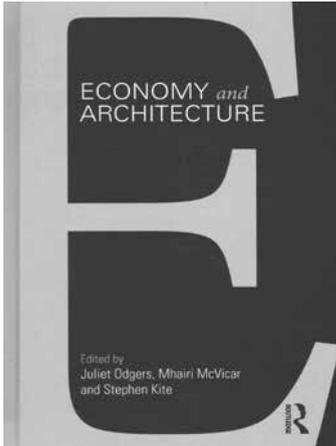


**Juliet Odgers (Editor),  
Mhairi McVicar (Editor),  
Stephen Kite (Editor),  
Economy and Architecture,  
Abingdon and New York,  
Routledge, 284 pp. - 2015  
Paperback: € 49.95 - ISBN-13:  
978-1138025486**



“We are all too aware, as any practising architect must be, that a skilful engagement with the exigencies of market, money and price are necessary not only in running a successful practice but also in “procuring” a building” say the editors of the volume “Economy and Architecture”, who indeed move entirely within the architectural realm as instructors and critics. This statement is the starting point for a broad reflection about the combination of budget concerns, management pressures and market feedbacks that the architect’s profession underpins. However, the different contributors to the volume also attempt at conveying a more optimistic attitude: even if architecture is strictly connected with the market in economic terms, the volume in its entirety also shows that architectural

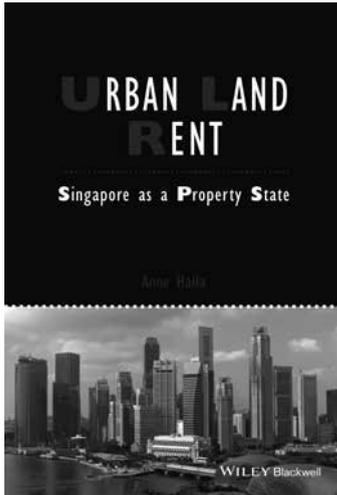
professionals can challenge the rules of the game by means of the creative potential of their designs and practices. Revolving around this central theme, the book implicitly rejects a unique and universal understanding of the term “economy” itself, which would reduce architecture to a simple commodity that strictly follows market patterns. On the contrary, the book explores a more complex and broader notion of economy, one that from the ancient origin of the term re-frames the connections between the *oikos*, which fundamentally is intended as the basic social unit, either in terms of family or community, and its spaces managed with the work of designers. The book is divided into four main thematic sections – Defining household, Negotiating value, Managing production, Politics and economy – each one hosting five different contributions that were previously presented at an international conference held at the Welsh School of Architecture in July 2011. Even though a clear relationship between the four parts of the book is not made explicit, each section explores a specific economic sphere of economy from a multitude of perspectives and case studies. This incredible variety of essays, set in very different historical and geographical contexts, surely deserves the reader’s attention as it mirrors the mutable nature of the relationships between architecture and economy – or the unstable character of capitalism itself, paraphrasing Peggy Deamer’s masterpiece (2014) “*Architecture and Capitalism: 1845 to the*

*Present*”. Yet the volume “Economy and Architecture” attempts at expanding the critical perspective prior to modern capitalism and liberal markets, including essays devoted to earlier time than the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Three further considerations should be added, though. Firstly, the volume includes contributions made both by architectural practitioners and by scholars of architecture and urban studies, as well as writings by ethnographers and sociologists. At any rate, no works by economists have been included in the assortment of essays, which is both challenging and possibly questionable. Secondly, the book provides a clear holistic understanding of the relationships between architectural design and the marketplace. The whole volume confutes the value of design and architecture as strictly economic and completely measurable in terms of performance; alternatively, essays argue for a multifaceted set of values involved in the process of architectural production and highlight how such values are continuously negotiated among different actors and in different situations. Thirdly, to conclude, the book positions among the multitude of investigations on the fringe of architectural design disciplinary boundaries and, even if in fitful way, sheds light into the implications of reading and understanding architectural practice from other fields of inquiry.

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**Anne Haila, *Urban Land Rent. Singapore as a Property State*, Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 291 pp. - 2016**  
**Paperback: \$ 32.44, ISBN 978-1-118-82767-3**



"This is a book about land" Anne Haila clarifies in the first line of her volume. Yet it is much more than that: the volume is a call for a comprehensive rethinking of rent theory and mechanisms to capture future rent in our cities. To this end, the author argues that David Ricardo's study of 'land' in association with rent – for agricultural taxation – should be critically updated to an urban world in which factors of production have changed to such an extent that 'land' in the city "was reified into the monetary value of real estate thus blurring the boundary between physical and financial assets" (p. 210). Such condition was made evident in recent financial crises, in which "derivative rents draw land and real estate into a financial game"

(p. 213), although 'money' is used more frequently as an easy explanation for crises. Despite these ambitious propositions, this is also a case study-based book about land, rent, property and state in the very peculiar Singapore city-state. As in other works by Anne Haila, the detailed accounts of local specificities are instrumental to explore critically conventional assumptions about general issues such as the interaction between state and private property and land use right. 'Land' accounts for the social relations affected by laws and customs in which land is embedded. Hence, land matters when occupied by people that are often emotionally attached to it. The book, after a brief introduction to Singapore and a methodological statement that introduces the unconventional way in which 'the case' is utilised, presents a detailed summary of land ideologies as retrospectively regarded from Singapore privileged observation point, multiplying the diverse possible definition of land and focusing on the more transformative ones. Anne Haila keeps Singapore in the background of the second chapter, as a test to her critiques to settled ideologies. Singapore, where state and market are blended and the 90% of land is owned by the state, is not presented as an ideal practice, but rather as the extreme condition in which conventional issues should be redefined. Anne Haila then presents a broad review of Rent Theory, or the relationship between owners and users of lands with the 'naturalisation' of claims over

future revenues, and of Property Rights Theory, declaring at the very beginning her interest in forms of land tenure to explain urban development processes. The argument is recapped in the 'Conclusion', thanks to an epistemological assessment of the land question, the urban question and the rent question, that ends with a pledge for an explicit policy choice on land speculation. Here comes the value of Singapore as a case study. Anne Haila guides the reader into the blend of state and market of the city-state making use of comparisons to other regions of the world to clarify her points and engage into challenging analytical angles without describing too many technical details. Land and real estate stand in a prominent, yet often neglected, position in Singapore's economic success. Indeed, the state has used its land resources monopoly to provide public housing for the majority of the population, and public industrial space for the economy to prosper, also benefiting a successful private development. With the structure of the book in mind, three further considerations should be added. First, the author proposed, in many cases, ground-breaking classifications. Since landownership has become a social issue, for example, a proper classification of land regimes may include not only forms of propriety (shared, leased, private) but also clarifications about the involved relationships, justifications and development modes. Moreover, this operation provides a new dimension for comparisons, the

comparison of causal factors, as the author did in this book, as opposed to macro-level comparisons and micro-ethnographies. Second, the author critically selects Singapore as a case study. Differently from other scholars, Singapore is never meant to be the 'best practice' and it is not only regarded as a single city. It is used to compare land as one causal factor of specific urban development also in Hong Kong, in other Asian cities and European and US cities, proposing interesting insights, remarking obvious and less expected differences and potential parallelisms. Again, in a time in which urban scholars pay more attention to non-Western cities this is a suggestive move.

Third, readers may find in some points that the author considers some pre-knowledge as taken for granted, in particular her well-defined position about property rights theory. To have the whole picture, further readings of her previous works are recommended, as well as a parallel reading of this work together with recent production on the nexus and tensions between neoliberalism, governmentality and the production of space.

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