

Levine, Myron. A. 2020. *Urban Politics*. New York: Routledge.

Contemporary global governance tests the state-centric thinking of politics through multiple dynamics and different perspectives. One of these challenges is the position of the cities as strategic actors in implementing global agendas (Climate Change, Migration, Sustainable Development Goals, and others). Acuto states that today cities are seen as «critical engines driving the global economy, global information flows, and the worldwide mobility of goods and people» (Acuto, 2016, p. 510)

The relevance of cities as strategic spaces to govern global agendas calls for a rising interest in studying cities' abilities to assume global governance capacities. In the book *Building and Dwelling*, Richard Sennett (2018) mentions that city means two different things: on one side, the city is a “physical space”; on the other side, the city is a “mentality compiled from perceptions, behaviors, and beliefs.” This review defines cities by the everyday dynamics and processes fed by the inhabitants.

Following a collaborative approach to the design of cities, this review questions the importance of asking oneself about cities' inclusion capacities in the face of their contemporary designs. This approach is necessary when a multiscale global context promotes multiple exclusions of people by race, origin, gender, religion, or nationality.

What role are the cities playing in an unequal multiscale global context? In a multiscale political environment where cities are critical spaces where every day global dynamics materialize, the 10<sup>th</sup> edition of the Handbook *Urban Politics* is required more than ever. *Urban Politics* studies politics in cities and suburbs in the United States and seeks to clarify how inequalities and injustice have emerged in urban contexts and cities of the United States.

With a “pragmatic” approach, this Handbook draws on an interdisciplinary dialogue between political science and interconnected urban studies. The discussions offered in this Handbook contribute to understanding how power interacts between private actors with public authorities in urban issues. Also, the Handbook focuses on contemporary controversies between private and public “powers” in the urban political arena.

The key argument of *Urban Politics* states that the United States is a “suburban nation in terms of population, economic activity, and political power.” In this sense, *Urban politics* offers a typology to understand how the United States is turning into a “Suburban Nation.” The author says the labels “denote complexity, a mix of progress and continued decline” in the urban condition of cities and suburbs of the United States. The proposed brands are Global City, Tourist City, and Bankrupt City. Following the key argument, the 10<sup>th</sup> edition of *Urban Politics* develops a critical approach to clarify how globalization has negatively impacted cities and suburbs in the United States. The book also advances a few subthemes to understand how public and private powers interact in cities and suburbs in this country. *Urban Politics* is organized into 13 chapters. The following issues are the subthemes offered in the chapters included in *Urban Politics*: The author reflects on the ongoing relevance of the set of rules and structures of urban governance; the author also discusses the interrelationships and tensions between the Federal government, States, and cities to resolve the challenges of urban agendas; besides, the Handbook questions the predominance of economic rationality such as the crucial perspective for the sustainable development of cities and suburbs in the United States; as well, the Handbook highlights how the political activism of mayors has increased in the last years at the local and global level; finally, the author puts special attention to the political relevance of race and ethnicity in the management of cities and suburbs in the United States.

The book is concerned with the pedagogical dimension. *Urban Politics* offers a set of contains that guide students into the discussions provided in each chapter: Message-oriented section titles and subtitles, boldface terms, key terms, photographs, boxed case studies, and boxed references to classic and current urban films and TV shows.

This handbook highlights the diverse repertoire developed by ordinary people to achieve empowerment in the city as residents, business owners, and community organizations pushed for transformative change in urban contexts. Following the question that oriented this review, what role are the cities playing in an unequal multiscale global context? We follow a critical discussion that

invites us to reflect on how communities and cities challenge the exclusion and inequalities in the United States.

To exemplify the challenges of exclusion and inequality in urban contexts, on one side, there are paradigmatic cases that help to understand how neighborhoods struggle against gentrification in many cities in the United States (Houston, Chicago, New York). On the other side, we consider the last violent events in Uvalde, Texas, as evidence of the urgency of rethinking how youths are experiencing their future possibilities in a declining Global North.

In the face of the gentrification processes and the tragic event in Uvalde, the Handbook *Urban Politics* offers at least the following four key lessons that teachers, students, policy-makers, and citizens interested in the contemporary challenges in the urban context of the United States need to be considered.

Firstly, the author invites us to study the notion of power in everyday urban dynamics; the formal rules and institutional processes are insufficient resources to understand how power operates in urban politics. Secondly, the Handbook invites us to analyze the private actors' power in designing and developing cities and suburbs. Thirdly, this Handbook invites us to examine more seriously and in-depth how each city and suburb has a specific situation in the face of inequalities and power. Fourthly, the author highlights the inequality in the urban situation as the main challenge for the metropolitan areas in the United States.

We close this review by arguing that it is relevant when studying urban politics and its controversies and challenges to draw on beyond the state-centric perspective. This Handbook of power in urban politics calls upon us to rethink society and state's challenges under globalized societies regarding contemporary urban agendas. Even though this Handbook focuses on power, cities, and inequality in the United States, the discussion offered in this Handbook could be a starting point to rethink how to observe the broader phenomenon of power and its multiple challenges in the Urban Global North and the Urban Global South.

Acuto, M. (2016). City Diplomacy. In, Constantinou, C., Sharp, P. Kerr, P. (Eds.). *The SAGE Handbook of Diplomacy*. (pp. 510-520). London: SAGE.

Sennett, R. (2018). *Building and Dwelling. Ethics for the City*. New York: Farrar Straus & Giroux.

Antonio Alejo

Bill Baker. *Place branding for small cities, regions and downtowns: the essential for successful destinations*. Independently published, 2019

Bill Baker è considerato uno dei pionieri del place branding ed è riconosciuto a livello internazionale come studioso innovativo e leader nel campo del *branding* turistico. Da anni lavora come consulente nel campo del marketing turistico e si occupa di sviluppare il marchio di luoghi e di costruire strategie ad hoc per la crescita turistica e culturale di numerose località e città statunitensi. In particolare, la sua attività si è concentrata negli ultimi anni sulla promozione e valorizzazione dei piccoli centri e piccole città che spesso, in tutto il mondo, vengono considerate come luoghi "minori", lontani dal turismo dei grandi attrattori, e quindi fuori dagli investimenti pubblici e privati in materia di marketing turistico e culturale delle destinazioni.

Il volume è ben scritto e affronta un tema molto *appealing* nella nostra società in trasformazione e in un'epoca di forze drammaticamente in conflitto tra loro. Restituisce una importante riflessione circa il rapporto tra rigore nella produzione di conoscenza, sua utilizzabilità nella pratica e conseguenze derivanti dall'applicazione di specifici approcci manageriali e strategici in tema di place o touristic destination branding.

Il libro ha un taglio essenzialmente divulgativo e di conoscenza, ma può avere la valenza di un manuale per studenti e studentesse post-graduated, che intendono approfondire la tematica in un modo meno *mainstream* e più *critical*. I quesiti riepilogativi alla fine dei capitoli permettono

agevolmente di verificare la comprensione e l'apprendimento di quanto letto. Tuttavia, bisogna sottolineare che il libro non presenta un percorso logico sempre omogeneo. Infatti, non sempre la lettura appare chiara e semplice, non per i contenuti, ma per la struttura che non è sempre lineare, rendendo poco accessibile la comunicazione (differentemente da quanto l'autore dichiara nell'introduzione) ad un pubblico nuovo all'argomento e che non conosce a fondo le tematiche.

L'autore affronta il tema, riportando decenni di esperienze e pratica. Interessanti sono le sette principali dimensioni di analisi, che definisce "step". Questi step si sviluppano attraverso un percorso ben definito, come un "touristic business plan" delle "small cities". L'autore spiega che sono uno strumento, un vademecum innovativo che ha lo scopo di trasformare una città in un luogo attrattivo che il turista vuole visitare, se non anche viverci almeno per una parte dell'anno.

La prima parte del libro illustra le modalità per gestire una destinazione sostenibile o un marchio di luogo. Fornisce gli elementi essenziali e spiega come si trasforma il turismo, lo sviluppo economico, quali sono le principali strategie per la creazione di luoghi e il *wayfinding*, in termini di identità e immagine, delle piccole città e regioni. Il libro semplifica l'ambito e le dinamiche del marchio locale, fornendo un approccio graduale alla ricerca, alla definizione e implementazione di una strategia di marchio vincente per luoghi soprattutto di dimensioni più contenute.

Ogni capitolo è ricco di idee utili a practitioner e amministratori pubblici per stabilire un marchio comunitario e per fornire un vantaggio competitivo. Il file rouge dell'intero volume è rappresentato dal supporto e dal ruolo partecipativo e bottom up dei cittadini, che sono i primi fruitori dei luoghi in cui vivono, sono il primo pubblico target. Tale file rouge rappresenta la principale differenza tra il place branding delle piccole città e il place branding dei grandi attrattori, dove spesso sono coinvolte istituzioni pubbliche e aziende private che sponsorizzano.

Leggendo il volume viene spontaneo riflettere sulla quarta rivoluzione industriale che stiamo vivendo, e che, differentemente dalle rivoluzioni passate, sta aprendo la strada a cambiamenti che stanno investendo radicalmente quasi tutti i settori aziendali e a sfide politiche, economiche, organizzative e sociali che possono essere affrontate e gestite se, e solo se, si assume la consapevolezza del ruolo sociale che hanno le imprese turistiche e culturali moderne. Tali imprese, oggi, più che in passato, agiscono come attori sociali, *driver* di inclusione economica e sociale per le persone e i territori in cui esse nascono e operano. In particolare, i processi che derivano da questo rinnovato ruolo, sembrano riportare in auge l'importanza dei territori, della prossimità e delle comunità, concetti di economia civile e circolare, che la competizione derivante dalla imperante globalizzazione della terza rivoluzione industriale sembrava aver fatto scomparire. Da questo punto di vista, per far fronte alle sfide proposte oggi a livello sociale ed economico, è necessario rilanciare un sistema imprenditoriale turistico inclusivo, che parta dai cittadini e dalle piccole comunità, nel senso che la gara competitiva per essere giocata deve, in ogni caso, tener conto e considerare i fabbisogni dei territori e delle comunità dove tali imprese operano. I molteplici attori pubblici e privati coinvolti nel processo di place o destination branding, intesi in una prospettiva che privilegia le relazioni tra le unità componenti una struttura, piuttosto che le componenti in quanto tali, devono apprendere un rinnovato modo di fare impresa turistica, imparando a muoversi in un sistema imprenditoriale che parta proprio da quei territori e comunità che si vogliono brandizzare, attraverso un meccanismo costante di ascolto, per essere inclusive e competitive allo stesso tempo. L'autore lo spiega bene. In tal senso, è diffuso ormai il concetto di competizione, che individua precise scelte strategiche (per ragioni legate all'innovazione sociale e tecnologica, al risparmio dei costi e alle economie di scala) volte a creare organizzazioni collaborative e multi stakeholder, che condividono intenti, obiettivi, risorse, competenze (normalmente concorrenti), al fine di ottenere vantaggi comuni. Dunque, se un territorio "fallisce" dal punto di vista turistico, falliscono anche le imprese che in quel territorio operano e viceversa: il successo turistico di un territorio e delle comunità è legato a doppio filo al successo delle imprese che in esso insistono.

Un ulteriore ultimo aspetto molto interessante affrontato dall'autore riguarda gli impatti e gli effetti delle strategie di branding sulle comunità che spesso non fanno nulla di marketing, pubblicità, comunicazione, ecc... Tali impatti hanno natura economica e sociale e sono oggetto di dibattito tra gli esperti appartenenti a diversi ambiti. I sostenitori, in prevalenza esperti di economia e marketing,

ne vedono le ricadute positive in un'ottica di sviluppo e benessere per la popolazione; i detrattori ne avvertono i pericoli e l'evoluzione in senso negativo. L'interdisciplinarietà del fenomeno deve generare punti di incontro che possono proprio arricchirsi di queste prospettive diverse e che affondano in diversi campi di specializzazione: sociologia, economia, organizzazione aziendale, architettura, psicologia, urbanistica, ecologia, scienze ambientali, non solo marketing.

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Trejo Nieto, A., Niño Amézquita, J.L. (2021). *Metropolitan governance in Latin America*. Abingdon: Routledge.

The world's population is organized around cities as the result of a process known as “planetary urbanization” (Brenner, 2014). At present, more than 50% of the world's citizens live in urban areas, a rate that is expected to 70% by 2050 (World Bank, 2020). The case of Latin America is paradigmatic. In this area, 80% of the population is already resident in cities. This is largely due to the intense growth of the region in the 1950s. For example, Buenos Aires, Mexico City and Sao Paulo are among the most populated cities on the planet. An increasing number of inhabitants are flocking to neighbourhoods in other big cities in the region, such as Lima, Bogota, Santiago de Chile and Rio de Janeiro, which are developing into megacities. Population growth, however, has not been accompanied by an increase or development of infrastructures and the public policies needed to meet the social, labour or economic demands required for the well-being of citizens.

Alejandra Trejo and José L. Niño Amézquita, the editors of this multi-author book, present a coordinated and interesting analysis of the different realities that coexist in the big cities of the region, highlighting the different practices that enable us to understand the developments in each of the cities included in the study. The book addresses the five large Spanish-speaking metropolises of Bogota, Buenos Aires, Lima, Mexico City and Santiago de Chile. The main aim is to determine how government structures are developed in these cities and how they work in coordination with other municipalities, other state structures and other external agents to manage public services.

The first part of the book introduces the context of urbanization and metropolization in Latin America with a special focus on the challenges of governance and, in particular, the provision of public services and the inequalities in access to such services. Emphasis is here placed on the role played by the process of decentralization or fragmentation that occurred between the 1980s and 1990s, which led to the separation between production and provision of services. This phenomenon, for some municipalities, led to the assumption of new responsibilities, and demonstrated the need to cooperate in a scenario marked not only by the dearth of resources, but also by the socioeconomic and socio-spatial inequalities generated by governments, authorities and economic elites that have hindered the accessibility of the city for other actors, such as the peripheral populations that lack adequate public services.

The second section of this book includes the participation of authors who present five case studies in urban areas of Latin America. Each one highlights the problems, challenges, and institutional context of this new urban scenario and, in addition, offers an overview of how to solve the shortcomings in services that most affect the population. In this sense, the authors describe highly diverse experiences around this phenomenon which, in some cases, results in practical solutions to the problems, while, in others, acts as a primary source of harm for the inhabitants. This second part is a clear example of the main purpose of the book, namely, to frame the discussion of governance in an empirical approach, operationalizing this in concrete variables and specific cases without delving too deeply into new theories on the concept of governance.

Finally, the third part showcases the main reflections and conclusions arising from the comparison of the different cases. It focuses on identifying characteristics, practices or types of horizontal and vertical cooperation of the different actors involved in shaping the cities. The configuration of an

urban area as a metropolis means it can be considered an active entity in constant movement, the main objective of which is the management of services. Large cities are characterized by a multiplicity of structures, as well as by strong competition among them, especially in terms of investment, talent, resources and, in short, in the generation of wealth. The emerging nature of this new reality is a threat to traditional structures. The usual players involved have no intention of innovating, nor of ceding autonomy or power. Nevertheless, the challenge lies in innovation in terms of metropolitan governance, the complexity of which can be seen in the times and rhythms of governance.

The principal idea underlying the argument is the inequality prevailing between the current conception of a city, understood as an emerging metropolitan development, and the institutional configuration that characterizes these areas, the structure of which appears to have remained anchored in the past. Efforts have been made towards cooperation among cities, states and countries on models of knowledge, infrastructure and services, but these are marked by the slowness of their response to an emerging reality. This mismatch is the central thread of the discussion and emphasizes social inequality as the starting point for the analysis. Understanding these inequalities makes it possible to anticipate the future, to hamper or to favour solutions. The book highlights diversity and ecology as the best mechanisms to effectively manage public services in the region.

As regards aspects to be criticized or future research avenues, it can be mentioned that the development of comparative work is always complicated in these terms as it addresses most complex issues. The urban question is one of these, representing the greatest challenge of governance at global level: the governance of large metropolitan areas. At the present, the great challenges of society are urban and so involve cities. This is even truer in the case of Latin America, where urbanization process is extremely extensive. The Latin American metropolis is a socio-spatial and institutional phenomenon. The challenge is firstly institutional and is rooted in the importance of the political and demographic processes that are taking place in the region. Together with the aforementioned urban needs, these processes exceed the capacities of the institutions tasked with resolving these issues. For this reason, reading this book helps better understand the enormous complexity of the socio-political settings in which these cities are located.

Brenner, N. (2014). *Implosions/ Explosions: Towards a Study of Planetary Urbanization*. Berlin: Jovis.

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