

Urban development and visual culture: Commodifying the gaze in the regeneration of Tigné Point, Malta

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Abstract

This paper explores some of the hitherto under-researched intersections between urban (re)development, urban planning and visual culture. What emerges is an academic context that, to date, has largely compartmentalised discrete literatures on 'view', 'value of the view' and cityscape change, (re)Imageneering and (re)scripting). It shows how materialising processes associated with the commodification of a panoramic view in politico-economic and cultural terms can be used to transform and regenerate along neoliberal lines. It demonstrates how panoramas, when treated as a commodity within the context of neoliberal capitalism, are appropriated, (re)imagined and (re)scripted by architects and property developers to create high status, residential and commercial space for an affluent élite. As such, panoramas are a mechanism for the acceleration of capital accumulation that inherently create new and reinforce existing spatial inequalities. This study draws on research into the commodification of the view of the historic city of Valletta in the redevelopment of Tigné Point, the largest, most comprehensive regeneration scheme in Malta in recent years.

Key words commodification of the view, financialisation, gaze, Malta, panoramic view, Tigné Point, urban regeneration, urban scripting

Introduction

This paper explores the under-researched interconnections between urban planning, development and visual culture (Boyer, 1994; Thrift, 2004 and Tuan 1974, 1993). It investigates the use of the panoramic view as an important element of commodity culture and shows how the panoramic view can be used in urban (re)imagining, (re)scripting and (re) development in the context of neoliberal capitalism. Not only does this echo Lefebvre's triad of perceived, conceived and lived space (Lefebvre, 1991: 292), but it also makes interconnections between the generally compartmentalised writings on visualities and materialities. These links are developed through study of the commodification of the view towards the historic cityscape of Valletta, Malta from the peninsula of Tigné Point and the role that this panorama and gazing on it has played in the redevelopment of Tigné Point as an up-market, mixed use residential and leisure space.

The panorama and commodity culture

The framing of this study draws on insights from visual culture, especially work on the commodification of view, gazing and the production of city form (e.g. Jansson and Lagerkvist, 2009; Lagerkvist, 2010). It is also illuminated by research into the commodification of the aesthetics of the view into diverse value in the property market and urban development (e.g. Benson and Benson, 2013; Damigos and Anyfantis, 2011). Further, the study uses the politico-economic context of neoliberal capitalism (e.g. Brenner et al. 2010; Harvey, 2005, 2010) to explore interconnections between these largely discrete strands of work to suggest ways in which these links are harnessed in the (re)development of urban space.

In terms of the commodification of visual culture, vision and gaze have become regarded as the 'primary' sense intrinsic to the practice of looking, 'spectatorship', 'sightseeing' and the evocation of desire and fantasy (Foucault, 1977; Urry, 1990; Urry and Larsen, 2011). In this paper the use of the terms 'view' (to look) and 'gaze' (as a way of looking which determines both what is seen and the mode of seeing) draws on the work of Urry (1990) and Foucault (1990) and on more recent studies (e.g. Jansson and Lagerkvist (2009) and Urry and Larsen, 2011).

Since the 1960s, consumer society has placed substantial importance on visual impressions and contemporary values and opinions have been largely conditioned by visual culture and images (e.g. Burgin, 1996; Dovitskaya, 2005; Heywood and Sandywell, 2011; Thompson, 2015).

Concurrently, from the mid-1970s onwards, the restructuring of society along neoliberal lines has intensified the commodification of material and non-material resources worldwide, as a way of increasing the accumulation of capital (see for example, Harvey, 2005, 2010; MacLeod, 2011; Peck and Tickell, 2002; Swyngedouw et al. 2002). In this paper neoliberalism is understood as primarily originating in the 1970s as a class based response to decreased profit generation within capitalism, in order to restore high levels of capital accumulation (Brenner et al., 2010; Harvey, 2005). Many scholars consider that urban development and regeneration are pretexts for capital accumulation (e.g. Harvey, 2005, 2010; Lees, 2008; MacLeod et al., 2003). It is argued that the drive for increased profits on the stock market through property development is reported as the predominant moving force in the accelerated commodification of space (e.g. Christophers, 2016; Krätke, 2010; Lawrence, 2015).

This current neoliberal politico-economic context frames how panoramic views are a commodity to be bought, sold and become the property the affluent élite. Views are thus one of the mechanisms of urban (re)scripting and (re)development that can accelerate capital accumulation and reinforce spatial inequalities. The panorama becomes an object for economic and political strategies as commercial and political interests concentrate energy in creating visual distinction, cultural and symbolic associations in and for a place (Taylor, 1992). The property development sector appropriates panoramas/views in its 'pioneering for profit' (Lefebvre, 1991: 291), to produce high status, residential and commercial enclosures/enclaves (e.g. Marcuse, 1997; Pow, 2009).

Visual images are thus encoded with the values of power, exert power and act as an instrument of power (Cosgrove, 2008; Rose, 2007; Urry, 1990). Commodities of all kinds, including visualisations of cityscapes and urban panoramas, are mystified and full of constructed cultural meanings to the extent that they can become 'powerful economical and political forces in their own right' (Jansson and Lagerkvist, 2009: 26) and a way of legitimating profit making through the appropriation and (re)scripting of politically, economically and culturally mediated gazing. This study extends the work of Jansson (2007), Jansson and Lagerkvist (2009) and Lagerkvist (2010), to situate the view and gaze at the dynamic nexus between panorama, city imagineering and urban (re)scripting in the realm of politico (economic) and emotive geographies. Social appropriation of cityspace, including the panoramic view, takes place in its mediation into a commodity through (re)imaging, (re)scripting and urban transformation. Furthermore, as observed by Thompson (2015), architecture produces a certain kind of way of experiencing space. The transformation of city spaces is then interpretable as

inherently affective, emotional and mediated at the intersectionality between people's (mediatised) aesthetic and economic preferences and mediated scripted space.

Exposure to familiar panoramas reinforces emotional responses and expectations and certain urban panoramas become strong visual signs. As Lefebvre (2014: 688) notes, 'while it lasts the object is *virtually* reduced to a *sign*' [original italics]. Some, such as the view of the Pudong-Shanghai waterfront, have also the propensity to evoke a 'future gaze' (Jansson and Lagerkvist, 2009) i.e. an aspirational glimpse of the future. Many panoramas include 'gazing across waters' that generate a liminal sense of time and space, and of material, symbolic and imaginary spaces. The sense of littoral liminality is also conveyed by Brand (2009) in her work on 'bluespace', in which the coastal edge and the urban environment become a transitional zone. In this 'bluespace' harbours become places of spectacle and performance, not only to view theatre and spectacle, but also as places across which, or from which, to view.

There is a nexus between gaze, urban scripting and (re)development (Jansson, 2007; Jansson and Lagerkvist, 2009: 26) reflecting the dialectic of spatial production centred on the 'interplay between subjective gazing and strategic urban landscaping and scripting'. The differing (re)presentations of cityscapes through their (re)scripting, or (re)casting, may be interpreted as the outcome of the actions of urban image makers (Waley, 2006) including planners and architects, politicians and developers.

Through the use of particular often preferred panoramas, cities become a large visual 'sign' with associated distinctive meanings. Gaze/gazing and urban scripting associated with selected panoramas and vistas have the capacity to transform urban spaces and places (both within the panorama itself and in places from which it is gazed upon).

Interlinkages occur between panorama, gazing and the creation of city form and these are revealed during the neoliberal commodification of the aesthetics of a panoramic view into cultural and financial 'value'. This commodification has not been explored, largely because themes of aesthetic preferences, valued landscapes are another strand in the literature.

Aesthetic preferences and 'valuing' the view

The process of transformation of the visual into the material draws on other ways of interpreting the power and influence of the panorama and the gaze, particularly in the literature on 'aesthetics and 'value'. This is shown specifically in the commodification of the aesthetics of the panoramic view and aesthetic preferences into diverse value, as created and mediated through the valuation and marketing of property.

This literature focusses on psychological and cognitive research into landscape perception and the factors or qualities of given landscapes that can predict aesthetic preferences. There is a distinction between natural and built scenes (Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989), in which more natural landscapes are favoured over cultural ones (e.g. Arriaza et al, 2004) and preference for historic landscapes (Fyhri et al., 2009) all of which are also influenced by associated pleasurable experiences (Hartig and Staats, 2006).

A beautiful view has perceived financial 'value' and is generally considered to be a commodifiable asset (Lange and Schaeffer, 2001). Visual quality is used as a positive attribute in property transactions, with brokers extolling, for example, the 'million\$view'. It is also reflected in the names of property and districts such as 'Bay

View' and the archetypal 'Belle Vue' (Isenstadt, 1999: 65). Although values are subjective and depend on age, culture and individual aesthetic preferences (e.g. Lange and Schaeffer, 2001), people are prepared to pay more for a good view (Benson and Benson, 2013; Jim and Chen, 2009). For example, 'the view' has a statistically significant relationship with the value of residential property (e.g. Benson and Benson, 2013) with premiums associated with it ranging from 10% to 65% (e.g. Damigos and Anyfantis, 2011; Luttik, 2000). This commodification of the view has economic value realised through financial transactions. It also suggests that there may be an association between this determinable value and the 'preferred' view that it represents. However, the economic value of the 'preferred' view may not be indicative of a 'preferred' gaze since it does not encompass viewers'/purchasers' interpretations of what the view means to them. The outcomes of this interpretative agency generate individual 'real' gazes that are not synonymous with the commodified, collective 'preferred' gaze.

Given the aesthetic preferences and subsequent value placed on a panoramic view, what then are the roles of urban change makers in (re)scripting cityscape through the use of a 'good' view or panorama and commodified gazing? The potential answers to this question are not developed comprehensively within either of the two broad strands of literature even though some cross-over exists between imagineering and (re)scripting (e.g. Jansson and Lagerkvist, 2009); (re)scripting and politico-emotive behaviours (Thrift 2004); visualities and materialities (e.g. Rose, 2007; Rose and Tolia-Kelly, 2012; Thompson, 2015); within some work on embodied urbanism (Glass and Rosewood, 2014; Hall, 2014) and in recent accounts of user generated urbanism (Bela, 2015).

Methodological Approaches

This study asserts that the 'separateness' of the literature on the commodification of visual culture and the 'valuing' of aesthetics and aesthetic preference hinders the forging of understandings of the visual and politico-economic forces at work in urban regeneration. Using the example of the mixed-use development of Tigné Point, Malta, these boundaries are transcended to explore the interconnections between them and their roles in contemporary regeneration.

A qualitative 'bricolage' approach (e.g. Denzil and Lincoln, 1999) was adopted, using sources obtained predominantly from field observation undertaken during visits to Tigné Point between 2011 and 2012 and official published sources notably from the Government of Malta and MIDI, the company responsible for Tigné Point's recent revitalisation.

The visual observation of the cityscape transformations at Tigné Point focussed on how the panoramic view across Marsamxett Harbour has been reflected in site and property design and property valuation (to explore links between view, viewer, imagineering, scripting and marketing). Review of additional other official planning documentation established the history of the site's (re)development trajectory. The property development company's and real estate agents' promotional materials were analysed using content analysis and thematic commentary (Aronson, 1994; Braun and Clarke, 2006), following standard procedures including logging and manual coding, using a researcher determined *a priori* coding of key dimensions (Scott-Jones, 2010). Other information, particularly about the operation of the local property market, was

collated from discussion with real estate agents. Full ethical clearance for the research was granted by Liverpool Hope University according to usual practice and procedures.

The commodification of the gaze in the redevelopment of Tigné Point

Context

The literature on vision view and gaze; valued landscape and imagineering provides the framework in which to build an understanding of their role in urban development. At the core of these interconnections are links between: (a) moments of vision i.e. 'viewing', 'view' and 'being viewed'; (b) types of viewing and (c) reimagining and the sequential enactment of (re)scripting that suggest the interconnectivities between vision, types of viewing and (re)scripting and (re)development. The intersection between vision and scripting holds a vital key to understanding urban regeneration, through its capacity to be visually and materially transformative. It creates a different lens through which to examine the role of vision in (re)development and provides an alternative to the more frequently encountered perspectives associated with conceptual visioning for (re)development and their subsequent realisation in changed urban form (Jansson, 2007; Jansson and Lagerkvist, 2009). Commodification and financialisation lie at the heart of the following reframing of the role of view and associated gaze(s) in the production of urban space.

This paper posits that vision, as interpreted through the trio of separate moments of viewing, view and being viewed, offer an alternative perspective on the processes of urban (re)development. Three moments of: 'viewing' (i.e. the act of looking at, or

inspecting something); 'view' (i.e. to see something at a single moment) and 'being viewed', are discrete but are often used interchangeably. So too are types of viewing, for example panorama (i.e. a view of a wide area), vista (i.e. a pleasing view/distant view/view from a high position), prospect (i.e. an extensive view of the landscape) and view. At the core of view-creation is the viewer, or observing subject (observer), and how they come to view through the scripting and materialising skills of architects and designers (Harvey, 2005; Lefebvre, 1991). How viewing is encoded through careful framing is well reported, particularly in the context of window-shaping (Friedberg, 2006; Isenstadt, 2007). Jacobs et al. (2011, 2012) explored the socio-technical achievements of a high-rise view, viewing and the integration of the human and the technological in the exploration of the view between window technologies, 'viewing' and 'the view' in Glasgow's Red Road housing development. However, during the social democratic phase of capitalism in the 1960s, when many social housing projects were designed and constructed, the panoramic view had a largely non-commodified role. Now, in contemporary neoliberal capitalism, anything including a view can be commodified and financialised, thereby creating an alternative explanation for the shaping of contemporary cityscapes.

Drawing on these conceptual contexts, particularly associations with the 'situated eye', this paper suggests an explanation of how cityscapes are transformed within the socio-economic context of neoliberalism through the lens of commodification and 'value' of the view south from Tigné Point, Sliema across Marsamxett Harbour to Malta's capital city, Valletta. Many of the features that comprise the 'good' and 'rare' view of perceived aesthetic attractiveness and 'value' (Bourassa et al. 2004; Jim and Chen, 2009) are to be found in this cross-harbour view from Tigné Point. From the water's

edge, the view also has ideal proportions (rule-of-thirds) for visual preference and perspectives of beauty (Svobodova et al., 2014) in having almost equal amounts of waterscape, cityscape and skyscape. The viewing eye is, thereby, inevitably drawn to what is happening in the harbour space rather than the sky. In the harbour arena, the harbour space acts as an amphitheatre for water-based activities, contained by the prized cultural heritage city of Valletta with its domes, spires, ramparts and battlements. The view is a 'bluescape' (Brand, 2009), full of aspirations and dreams and encouraging the spectator and *flâneur* to fall under its spell. Evoking the romantic, historic 'preferred' gaze, this cross-harbour view exerts a strong visual presence along the Sliema's harbour waterfront and has the capacity to draw in and immerse the spectator.

The role that the view and gaze plays in the tourism context is extensively discussed in the literature (e.g. McCannell, 2001; Urry, 1990; Urry and Larsen, 2011) as have tourists' willingness to pay more for a room with a view (e.g. Espinet et al., 2003; Fleischer, 2011; Lange and Schaeffer, 2001). However, beyond the gazes of tourists there has been far less reflection on the role of the view and the gaze in urban scripting (Brenner et al., 2009; Harvey, 2005; Weber, 2002, 2010). This is the key gap which this paper addresses.

Rescripting and regenerating Tigné Point

The study traces the historical background of Tigné Point and considers the character and form of its reinvention and rescripting. Emphasis is placed on how, during its most recent transformation in the wider context of financialisation of land and property

(Christophers, 2016; Lawrence, 2015), existing panoramas and new views and gazes have been created and capitalised in order to accelerate profit generation.

Throughout the early 21st century rescripting of Sliema has centred on the regeneration of the former forts at Tigné Point and Manoel Island (Figure 1).

[Insert Figure 1]

The fort at Tigné Point was developed by the Knights of St John in 1792 and used by British forces from 1805-1979. In 1979 the fort, barracks, foreshore, leisure facilities (football club, lido) were returned to the ownership of the Maltese Government. Many of the barracks were subsequently redeveloped as social housing, but by the 1990s much of area had fallen into disrepair. In 1992 the 13.5ha site was heralded as ‘the prime development opportunity in Malta’ (Government of Malta, 1992:1.1) and the initial visioning was for a holistic, mixed-use, low-rise (maximum six storey) development. Within the context of the overarching Maltese Islands Tourism Development Plan (Horwath and Horwath Consultants, 1989) and the Structure Plan for the Maltese Islands (MEPA, 1990), the development brief emphasised landscape and coastal dimensions, for example in comments such as ‘urban design matters in this strategic location opposite a World Heritage Site are of paramount importance’ (Government of Malta, 1992, Annexe A). One of the primary objectives was that ‘buildings along the waterfront areas of both sites should reinforce and add to the sense of enclosure which contain the Harbour and maintain its unparalleled visual splendor [*sic*]’ (Government of Malta, 1992: 2.4). Clear steer was given towards

conservation and enhancement of the existing historic dimensions of the site. What ultimately materialised was very different.

Six years of preparatory work on a lease agreement with the Government and radical reworking of the original design brief (as a high-rise, high-density development) meant that the construction work on Tigné Point and Manoel Island did not get underway until 2000. The €450m project was awarded to Manoel Island Development Investment (MIDI), a consortium of some of Malta's leading construction, development, design and investment companies in conjunction with Italian design team Pininfarina and their lead architect, Konrad Buhagiar.

This demonstrated a shift towards corporate, property-led, high-rise residential and retail regeneration (and its associated quest for maximisation of financial value) that was largely delivered during 2004-8, at a time of booming property prices (Attuyer, 2016; Halbert and Boissevain, 2010). It also took place at a time of other major property led regeneration schemes in Malta, notably the Cottonera Project (McCarthy, 2004) and coincided with the up-market shift in Malta's tourism promotion (Chapman and Speake, 2011).

There has been considerable on-going discontent about the apparent lack of opportunities for public consultation (Sliema Residents Association, 2012) and 'swaying of political sentiment' in Sliema (The Sunday Times of Malta, 2008). At its heart there is an intense struggle between the long-standing public value placed on Tigné Point as an accessible, historic place in a uniquely attractive location, and a contrasting commercial value generated through its commodification by and largely

for private élites. In response to concerns about the privatisation of spaces, MIDI has consistently maintained that most of Tigné Point is open to the public, including the foreshore, leisure and heritage facilities. From these vantage points the harbour view is still largely accessible to the public. The 'old' view of a dilapidated Tigné Point Battery has been replaced with new views of an uncompromisingly modernist landscape. In reality, part of the panoramic view has been commodified as a commercial proposition within this intrinsically financially driven, property led regeneration scheme, with much of the capitalised view, accessible to a few wealthy residents able to buy into it.

[Insert Figure 2]

Thus, the revitalisation of Tigné Point was reinvented as an exclusive commercial and profit driven regeneration scheme (Figure 2) in line with global trends towards financialisation of property development (e.g. Theurillat et al., 2016; Weber, 2010). The use of the view to capture the attention of the (paying) viewer became a pronounced part of the commercial mix. View and viewing were fully part of Pininfarina's vision for Tigné Point. An up-market, contemporary village emerged as an imagineered central piazza [piazza] as an important focal point for the whole development. The Point retail mall on the eastern side of the piazza incorporates a full-sized football pitch on its roof and an underground car park for over a thousand vehicles. The southern foreshore is lined with exclusive, expensive apartments, a clubhouse and infinity pool (MIDI, 2011a) and in 2012 the development moved towards completion (MIDI, 2012a). At all points in its development it was made clear

that the key beneficiaries of the project were those who could pay their way into the increasingly expensive and exclusive properties.

Central walkways radiate from the piazza and provide car-free access to the residential blocks and help maximise light, shade and air circulation and residential blocks have been built according to sustainable, design principles. They were also designed (many as stepped buildings) to maximise the number of apartments with views, specifically towards Valletta and to create residences that overlook courtyards and radial walkways. These plans present a modernist envisioning of the importance of views (as assets) and viewing technologies in the design of buildings for high-rise living (Jacobs et al. 2011, 2012; Le Corbusier, 1967 [1933]).

The outward views including the panorama of Valletta, dominate Tigné Point. For the observing subject, positioned inside buildings or in open spaces, the physical design of the development draws the eye to wide, extensive uninterrupted views and small glimpses through deliberately positioned and framed windows in which viewing is coded through window shaping (Jacobs et al. 2012). The 13 storey, Q1 block's 38 apartments are carefully positioned to maximise the views. In October 2013 and valued at €1.5m, apartments with views of Valletta harbour entrance were purchased first, then apartments with a view of Valletta, valued at €1m to €1.5m, and last by those with a northerly view of the Mediterranean Sea priced at €800k to €1m. The majority of apartments were sold within two weeks (Tigné Point, 2014).

The radial form of roads and alleys, from the piazza towards the sea, provide staged glimpses of 'bluespace'. Whether taking the form of gaze perspective (i.e. a single

unchanging viewpoint) such as a small window view of the Mediterranean, or a route perspective such as offered on the foreshore walk, the view and potential for viewing are integral to the development. Sight lines or the visual field of the viewing subject at any point in space, carefully maximise 'view'. The architects' controlled use of vistas and panoramas position views at the development's heart and the observer is drawn in as a consumer of views and potential investor.

Thus, the existing views and the capitalising that create new, commodified gazes to accelerate profit generation have been instrumental in the scripting of both the macro and micro design of Tigné Point. They have exerted substantial influence in the regeneration process and in doing so, show how some of the asserted interlinkages between the visual (viewing/gaze) and the material, through (re)scripting and the construction of new places and spaces are realised.

View, gaze and the development process

MIDI promotes the Tigné Point development with reference to its view of Valletta. Through its presentation in the media the consortium often defines itself in terms of the view as for example, 'your perfect balance of leisure and living' describes the view stating that 'Malta's history [...] is clearly visible on Tigné Point, a promontory overlooking the beautiful 16th century, walled city of Valletta, the island's capital and a World Heritage Site' (MIDI, 2008: 4). The panorama is frequently cited as the main reason for the design configuration of the apartments, for example 'The glorious vistas of Malta provide the starting point for the living spaces of Tigné South' (MIDI, 2008: 13a). Of the 50 images in this brochure, nine (17%) feature the across harbour-view. Subsequent brochures such as the one for the T10 residences, state 'some dream of a

view like this. Some wake up to it ... every single day' (MIDI, 2011b). One resident notes that 'the position of the apartments is fantastic and they offer a lot of scope for innovative design to play against the beautiful backdrop of Valletta Harbour and the sea' (MIDI, 2011c). In the print brochure for the T10 apartments (MIDI, 2011b) a cross-harbour view features in eight out of 36 images (22%) including the largest image, the centre-page spread. This view is promoted within the MIDI marketing literature above other property retail factors such as location, facilities for the residents, and transport links.

Since 2003, Tigné Point has been the most expensive residential and commercial location in Malta. Residential units at Tigné Point are placed in price brackets based on their view. In March 2011 the valuations for apartments were: Garden view from €388,000, Piazza view from €388,000, Sea view from €403,000, and Valletta view from €976,000. In total, 250 of the 500 apartments at Tigné Point have a view of Valletta and command this substantial premium. The monetary value created by the view, combined with the accompanying promotion of the views as part of a 'prestige' lifestyle, defines a commodified 'preferred' gaze. Through economic transaction the purchaser buys not just the view but the commodified gaze. Nevertheless, this may not equate directly to an individual's more multifaceted 'real' gaze that incorporates other facets of their life (e.g. identity and experiences) which influence how they view. It also reveals a glimpse of the design scripting process in which apartment construction has oriented itself around the view in order to maximise both mediated attractiveness to investors and sale and rental income - all features of the recent neoliberal phase of capitalism (Theurillat et al. 2016; Weber, 2010).

Rescripting and the commodification of the gaze

Through imagineering and (re)scripting, new vistas and gazes have been created and these in turn have been commodified and popularised. The construction of the clubhouse with a new infinity pool has provided state of the art leisure amenities for Tigné Point and has also created a new foreground for one of the best known views across the harbour to Valletta [Figure 3]. Here, the traditional 'preferred' view has been used as the key driver in the viewpoint's rescripting to create amenities that share this view. The infinity pool resonates with the design device of the ha-ha and the maintenance of an uninterrupted prospect. The clubhouse has carefully positioned and designed 'picture windows' to frame the panorama and draw in the viewing eye. Both the clubhouse and the pool have added new materialities at the viewpoint. In turn, this rescripted viewpoint (see Figure 3) has also created a new vista and altered imagery. The traditional view is reframed and an alternative gaze is generated.

[insert Figure 3]

This new view has become one of the defining, charismatic images of the revitalised Tigné Point and has featured prominently in MIDI promotional materials and real estate agents' web presence. It has also become a signifying visual image for media reports. The Financial Times (2012) featured it in its report on 'Mediterranean Revival' and Malta's economic repositioning. The significance of this reimagineered, rescripted cityscape, new views and commodified gaze, is that its imagery has the capacity to make statements about Tigné Point (the viewpoint) and also encourage differing imaginaries of Valletta (the view). For Valletta, this may be significant for its status as

European Capital of Culture 2018, and the desirability of gazing on the city looks set to increase.

Capitalising the view through a commodified gaze

Through financial transaction, the commodification of the gaze is operationalised and the viewing subject takes ownership of the commodified gaze, in scripted, tangible, material form such as an apartment. As viewing subjects buy into the (re) imagineered, mediatised and commodified gaze they confirm its capacity to contribute to the transformation of the cityscape. Indeed, the attractiveness of the location and investment potential, both initially and for resale, has generated interest from both Maltese and international purchasers. Of the initial 200 apartments launched from autumn 2002 to spring 2003, 74% were sold to Maltese and 26% to overseas purchasers. There has been an element of resale but most apartment owners are retaining their properties as investments and sources of rental income.

Tigné Point property availability listings in July 2012 also showed the prominence given to the vista with information for each apartment including, location, price, number of bedrooms and the view. Apartments with a piazza view had a mean value of €2199 per m² whereas for those with a Valletta view the figure was €3138 per m² (Tigné Point, 2012). While it is difficult to attribute the price differential solely to the presence or absence of a spectacular harbour-side view (as there were other differences e.g. number of bedrooms), the fact that MIDI favourably profiles the character of a property's view is indicative of its influence. Using compiled rental data from a range of property agents, in July 2012 apartments in block T10, with one or two bedrooms, were priced from €1500 to c. €1900 monthly and with sea views between c.

€2250 and €2500. That very few residential properties were unsold or available for sale or rental, within a few months of completion, reflects the 'pull' of Tigné Point as an investment opportunity. In terms of resale, several property agents reported the highest demand for views of the harbour, then the Mediterranean and lastly of the courtyards and backs of the buildings.

In 2011 the International Property Awards gave the title of 'Best Mixed Use Development in Europe' to Tigné Point (MIDI, 2012b). It raised the prominence of the project in Europe and beyond and contributed to fuelling home and international investment, a commercial vindication of the financial 'value' to be accrued through calculated manipulation, mediation and mediatisation of ascribed aesthetic and cultural 'value' (see also Theurillat et al., 2016).

Conclusion

This study of a major regeneration project in Malta shows how cityscapes are manipulated through the materialisation of visual, imagined, imagineered, iconographic and symbolic space for economic and political purposes and gain. Further, it shows how urban transformations can take place through the commodification of the panoramic view and gaze within the context of neoliberal capitalism. It also shows that the accelerated commodification of the panoramic view is part of an increasing drive for profits associated with the financialisation that characterises current (i.e. neoliberal) capitalism (Fields and Uffer 2014; Halbert and Attuyer 2016; Lawrence, 2015; Theurillat et al., 2016; Weber 2010). Thus, panoramic views are commodified and become part of investment strategies by real estate companies. Through this, panoramic views are a medium to extract value (Jansson and

Lagerkvist, 2010). Urban space is (re)scripted and (re)produced and, in so doing, the city gets closer to being a site of value extraction for capital rather than a site of human living (Brenner et al. 2009; Fainstein, 2016; Lefebvre, 2014).

This study is one of the few during the last decade (e.g. Jansson and Lagerkvist 2010; Rose and Tolia-Kelly, 2012) that have crossed the boundaries between visual culture and urban development. It points to the opportunities for further exploration of ways in which visual and other amenities may be commodified and contribute to the contemporary transformations of urban landscapes under neoliberalism. In future research, it will be useful to explore more the dialectic of this transformation. Specifically, there remains much to investigate on areas of contestation in the commodification of the view. There is also potential for further exploration of the effects of the financialisation of property development in urban regeneration (as also suggested by Halbert and Attuyer, 2016).

Under neoliberal capitalism, commercial property led development utilises the mediatised cultural and aesthetic preferences of the affluent to fuel its profit generating capabilities and outputs. Interpreted through a Gramscian lens, these affluent enclaves are a reflection of continued bourgeois class domination through the state and the everyday hegemony of the media (Gramsci, 1971). Consequently, other, less affluent sections of the population are, to a greater or lesser extent, excluded from viewing and gazing on these vistas and panoramas, a reflection of the wider occurrence of accelerated class based socio-economic inequalities under neoliberalism (e.g. Dorling, 2014; Fainstein, 2016; Harvey, 2005, 2010).

Importantly, this study has also started to identify and explore, within the context of neoliberal capitalism, interconnections between, (a) moments of 'viewing', 'view', 'being viewed, (b) types of viewing, (c) reimagining and the sequential enactment of (re)scripting. At its core lies the observation that 'viewing' is the act of looking at, and for the observing subject who views, the object of view is something that may 'catch the eye'. The observer is encouraged to view, through mediated and mediatised creation of alluring vistas by architects and urban designers. The momentary view of the manipulated observer is part of scripting and enactment by those involved in urban space creation and establishes a fundamental connection between viewing, view and scripting. Conveyed to prospective potential investors, residents and visitors, newly created vistas (re)present the epitome of capitalistic, élitist aspirations associated with prestige and chic-liveability as encoded in the values of and power of consumer society (Cosgrove, 2008; Rose, 2007). High property price valuations and rapidity of sales and rentals after construction reflect the commercial 'success' of the process of the commodification of a rescripted view and re-imagined gaze.

At a time of neoliberal capitalism, selling the view and gaze is just one tool in the regeneration tool kit, but one that has been shown in this paper to have a considerable and financially lucrative effect in 'selling' space and place. In this context subjective gazing (as manipulated by market driven ends) creates bespoke material realities to match.

This paper demonstrates how the dialectic between subjective gazing and strategic urban scripting can operate. It also provides new insights into the fundamental links between visual culture and urban planning and development within the framework of

neoliberal capitalism and its characteristic intent to commodify everything. The capitalisation and associated commodification of the non-material (including visualities like the panoramic view) and the material (such as the built environment) are an integral part of the financial, profit driven behaviour of property developers. They are also inherent in the actions other scripting agents of urban change, and consumers who buy into the pervasive, persuasive cultural constructions of aesthetics, economic value and speculative gain. Thus, processes of urbanisation and the transformation of urban space are a clear reflection of the 'values' of the society that creates it and evidence for the materialisation, embedding and continuation of neoliberal capitalism itself.

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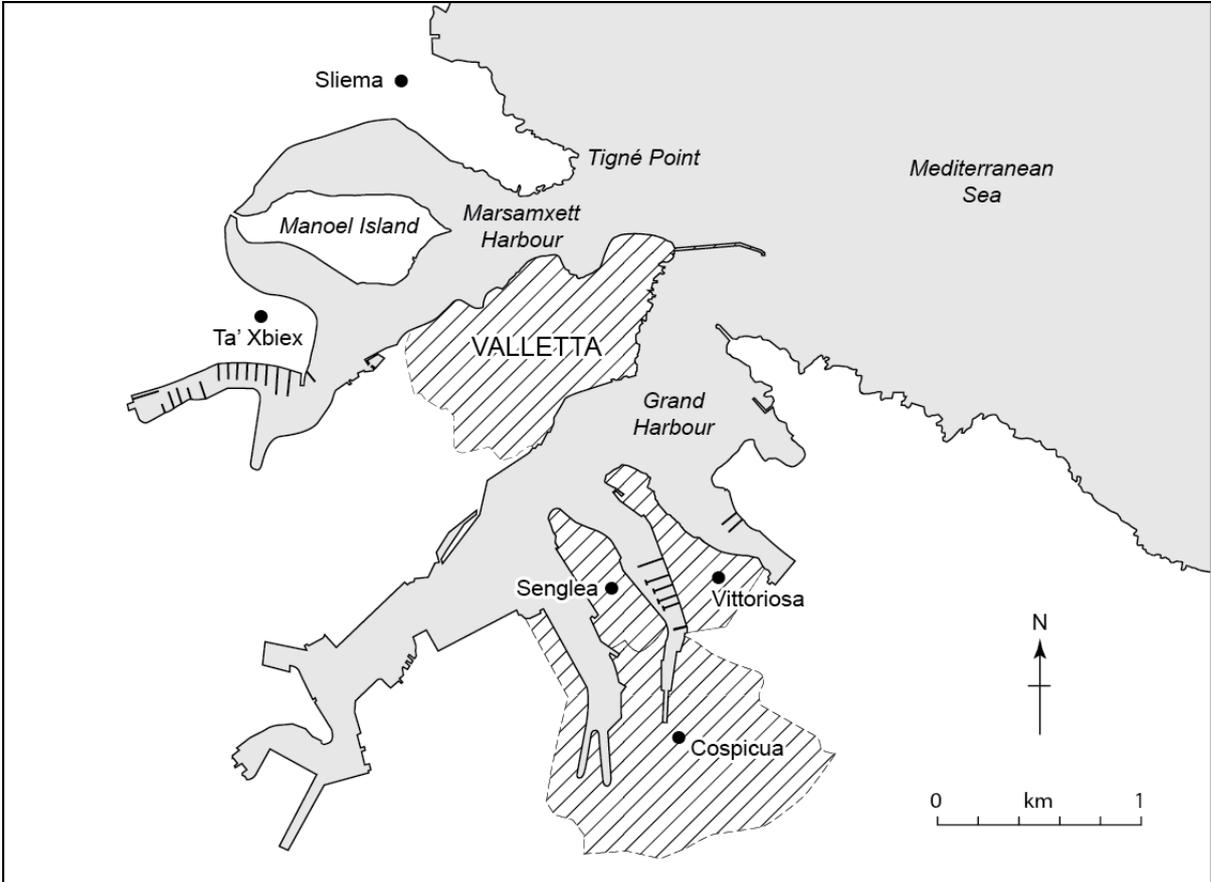


Figure 1: Location of Tigné Point

Showing the city of Valletta, Manoel Island and the Tigné Point peninsula to the north across Marsamxett Harbour.



Figure 2: Tigné Point development elements

Key features of the rescripted townscape are Fort Tigné to the east, the infinity pool to the south, residential blocks to the west and in the far north-west the football pitch on the roof of The Point retail centre.

Image: Google Earth 7.1.1.1580 (2013). *Malta 35°53'N 14°30', Elevation*

132m, Available Through: <http://www.google.com/earth/index.html> , accessed

06/09/2013.



Figure 3: Rescripting the view of Valletta

The cross-harbour panorama from Tigné Point inspired the location of new leisure amenities such as this residents' pool. The view of Valletta has been transformed to incorporate the historic (cityscape of Valletta) and a commodified gaze grounded in chic-liveability (represented by the pool).

Image: MIDI (2013).