
REZENSIONEN

A. K. Sandoval-Strausz / Nancy H. Kwak (eds.): Making Cities Global. The Transnational Turn in Urban History, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 2018, 340 p.; Nicolas Kenny / Rebecca Madgin (eds.): Cities Beyond Borders. Comparative and Transnational Approaches to Urban History, Farnham / Burlington: Ashgate 2015, 251 p.

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Bespeaking of the transnational turn that has, at last, also found its way into urban history circa within the last ten years, both volumes attempt to shift the focus from the history of a particular city to an inquiry of connections, comparisons, and transfers between cities, not only in North America and Europe but in a global perspective. While this premise certainly lies at the heart of both volumes, nonetheless, they offer different methodological approaches as well as varying degrees to which the respective geographical scope actually encompasses studies from all around the world. Thus, a reader of these two volumes is confronted with a whole

range of cases and dissecting instruments that offer multiple strategies and ways to conduct studies in urban history with a transnational or global angle.

The editors of *Cities Beyond Borders*, Nicholas Kenny and Rebecca Madgin, are clearly indebted to the work done by Pierre-Yves Saunier on transnational urban history as they also point out in their introduction to the volume. Saunier's work was instrumental in researching the connections and transfers between cities.¹ At the same time, Saunier committed himself to link new approaches of transnational history with methodologies of different sub-disciplines, namely of comparative history.² It is also through this background that the book emphasizes the possibility to compare cities with each other in order to trace connections, similarities, or differences. Since studies in transnational history often examine the exchanges between two societies and, thus, possess a "bilateral structure",³ linking the comparison between two cities with the framework of transnational history is fitting. However, with it comes a constraint of the connections a city might have had and a geographical constriction that may fall trap to leaving a global perspective out of the inquiry.

To an extent, this is traceable since the volume largely focusses on Europe and North America. That is not to say that the essays

collected in the volume pursuing a transnational history or a comparative history of cities on both continents are obsolete – quite the opposite. For instance, Dan Horner's study on how Montreal and Liverpool organized the massive 19th-century Irish immigration, or Janet Polasky's essay on urban reform in London and Brussels are striking examples of how cities coped with phenomena like mass migration and urbanization by adapting to practices and knowledge that were constantly fluctuating between the respective cities. In this context, comparative history becomes an effective method of exemplifying how transnational processes travel vice-versa. However, complemented by such texts as Jeffry Diefendorf's essay on the rebuilding of European cities destroyed in World War II or Stefan Coperus' and Shane Ewen's essay on the *Union Internationale des Villes* attempts to spread socialist notions of modern urban life, in the end, *Cities Beyond Borders* tells a very European transnational urban history.

A welcomed exception from this feature, alongside Nikhil Rao's essay on town planning in late colonial Bombay and Harold L. Platt's take on the global spread of gated communities, is Carl Nightingale's reflection on his research on racial segregation in cities all around the globe which yielded the much-lauded 2012 book *Segregation: A Global History of Divided Cities*.⁴ Looking back on the fruits he harvested from his research, Nightingale highlights the possibilities available for researchers when engaging in a global perspective. Without the latter, it would have indeed been impossible to conclude that segregation "spread, and deliberate action was involved in making it spread",⁵ not only

on one continent but all around the world. Deriving from these insights, Nightingale convincingly argues for the advantage that lies at the heart of a global perspective in urban history: "to abjure any tacit or active support for ideologies of national exceptionalism."⁶ Aside from this essay and its two like-minded others, the geographical scope of *Cities Beyond Borders* falls a bit short on going beyond the northwestern hemisphere, something that the editors actually address when they admit that they cover "primarily Europe and the Americas."⁷ It is, however, a confession that relativizes the claim of the volume to be "global in scope".⁸

In contrast, *Making Cities Global* goes further in exploring global dimensions of urban history by focusing largely on South America and South and East Asia at the same time offering studies of the "usual suspects" group of North America. While the latter may seem like a rather ordinary choice for urban history and not really an outcome of a global perspective, the essays collected in this volume dealing with North America bring a fascinating angle to this space by emphasizing urban change and conflict through settlement patterns and consumer cultures of migration groups. For instance, Arijit Sen analyzes how city spaces in Chicago were affected by the presence of Indian and Pakistani migrants, the conflicts between them, and how, in turn, transformed localities shape transnational identities. By focusing on parades that were organized by ethnic associations on the occasion of India's Independence Day, Sen emphasizes that urban spaces and local politics influence the self-perception of an immigrant community while at the same time being under the

constant influence of transnational politics. This is just one example of how the volume attempts to open urban history to a global perspective. Avoiding most of the time the explicit use of comparative history, the essays in this volume rather examine urban environments' connections to knowledge and people fluctuating between multiple cities around the globe.

By this, the search for connections is not restricted to a bilateral relationship between cities in two nation-states but, rather, a much more open and flexible methodology is used in order to unpack the exceptionalism of one city's history. Thereby a multitude of connections is grasped that is not restricted to a specific nationhood or nation-state set up by the imperative of a comparison. The essays combine a detailed analysis of local conditions with a history of thought concerning globally circulating urban planning ideas and, thus, offer a striking strategy on how to open a city's history to a global perspective. While comparisons are not disregarded they are rather enmeshed within the overall analysis. At the same time, by putting thematically similar essays side by side the reader automatically develops modes of comparisons for his own understanding, a way which might leave more freedom and enjoyment to the individual reader.

While it is said that global history in contrast to transnational history is going beyond the historical existence of nation-states and theoretically encompasses more than the last five hundred years,⁹ *Making Cities Global* chose to confine its approach mainly to the post-World War II period. The reason for this somewhat temporal fasting is that the volume wants to highlight how capitalist surges began

to spread globally at that time, affecting urban spaces of work and living in many parts of the world. For example, two essays deal with the Alliance for Progress, a US-funded project that aimed to create affordable housing in South American cities for tenths of thousands of members of a developing middle class. Put in the context of international politics and the Cold War, these housing projects deeply affected the respective urban space. At the same time, both essays show that theoretical ideas mapped out on an international level by city planners and US-academics almost always were confronted with local practices different to significant degrees from what they had sketched out. In the end, the local population took it upon itself to deal with the housing offered by the state, adapting it to the conditions and needs of their daily lives.

Tracing how capitalist imaginations of urban space began to spread and affect cities in the second half of the 20th century stands out in other essays of the volume as well. For instance, an essay by Nancy H. Kwak explores how slum clearance began to develop as a mutual aim of global actors such as the World Bank. In addition, while Carola Hein's essay on globally migrating urban experts and their advisory function in city planning in South East Asia is closely linked to Kwak's topic, the essay by urban historian Matt Garcia highlights how first race created and later the spatial expansion of a university college threatened the existence of a considerable Mexican neighborhood at the outskirts of Los Angeles. Garcia's study puts the main focus of the volume in a nutshell by showing that the spatial expansion of the university college was capitalist-driven in the context

of a competitive situation for rich students from all around the globe. All in all, the volume makes for a strong case of how urban spaces became fully part of global economic entanglements after World War II. Through this, while not explicitly referring to it, *Making Cities Global* pursues a set of inquiries shared with the so-called New Urban Sociology¹⁰ which emerged first in the early 1990s and which has its roots in the work of Henri Lefebvre who, already in the 1960s, famously made the diagnosis of a worldwide expansion of “urban society” shaped by a global economy.¹¹

Ultimately, two major aspects that reach far beyond the focus on the urban deserve extra mentioning. First, both volumes effectively demonstrate by the respective inclusion of Jordan Stanger-Ross’ and Carl Nightingale’s take on the possibilities of digitization in urban history, how the field has adapted fruitfully to the technological progress done in the last thirty years. While it is bemoaned by some historians that the study of history has in general only hesitantly adapted to these developments,¹² urban history may be a step ahead. The combination of historical sources offering residential patterns or individual-related data, for instance from census material, and GIS software has opened the door to an in-depth and at the same time extensive study of how people moved in time and space, something seemingly impossible without the use of modern software equipment. Beyond the essays in both volumes, there are several research projects currently conducted dealing exactly with these technological possibilities. A prominent example for this kind of development is the “The Urban Transition Historical GIS Project” organized at Brown University.¹³

While not being a panacea, erasing the need for complex historical interpretation, such a use of technology helps to locate general aspects of historical inquiries like consumerism, racial or ethnic segregation, class, or networks within specific urban spaces. One could argue that such a combination of space, time, and human conditions was indeed attempted in sociology or economics but was largely missing in historical studies up until recent times.¹⁴ Urban history with all its expertise in digital history offers impressive solutions for how to handle the digital in historical studies.

The second proposal both volumes clearly agree upon are the remedies urban history might offer for potential shortcomings of global history studies by bringing a focus of place back into the discussion. For instance, the editors of *Making Cities Global* identify “pitfalls of the study of globalization [...] that are based on the exigencies of model building or theory rather than empirical inquiry.”¹⁵ Through this, it is disregarded that “local conditions build and shape transnationalism – that, in fact, local imperatives influence cross-border movements even as transnational flows transform the local.”¹⁶ Much in the same vein, the editors of *Cities Beyond Borders* promote urban history’s utility in providing “possible remedies to globalization studies that are often criticized for making universalistic generalizations at the expense of attention to local variations [...]”¹⁷ Thereby, in fact, the editors of both volumes point to an aspect that has been identified as a potential pitfall of global history when done only superficially. As one influential global historian has indicated, “the privileging of large scales may come at the price of downplaying local agency.”¹⁸ In this

context, urban history with all its affinity for detailed analyses of local conditions may offer manifold empirical evidence for global history's expanding field.

Notes

- 1 P.-Y. Saunier/S. Ewem (eds.), *Another Global City. Historical Explorations into the Transnational Municipal Moment, 1850–2000*, New York 2008.
- 2 P.-Y. Saunier, *Going Transnational? New from down under: Transnational History Symposium*, Canberra, Australian National University, in: *Historical Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung* 31 (2006) 2, pp. 118–131, here p. 128.
- 3 S. Conrad, *Globalgeschichte. Eine Einführung*, München 2013, p. 17.
- 4 C. H. Nightingale, *Segregation. A Global History of Divided Cities*, Chicago 2012.
- 5 C. H. Nightingale, *The Seven Cs. Reflections on Writing a Global History of Urban Segregation*, in: N. Kenny/R. Madgin (eds.), *Cities beyond Borders. Comparative and Transnational Approaches to Urban History*, Farnham Surrey, Burlington VT 2015, pp. 27–42, here p. 36.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 41.
- 7 N. Kenny/R. Madgin, 'Every Time I Describe a City'. *Urban History as Comparative and Transnational Practice*, in: N. Kenny/R. Madgin (eds.), *Cities beyond Borders. Comparative and Transnational Approaches to Urban History*, Farnham Surrey, Burlington VT 2015, pp. 3–23, here p. 4.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 5
- 9 J. Osterhammel, *Global History*, in: M. Tamm/P. Burke (eds.), *Debating New Approaches to History*, London 2019, pp. 21–34, here p. 29.
- 10 Cf. D. A. Smith, *The New Urban Sociology Meets the Old*, in: *Urban Affairs Quarterly* 30 (1995) 3, pp. 432–457
- 11 Cf. N. Brenner, *The Urban Question as a Scale Question. Reflections on Henri Lefebvre, Urban Theory and the Politics of Scale*, in: *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 24 (2000) 2, pp. 361–378.
- 12 G. Koller, *Geschichte digital. Historische Welten neu vermessen*, Stuttgart 2016, pp. 11, 36.
- 13 Cf. <https://www.brown.edu/academics/spatial-structures-in-social-sciences/urban-transition-historical-gis-project>.
- 14 S. Gunn/L. Faire, *Introduction: Why Bother with Method?*, in: S. Gunn/L. Faire (eds.), *Research Methods for History*, Edinburgh 2016 (second edition, p. 3f.)
- 15 A. K. Sandoval-Strausz/N. H. Kwak, *Introduction. Why Transnationalize Urban History?*, in: A. K. Sandoval-Strausz/N. H. Kwak (eds.), *Making Cities Global. The Transnational Turn in Urban History*, Philadelphia 2018), pp. 1–16, here: p. 6.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 5.
- 17 Kenny/Madgin, "Every Time I Describe a City", p. 22.
- 18 S. Conrad, *What is Global History?*, Princeton 2016, p. 224.

Diana Mishkova / Balázs Trencsényi (eds.): *European Regions and Boundaries. A Conceptual History (European Conceptual History, vol. 3)*, New York: Berghahn Books 2017, 410 p.

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Conceptual history belongs to those fields of historical enquiry where the full impact of the spatial turn has only recently started to be felt. While for the longest time, research questions mainly addressed the national level, this book contributes to this new current by analysing how "European transnational (meso)regions have been, and are being, conceptualized and delimited over time, across different disciplines and academic traditions, in different fields of activity and national/regional contexts." The volume, which mainly discusses the 19th and 20th centuries, presents the results of a multi-year research project hosted at the Center of Advanced Study Sofia. The