# Cities, cultural policy and governance

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# BOOK REVIEW

**Cities, cultural policy and governance**, edited by Michael Hoelscher, Helmut Anheier, & Yudhishthir Ray Isar, The Cultures and Globalization Series, London, Sage, 2012, 448 pp., £ 37.99 (paperback), ISBN 978-1-4462-0123-7

This is the fifth and final volume in the series on Cultures and Globalisation and is entitled *Cities, cultural policy and governance*. The urban sociologist Saskia Sassen contributes a Foreword situating the debate very firmly in the here-and-now world of the recession-struck Western economies, arguing that the "culture" of the title is not just to be seen as the higher expressions of human society to be found in arts institutions, but also in the more nebulous structures of governance, such as the "culture of trust" that is, or should be, a feature of our financial institutions.

The intellectual traditions that define the territory of the volume are those of the urban sociologist and of the liberal or neo-liberal economist. Many of its chapters are about the negotiation between the ideological positions produced by these highly influential streams of thought. Both, in one sense, stem from one world city, and from one university, Chicago. If Milton Friedman is the (god)father of one, then Robert Park can be credited with the other. However, opposed to the positions of these eminent figures and their descendants, they shared a common assumption that the city is a kind of laboratory, where experimentation, and not just observation, should happen.

These two "Chicago Schools" seem at times to be fighting proxy battles across the pages. As typical chapters in the "Experiences" section note, the forces of international capital impose compromises on the newly elected ANC in South Africa, and on the other hand wily local communities devise their own "third ways", like the Vancouverism that bucks the centralising trend in Canada. In this spirit, the authors of many chapters have been more than mere bystanders, becoming involved as policy advisors or legislators, such as Catherine Cullen in Lille or Pier Luigi Sacco in various Italian cities. Alongside those playing what Phil Wood, in his self-description, calls the role of "urban therapist" there is an impressive roll call of academic researchers contributing their reflections on the theme both in this and in the chapters of the preceding "Issues" section.

Kate Oakley, as a commentator of long-standing as well as an academic, is well placed to describe the interactions of cultural policy with the changing governance of London, as its position in the world shifted from the 1980s until 2010. Summarising recent major redevelopment projects in London, including preparations for the Olympics, she shows how ambitious promotion can be overtaken, not just by economic Armageddon, but can also risk conflict with past waves of policy-driven development, such as those which sought to develop London's creative industries. While plotting the shifts in policy and the balance of power of various institutions she also manages to point up the reality of life experience for London's citizen's, who must suffer greater inequality than any other part of the UK.

The emergence of new world cities to rival the old is one of the consistent themes of the volume. In their study of Johannesburg, Edgar Pieterse and Kim Gurney also aim to show how the processes of development reshaped whole districts in the wake of the accession of South Africa's new government. While regarding much of the practice of planning as flawed they analyse in depth the thinking behind the Cultural Arc, a concept adopted by the Johannesburg Development Agency to stimulate deep-seated change in the use of public space, commercial premises and the major institutions, such as Wits University which, despite its tradition as a bulwark of South African liberalism, for decades showed its classical face to the world

through ten-foot-high wire fences. Change here, as much as on the triumphant Constitution Hill, site of the hated Fort prison, would signify a real shift in the ownership of the city in favour of its inhabitants.

This nuanced view contrasts with other critiques of South Africa's recent transition. In her influential account of the progress of neo-liberalism, The Shock Doctrine, Naomi Klein gives a less positive account of the intentions and results of some of the same Johannesburg agencies. For her, the "Chicago boys" who came to advise newly invested ANC ministers on how best to attract overseas investment owed their loyalty to Friedman not Park, and sold the pass on every economic issue that mattered, imposing public sector cuts, allowing prices to rise, and selling off national resources.[1]

In *The metropolis and mental life* Georg Simmel seeks a definition of the modern, as opposed to all past ages, in the resistance of the individual to being levelled, swallowed up in the social–technological mechanism. In her short but punchy introductory essay, "Culture and its many spaces" Saskia Sassen observes that no contributor takes the definition of culture to include the "culture of governance". In London and Johannesburg in the periods described, there was certainly no lack of incident or forceful characters shaping not just policy but also the destiny of their cities. There must be something still to be said for accounts that do more than note policy objectives and outcomes, but deal with the motivations and impacts of the people who devise and carry them out. Maybe that is to describe a "culture of governance".

The "Issues" and "Experiences" sections that make up the greater part of the volume are followed by a less persuasive set of "indicator suites", the purpose of which is to propose useful measures of change in globalising cities. One such source is the Globalisation and World Cities data series produced by an international academic consortium based at Loughborough University. Cities are assessed in terms of their advanced producer services using the interlocking network model. Indirect measures of trade, travel and communications flows are derived to compute a city's network connectivity – this measures a city's integration into the world city network. In the project directors' disarming phrase "the world according to GaWC" reinforces an urban solipsism, where anxiety about the current ranking displaces concerns about openness, democracy or well-being.

The problem is that quantitative indicators are almost inevitably inadequate to the task of grappling with the phenomena they seek to describe, although whether qualitative or even frankly narrative accounts might be more successful is open to question. The intriguing assertion by the volume editors in their introduction, that cities may be better managed than their respective states, may be correct, but it cries out for a deeper analysis. If it is true merely in the sense that any part of an organisation might outperform the whole then it seems trivial, but if there is something in the governance of "world-cities" that encourages an antagonistic relationships with states it would be a dynamic worthy of comment. Perhaps this is where the tradition of city writing, which is well-mapped, extensive and increasingly borne of the experience of the new world cities, should find its place in urban policy.

The volume is dedicated to the memory of Dragan Klaic who died in 2011, leaving a legacy of justifiable scepticism about the motives of urban institutions when they join forces. His subtle contribution to this volume explores some of the reasons why universities find it hard to play the part that might be expected of them. Given their diversity around the globe and in many cases their inarticulacy about their goals and achievements, he charts with considerable accuracy the impact of pressures on higher education and proposes a number of practical steps that could be implemented in many states. Broad though his frame of reference is, he fails to mention an important international study of the interaction between Universities and regional development.[2] In their detailed study based on fieldwork in 12 sub-regions around the world carried out in

2005–2006 the OECD arrived at solutions with which Klaic would almost certainly have concurred.

The literature of neoliberal economics promoted the notion that the inevitable domination of capitalism has effectively ended history and with it, any sense that there might be purpose in working for other, better ways of organising human affairs. For anyone who is active in this field as a researcher, bureaucrat or legislator, this volume provides many rich narratives from which to learn some of the ways in which history goes on.

**Notes**

1. Klein, N. (2008). *The shock doctrine*. Penguin Books, especially the chapter "Democracy Born in Chains", pp. 194–217.
2. OECD, Institutional Management in Higher Education, Supporting the contribution of higher education institutions to regional development – reviews and reports, 2008 http://www.oecd.org/edu/imhe/supportingthecontributionofhighereducationinstitutionstoregionaldevelopment-reviewsandreports.htm (Accessed 27 August 2012).

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