

URBAN POLITICS: CRITICAL APPROACHES. Edited by Mark Davidson and Deborah Martin, London: Sage, 2014.

The urban is not only a bounded territory or 'place', nor is it exclusively about power located in government administrations, but is rather a set of processes and power relations 'stretched' across space and embedded in everyday situated practices and subjectivities. Shortly, the editors, Mark Davidson and Deborah Martin aim to capture in their book the multiplicity of socio-spatialities and to develop different perspectives on the urban within the relational nature of urbanism in a globalized world (Amin and Thrift, 2002; Massey, 2005; 2007).

Defining politics, Davidson and Martin employ the work of Jacques Rancière (2004), and conclude that politics is a particular type of struggle and contestation, a societal commitment to correct a wrong. The term politics is therefore reserved for a particular form of contestation and social change, a disruption of the city and its replacement. As such, urban politics emerges across and through cities in every particular ways. It can be seen as processes and practices that intersect agencies, administrations and structures, situated in cities or govern cities, and also social movements that challenge existing systems.

The editors reconsider urban politics within the framework of urban geographical scholarship. They argue, following Žižek, that a critical approach to urban politics seeks a parallax view (Johnston, 2007): a viewpoint on the topic that is beside, beyond and outside the obvious. They took a step beyond the parallax, so that the chapters of the book are multi-dimensional and highlight the importance of alternative lenses for seeing and investigating urban politics.

Moreover, they claim that: "the task of defining 'urban politics' is not only analytical, but deeply political" (P. 1). When they define their object of study they have to choose what to include and what to exclude. The answer to this problem stems out of their way of theorizing the city itself. They ask: where urban politics can be found so to shape understanding of the process in place in its numerous dimensions?

Answering that, the book presents three entry positions to urban politics as: setting, medium, and community – three different ways of seeking the not obvious. Each section is thematically organized according to the different way of thinking about the city as political space, and each section begins with the editors' introduction.

In the first section the city is designated as urban environment, and a setting for particular forums of politics. The chapters of the first section, the urban as setting, observe the local and yet the issues are always bound up in conditions and relations of multiple locations and scales. Katherine Hankins and Deborah Martin look at the neighborhood as relational place that has the inherent potential to invoke politics far beyond the neighborhood limits; Kevin Ward argues that we couldn't conceive the urban in urban politics as given, but we have to understand it as a place that gives shape to channels, networks and webs of differing geographical complexities; Kathe Newman and Elvin Wyly write on localization of global mortgage finance.

They claim that urban politics of finance can help to uncover the political economy of urban change, as it is tied to global capital flows and untangle the policy decisions that enable capital to reach communities. The section points to the ways that urban politics are bounded by multiple locations and scales that lie in relationships and processes far beyond the city limits and influence on local choices. Thus the chapters show the relational character of urban politics.

The second section, city as medium, focuses on the idea that the city functions as a medium through which politics are enacted. It first looks at the actors, mayors, political institutions and legal systems, who utilize the city as a particular environment. They use the city as a means to achieve their goals: to produce certain outcomes or to elude them. The chapters take us beyond the common and usual actors associated with urban politics.

Kurt Iveson is drawing on Jacques Ranciere's theory of politics and policing, illustrating his approach with an example of the policing of graffiti. He concludes that in fact the graffiti writers do challenge the 'natural order' of urban public space, and have a part, by declaration of their rights to inhabit the city as equals; Donald McNeil looks at the mayor as an individual actor supplied with political power, and also represents particular set of world views that shape moral geographies; John Carr shows how the legal regime in Seattle serves particular interest over others. Through this case study he argues that a critical and comprehensive re-evaluation of what participatory planning is and does in real world is overdue.

Section 3, explores the city as community, with vast interpretations of 'community' as social grouping. The five chapters in this section are crossing many different political terrains. Natalie Oswin describes the politics of sexuality that are a crucial part of Singapore's urban politics. Drawing on queer theory, she explains how the city-state has constructed various sexual norms as part of its social agenda. Jamie Winders builds the chapter on the argument that neighborhood comes into being as a space and a construct through political strategy and contestation over its spaces. He suggests that neighborhood is also produced through struggles over its place within wider urban politics in moments of transition, such as the immigration of Latino workers to Nashville, Tennessee since the 1990's.

Susan Hanson takes us to Worcester, Massachusetts, and Colorado Springs, Colorado, in order to deconstruct the notion of the entrepreneur (Harvey, 1989). She finds that entrepreneurs, women in this paper, do create important societal change, but also transform places out of local knowledge and devotion that help create place capital. Mark Davidson looks at the social classes as communities which are involved in urban politics. Their relations and composition in the post-industrial city are completely different of those used to be in the industrial era. Of course it is true mainly for the western world. The final chapter of this section, by Matthew Huber, examines the urban environmental component of urban politics. He argues that the traditional separation between the city and the environment, like two different territories, must be mutually constituted.

The concluding chapter: "urban politics as parallax", tries to emphasize the main point of the book: "the parallax perspective requires a constant consideration of the gaps between perspectives and the implications of holding a perspective that creates a gap between you and those who hold other viewpoints" (p. 230).

This innovative book challenges the geographical thought by a clearer and more comprehensive approach that stems out of the mundane research of urban politics as a new and ever changing subject in geography. Yet, its approach is characterized as open multiple and dynamic, and can be embedded only by enabling different perspectives to coexist.

The lacuna of the book is embedded in the political choice of the editors to concentrate mostly around the western world case studies, while there are very important developments and new insights that came to the fore lately from the non-western gaze on cities. Even though, it provides a thorough theoretical grounding and a good point of departure to the forthcoming critical geographical thought.

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