance between the elaboration and execution. Expositions are designed with a limited lifespan for a specific organization, and technocrats (architects and urban planners) take their decisions based on this fact. However, while they may plan for the dismantling of the structure, it may be erected in a different location, and it is at this point that the technocrats lose their decision-making power, which passes into the hands to the state. The state may decide to keep the structure to gain profit from it, by which it becomes a Meta with potential as a surplus value. In this way, the state uses the structure for the transformation of their power to meet the needs of industrial production through modified nationality, planning and programming. This kind of urban transformation is the simple superstructure of the mode of production. There is always interaction between urban phenomena, the relations of production and productive forces that occurs with the start of industrialization, and is a twofold process of industrialization and urbanization. The second period becomes dominant following the first period, and this approach constitutes the base of the urban ideology.

The diagram indicates the effects of the Great Exposition on its location in London, where there are now several museums and exhibition spaces. The Kensington site became known as the exhibition centre of the city after the exposition transformed the urban, changing, reorganizing and re-designing the character of the site as an exhibition space. Following the Great Exhibition, The South Kensington Museum was opened to house exhibitions to the Royal Commission in 1857 and joined by the Royal Albert Hall in 1871, the Natural History Museum in 1880, and the Royal College of Music in 1882. Moreover, the Royal College of Art in 1896, the Imperial College of Science in 1907, the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Science Museum in 1909, the Royal Geographical Society in 1912 and the Geological Museum were opened in 1935.⁹ Although the exposition was a temporary and small-scaled architectural design, its influence became permanent and effective. This part of the urban marks a significant historical paradigm shift, with the international exposition negotiating between regional and international networks of production, consumption and exchange. Reformed urban centres of universal expositions give birth to a restructuring of time into a continuous story of positive development, and stretch into a human-constructed future.¹⁰

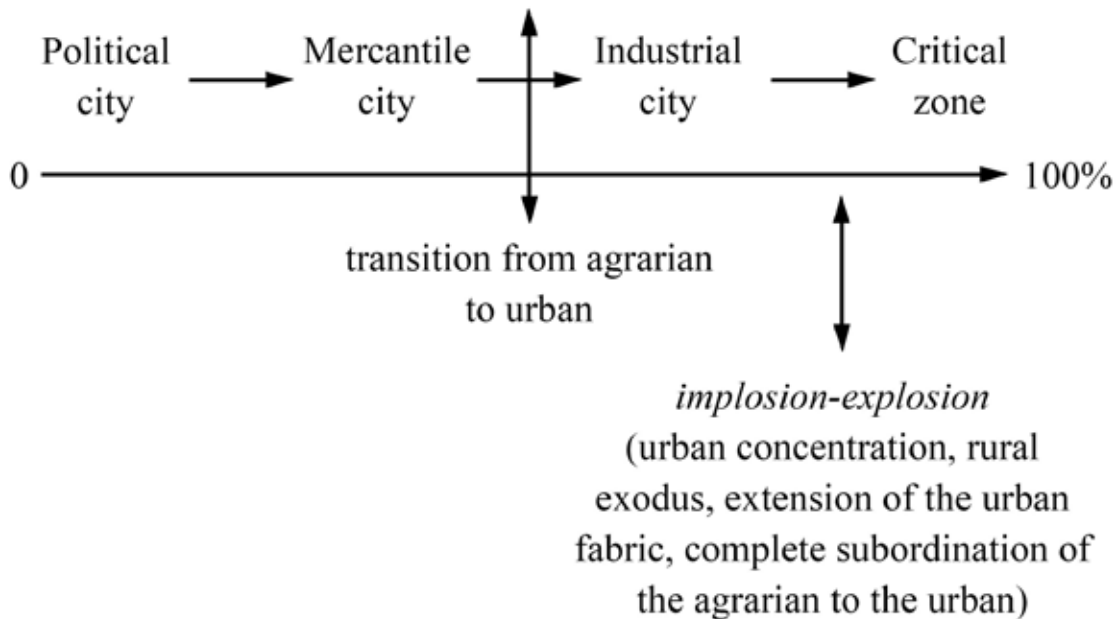


FIGURE 3 The Timeline of the City to Urban Society

Universal expositions play a crucial role in the significant break with the traditional understanding of society, which is interrelated with agriculture, and bring about the construction of an entirely new reality related to the industrial age. The exposition can be sited at the point of transition from agrarian to urban in the timeline of Lefebvre.

Exposition space subsequently becomes the integrated part of the city by taking on a set of additional functions, as well as such neighbouring institutions such as museums and other exhibiting spaces. The exposition has developed into a key site on the symbolic landscape of London, while South Kensington has become a model of how international expositions can have a role in the contributing to change, and the redefinition and design of urban sites with a specific meaning: representation and exhibition.

In order to understand this urban transformation, one can refer to Henri Lefebvre's timeline graphic, which begins with the political city at the '0 point' and goes on to the critical zone that is the 'point of 100%'. Lefebvre examined three fields/domains/continents (agrarian, industrial and urban) for discovery, emergence, constitution and historic creation in terms of his time-space axis, and interrelated these periods with several keywords. The agrarian period corresponds to the *need*, and subjected to nature and interspersed with catastrophe and famine, as a domain of scarcity. The second one is the *work*, and it corresponds to the industrial period that is related to fetishized productivity, and refers to the destruction of nature that lives and survives in a human being. He finally asks as if the urban society corresponds to the *enjoyment*.¹¹ Urban society may be interrelated with enjoyment, and its main issue may be the representation of this society at an urban scale. In his time-space axis, Lefebvre questions on the transitions from industrial city to critical zone and indicates that this gap is the implosion-explosion of the urban. Expositions emerge from this transition and somehow serve as a key to the urban form, which is designed, based more on the exhibition infrastructure of the urban.

In 'Urban Revolution' Lefebvre complains about the definition and borders of the urban. The urban cannot be defined by a single space that is a place of passage and exchange, just as the reality of urban cannot be associated only with the consumption, the tertiary activities, and the distribution network. The urban reality covers all the production and its relations.¹² How can these productions be exhibited? Answering this question is crucial to the understanding of production activities and their relations, and at this point, the exhibition of these productions becomes an important part of these exchange relationships. International expositions are the place of these activities, and these time-limited activities become the part of a global production network. They change the identity of the location whether constructed at a local scale or a global scale.

Lefebvre claims that space cannot be separated from its physical, social and mental context in his book 'The Production of Space', in which he focuses directly on the representation of spaces/the spaces of representations. He questions the shifts from the lived to the blueprinted spaces and claims that 'things, acts, and situations are forever being replaced by representation'.¹³ He goes on the claim that these temporary structures are replaced by their representations, even if the nature of their existence is not long lasting. Exposition space changes and affects its host city in both physical and mental ways and this cause-effect relationship is mutual. The Great Exhibition can be put forward as an example of blueprinted space as an exposition space. It transforms as a lived space in the story of both South Kensington and the Exhibition Road Cultural Quarter in a mutual way. In 2000, the Millennium Dome of Richard Rodger with its specially built Jubilee Line extension was an attempted integration with the Great Exhibition tradition that was invented in 1851.

According to Michel Foucault, the exposition can be easily added to a list of similar spaces, in which 'history unfolds' such as cemeteries, theatres, cinemas, gardens, zoos, museums, libraries, brothels, barracks, and also the prisons. These places differ from all the other institutions in a single factor, being the greater importance of their ephemeral nature. An attempt is made to overcome the inherently transitional character of the expositions by arguing, interpreting and issuing the existing situation. The main issue for these structures is the 'day after', while their primary obligation is to overcome, and eventually transcend, the definite boundaries. In many cases, these structures are re-erected in a different location, and doing so a new transformation at an urban scale is inevitably. For instance, the Crystal Palace was relocated in an enlarged form on Penge Common next to Sydenham Hill, and came to transform this location as well as at an urban scale. This structure eventually succumbed to the fire in 1936, however the name of this temporary structure was later adopted to refer this area of south London and the park that surrounds the site, which is not the home of the Crystal Palace National Sports Centre. Even when these structures are not kept alive again, they have potential as a history unfolds in a Foucauldian manner.

How can these ephemeral structures be positioned in the timeline of Lefebvre? As he mentions in his book 'Urban Revolution', there are two critical phases in his time-space axis that intersect the urban in historical time: the first phase and the second critical phase. He explains that the first critical phase is related to the long-dominant agrarian (agricultural production, rural life, peasant society), although this trilogy becomes subordinate to an urban reality that is initially propelled and soon ravaged by commerce and industry.¹⁴ In the time-space axis, this period refers to the transformation from political city to a mercantile city, although there is also a paradigm shift between the mercantile city and industrial city that is a transition from agrarian to urban. The first critical phase can be explained as the subordination of the agriculture to industrialization and refers to the 16th century of Europe and the effects of Renaissance and Reformation. The second critical phase is when a dominant industry that becomes subordinate to the urban reality. Lefebvre questions the knowledge of the urban phenomenon, with his first claim is related to its scientific position. He states that it can be considered as a science if it involves the conscious formation of an urban praxis (becoming an industrial praxis) in terms of its rationality. Generally, industrialization results in urbanization, with the relationship between the urban and the process of urbanization are resulting in the mode of production.

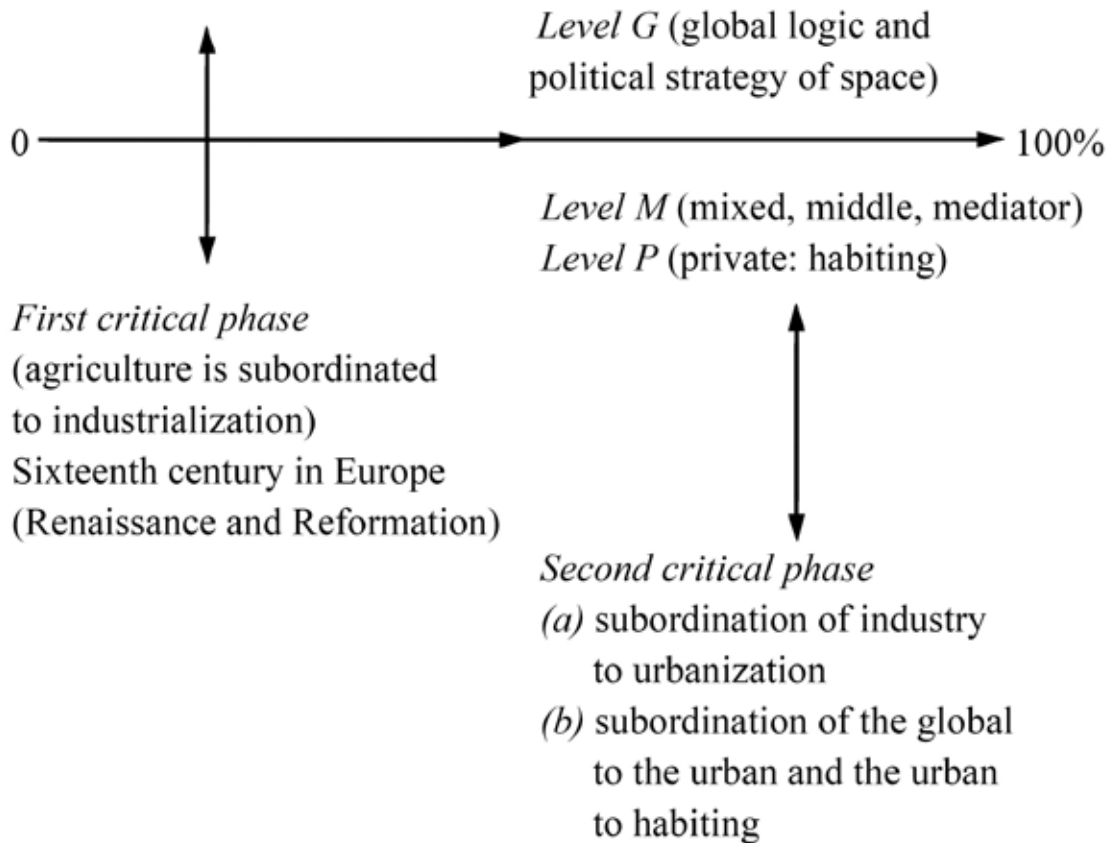


FIGURE 4 The phases of the City to Urban

Lefebvre concludes with an objective definition of urbanism, claiming it to be the ‘physical trace on the land of human dwellings of stone, cement, or metal’ and continues his argument by making a radical critique of the activity that claims the control the process of urbanization, and urban practice, and subjects it to its order. Lefebvre claims that there are several urbanisms, being those of humanists, developers, and the state and its technocrats. The first of these is related to abstract utopias, while the second sells urbanism and the last one dissociates into will and representation, institutions and ideologies. How can this be interrelated with the urbanization and the exposition? This architectural process begins with the urbanism of the technocrats and developers, but turns into the urbanism of the state. The fact that the state provides several benefits within this structure can be proof of the power that the state demonstrates through these international organizations uses as a formation of surplus value within its economic power.

Planners and developers are unable to control the productive activities, and Lefebvre criticizes this bureaucratic capitalism. While technicians and technocrats may be asked for the advice, they cannot take decisions and they are not decision makers, and lack the ability to decide upon the lifetime of the temporary structures. The state may decide to extend the lifetime of these projects, and technocrats will have no say in the matter. Urban planners take on the role of administrators and organizers, even though they may (not) recognize the fact. They have no role in the control of space, and the medium of space itself also changes, no longer being perceived only as an earth or soil, but also the space of society. Space becomes the product of social labour; production object and the formation of surplus value. In the recent past, production could be conceived only as an object; today, however, space is an output of production that can be bought, sold, and exchanged. Although the production of space is not a new thing, what is new is the global and production of ‘social space’.

Urban ideology exaggerates the role of planners and their activities, creating the illusion that they can manage others and things by using these representations in an innovative and positive way. Many planners think they have the ability to define, design and create social life and its relations, although Lefebvre says, 'Here the urban illusions awakens the somewhat somnolent mythology of the Architect'.¹⁵ Urban ideology becomes a passive and reductive practice, and follows a kind of medical ideology in which urban planners diagnose spatial diseases, and space becomes the subject of this diagnosis that suffers, becomes ill, is taken care of and is returned to health.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, the international expositions and world's fair as worldwide events crossing over centuries have been re-examined and researched from different perspectives such as architecture, urban planning, architectural history, art history and urban history. This paper is focused on the relationship between the exposition and the historical urban developments. Moreover, it leads to document and expose the impact and the role of the expositions in the history of planning. These exhibition spaces are a significant visionary statement for rethinking, understanding, and planning the future urban developments. The international expositions have played a great role in the transformation of the urban.

The design of the urban form is based on the infrastructure necessities of the exposition such as transportation, accommodation, and also catering. The transformation of the urban can be reorganized and overhauled in these fields, given their ability to change the identity of the particular site. Expositions form part of the urban environment, but also influence the formation of the urban in the transformation of space. This study examines the relationship between the Great Exposition and the subsequent transformation of the Kensington site into the exhibition district of the city of London. The Great Exhibition is a particularly significant event from a planning and architectural perspective that transformed the urban context. The urban operation was developed on the Kensington Site and has been a great model as an exhibition space. Although the exposition has long gone, its area of influence extends far beyond its own scale even today. South Kensington has become a prime example of how international expositions can contribute to the design and transformation of urban sites with a specific meaning: Exhibition.

Endnotes

- 1 Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital* (second edition New York, 1979). pp. 32-33.
- 2 Zeynep Celik, *Displaying the Orient: Architecture of Islam at Nineteenth-Century World's Fair* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992) p. 1.
- 3 Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution* (The University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and London, 2003) p. xi.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 115.
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 *Ibid.* p. 119.
- 7 *Ibid.*
- 8 Jeffrey A. Auerbach., *The Great Exhibition of 1851: A Nation on Display* (London: Yale University Press, 1999) p.197.
- 9 Kirsten Orr. 'Designing Sydney, 1879-1891: Visions of an Antipodean South Kensington' (*Journal of Australian Colonial History*, Vol. 11, 2009) pp. 147-166.
- 10 Miriam L. Levin, "Dynamic Triad: City, Exposition, and Museum in Industrial Society," *Urban Modernity: Cultural Innovation in the Second Industrial Revolution* (MIT Press, United States of America, 2010) p. 3.
- 11 Lefebvre. op. cit., p. 32.
- 12 *Ibid.* p. 47.
- 13 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Blackwell Publishing, Oxford UK, 1991) p. 311.
- 14 *Ibid.* p. 88.
- 15 *Ibid.* p. 156.

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Image Sources

- Figure 1: The diagram is produced by the author.
- Figure 2: The diagram is produced by the author.
- Figure 3: Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*.
- Figure 4: Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*.