



UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

[Review of: T.A. Hutton (2008) The new economy of the inner city]

Bontje, M.A.

DOI

[10.1007/s10901-009-9141-5](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10901-009-9141-5)

Publication date

2009

Published in

Journal of Housing and the Built Environment

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Bontje, M. A. (2009). [Review of: T.A. Hutton (2008) The new economy of the inner city]. *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment*, 24(2), 221-223.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10901-009-9141-5>

General rights

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

Book Review

Marco Bontje

Received: 1 March 2009 / Accepted: 1 March 2009 / Published online: 13 March 2009
© The Author(s) 2009. This article is published with open access at Springerlink.com

Thomas A. Hutton: *The new economy of the inner city. Restructuring, regeneration and dislocation in the twenty-first-century metropolis*, Routledge, London/New York, 2008, ISBN 978-0-415-77134-4 (hardback)

This monograph is the third volume in the series of Routledge Studies in Economic Geography, a series which according to the editors “provides a broadly based platform for innovative scholarship of the highest quality in economic geography”. The book’s title may be a bit misleading at first sight; the first part suggests that Hutton’s research is focussed on ‘the new economy’ of the late 1990s. In academic and popular debate back then, this term hinted at the emergence of a new system of production, service provision and distribution connected to the rapid rise and even more rapid fall of the ‘dotcoms’. This experience, however, appears to be only part of the economic restructuring Hutton is analysing. Besides the ‘dotcoms’ and their new guises in the ‘Web 2.0’ wave, Hutton studies a broader range of creative and technology-intensive industries. A second question raised by the title concerns the area being studied: the inner city. The working definition of the inner city in this book is “(...) a larger zone incorporating ‘industry’ (...) as well as older housing (...) with an emphasis on working-class residential communities and households (...)” (p. 303). Throughout the book this clearly denotes an area adjacent to the historic city centre or the classic central business district. But the alternating references to ‘inner city’, ‘CBD fringe’ and ‘city fringe’ (an area separate from the inner city, or part of it?) as well as ‘central city’ and ‘metropolitan core’ (CBD + CBD fringe + inner city?) cause confusion about which part of the city is actually studied.

The stage is set in chapters 1 and 2, where Hutton positions his work as a departure from the trilogy post-industrialism, post-Fordism and postmodernism. These theoretical frameworks no longer apply to the dynamics of the early twenty-first century metropolitan economy as a whole nor to the inner city economy in particular. After decades of dramatic decline and the departure of industry from the inner cities of the advanced capitalist world, new forms of production have emerged in this zone. Creative, cultural and knowledge-

M. Bontje (✉)

Nieuwe Prinsengracht 130, 1018 VZ Amsterdam, The Netherlands
e-mail: m.a.bontje@uva.nl

intensive companies, especially start-ups, led to a rediscovery of inner city sites as working environments. In part, these sites consist of revitalised manufacturing complexes, but a considerable share are also mixed living-working environments. Chapter 2, on the transformation of the inner-city economy, is a well-structured review of the most influential recent literature on the impact of globalization on (inner) cities, the rise of the urban cultural and knowledge-based economy, and the reassertion of production in the inner city. It offers a synthesized model of the production economy in what Hutton calls 'the new inner city' (p. 36). Chapter 3 continues the literature review, moving from process to place. This chapter zooms in on types of industrial districts in inner cities across the globe. Some of these types are revitalizations of traditional artisan, crafts or manufacturing clusters; others are new production clusters at sites with an industrial history, but without direct connections between past and present in terms of path dependency. Chapter 3 has a rather fragmented effect; it jumps between theoretical discussions and cases that do not seem to give the book a clear added value.

Chapters 5–8 report on the author's case studies in four cities: London, Singapore, San Francisco and Vancouver. Chapter 4 serves a 'bridging' function between theory and the case studies, reviewing the literature and secondary data on the transformation of London's inner-city and CBD economy since the 1950s. These case studies differ considerably in size and relative location, even though they are all located in an inner city. Some are direct neighbours of a CBD, others lie at the periphery of the inner city; and their current economic specialization ranges from intermediate services, creative industries, crafts, ICT and tourism to mixed economies. Still, the cases are presented in a systematic way which facilitates comparison. Each description starts with recent relevant developments in the city as a whole and then focuses on the case study area to reconstruct its recent economic trajectory. The author was able to study each of the areas repeatedly between 1999 and 2007, thereby offering insights in the processes of change, a luxury not many researchers can afford. The case selection makes sense: the cases represent cities from different tiers of the world city hierarchy and, within those cities, locations within the inner city that have experienced a comparable process of industrial restructuring. Since the cases are drawn from four countries in three continents, there is significant scope for generalization. However, as Hutton admits, London is a unique case and not representative of Europe. Moreover, Singapore is probably an atypical Asian case. And unfortunately, emerging world cities in countries like China, India, Brazil or Russia are not discussed. The methodology applied and sources used are an eclectic mix: observations, mapping, interviews, conversations, literature study, local media and descriptive statistics. But despite this rich methodological mix, the cases are largely descriptive. Thus, it remains a bit unclear how the methods were applied: how many interviews, what was asked, how were respondents selected, what is the difference between 'interviews' and 'conversations', etc.

The book ends with a substantial theoretical synthesis putting the pieces together. Instead of the 'new economy' referred to in the book title, Hutton prefers to speak of a 'recombinant economy' of the inner city here, a term which indeed fits the picture of inner-city economic redevelopment much better. All of Hutton's cases show an intriguing mix of Fordist, post-Fordist and 'post-post-Fordist' economic activities that are linked in various ways, including collaborations, hybrids, production—consumption interfaces and, of course, also competition (p. 280). Hutton's monograph offers a useful 'state of the art' of research on the inner-city economy, a welcome critical reflection on over-hyped concepts like the creative class and the creative industries, and several building blocks to bring this research field forward. As often happens with such ambitious books, the reader is left with

many new questions. Hopefully the research agenda suggested at the end of the book will contribute to additional in-depth insights into what has happened in our inner cities in the late twentieth century and what we can expect to happen over the next decades.

Open Access This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Noncommercial License which permits any noncommercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author(s) and source are credited.