
BOOK REVIEWS

Ethan N. Elkind (2014). *Railtown: The Fight for the Los Angeles Metro Rail and the Future of the City*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

From its title, this book challenges both the assumed image of Los Angeles as America's automobile metropolis and the urban rationale of infrastructure needs. *Railtown* deals with the future of that city by narrating the fight for Los Angeles Metro Rail. The subtitle frames very well the content of the book by pointing out two key terms: 'fight' and 'future'. The departure point is a vision of the future promoted by Tom Bradley's campaign for mayor in 1973. Those who understood that the future of a sustainable Los Angeles was linked to the development of a public transit rail network and more transit-oriented walkable neighborhoods. Those who promoted the metro rail system in the city wanted 'to elevate Los Angeles into a world-class city' (p. 2). The story the book carefully describes reaches the current situation and outlines the future prospects of a twenty-first-century railtown.

Ethan Elkind's narrative moves from the rationale of train and public transportation in LA to the contingencies and complexities of developing public transportation in a car oriented city — it was not always this way. Before the car, there was a good network of rail services in the city. Los Angeles is difficult to define. The problems, well outlined by the author, are not just related with the enormous size of Los Angeles county (four thousand square miles) but also with the sprawling political power of the 'byzantine political structure' of a city composed of

eighty-eight cities, a big county, and 'state and federal representatives and agencies. Underlying these entities were communities segregated by class, race and ethnicity' (p. 8). It seems miraculous that such a complex political, social and urban structure could be led in a unified way.

But the future of Los Angeles envisioned by the promoters of an environmentally friendly network of rail public transportation did not come without a fight; actually, a long and complex series of arguments, coalitions among agencies, officials and lobbyists at local, county, state and federal administration levels. This book is a detailed and meticulously reconstructed story of all the plans, controversies, fights, campaigning for funding, setbacks and successes that have marked the construction of a, still evolving, public rail transit system. The reader sometimes finds himself immersed in a complex and multisided story that resembles the best soap operas.

Narrating such a fight is not an easy matter, and Elkin does a great job describing the whole story, focusing mostly from 1973 to 2008 and the different contexts that gave a sense to the deployment of the different rail and light rail lines of the Los Angeles Metro Rail.

This book provides great material for urban anthropologists. It shows how the planning, development, and building of public transportation is shaped and, sometimes, ruled by the usually petty personal, agencies, communities, and ethnic group interests. In a way, it is a 'study up' focused on those individual, agencies and administrations with power; but it is also an enlightening ethnography where local leaders, activists, affluent and

poor neighbors play a part. We read about residents of suburban areas worried about gentrification; neighbours of economically depressed areas interested in an affordable and safe public transportation system to carry them wherever jobs can be found; communities fighting for rail routes that do not affect their quiet backyards or religious life. Some of these movements could be clearly defined as NIMBYs, while others seek the commercial advantage of the shops of specific thoroughfares and avenues. In any case, the author keeps a balanced and safe distance from any party.

Studies of Los Angeles would benefit greatly from this book. What about those urban studies scholars not directly related with the peculiarities of this city? It seems to me there is a lot to learn and think about in these pages. Unfortunately, some of the more general topics that could be ascertained from this study are not easy to grasp, e.g., the interest of the commercial developers of downtown Los Angeles and the renaissance or reinvention of the central urban core. This book provides a good amount of food for thought about governance; the complex interweaving of public agencies, private interests, activists, and residents; and some of the key issues on the future of metropolitan areas.

Fernando Monge

Spanish National University of Distance Education (UNED, Spain)

fmonge@fsof.uned.es

Fabien Frenzel and **Ko Koens** (eds) (2015). *Tourism and Geographies of Inequality. The New Global Slumming Phenomenon*. London: Routledge.

This research-focused edited volume provides the reader with insights into the

complexities of slum tourism. The text posits that the controversial practice of ‘slumming’, which refers to travelling for leisure purposes to ‘slums’, is rising in popularity globally. Papers from the conference ‘Destination Slum! — Reflections on the production and consumption of poverty in tourism’, held in Bristol, U.K., in December 2010, served as the origins of the eight chapters written by ten authors. This collection of chapters was previously published in *Tourism Geographies* (May 2012).

This text is a composition of qualitative case studies that contribute to the growing field of research about slum tourism. Of particular note is this text’s contribution to the field of urban anthropology. The work of various authors compiled into this edited volume allows the history of slum global tourism to be traced back to Victorian England. The histories and intricacies of global slum tourism are then depicted in various intersecting contexts in several developing nations. Myth debunking is a focus of the chapters, as is asking the reader to reflect upon the ethics of slum tourism.

Chapter One introduces the reader to the interdisciplinary and relatively young field of slum tourism research. The term *slum* in the text is defined using the United Nations Human Settlements Programme’s 2003 definition: ‘a heavily populated urban area characterized by substandard housing and squalor’ (p. 4). Although the authors utilize the phrase ‘slum tourism’, they clarify early on in the text that there is no global definition of slum tourism as ‘these areas all originate in particular historical conditions and hence form distinct social and political spaces’ (p. 4). Chapter One

also reflects upon the numerous papers presented at the ‘Destination Slum’ conference in 2010, listing them in detail, although not all papers are included in this edited volume.

In Chapter Two, ‘“We did the Slum” — Urban Poverty, Tourism in Historical Perspective’, the reader is given a historical perspective of slum tourism dating back to Victorian England, when the upper class would go ‘slumming’ to see poverty in the East End of London. The reader is then taken forward into the twenty-first century and reminded of ‘township tourism’, which takes place in South Africa, as well as organized slum tourism in areas of Manila, Jakarta, Cairo, Buenos Aires, Nairobi, Bangkok, and Windhoek. Chapter Three, ‘Poor but happy: Volunteer tourists’ encounters with poverty’, is a must-read chapter for professionals or volunteers who encounter poverty while travelling. This chapter focuses on how poverty can be threatening and cause anxiety for volunteers. In order to combat these feelings, volunteers may in effect normalize poverty and construct and romanticize the poverty experience to be one that is ‘poor but happy’. The fourth chapter focuses on Dharavi, Mumbai, which was the setting for the movie *Slumdog Millionaire*. The most poignant part of this chapter is its focus on perspective — mainly, that the representation of Dharavi is ‘subjective, conditional, and uncertain’ (p. 60).

Chapters Four through Eight, while they still focus on slum tourism, share similar themes in that they focus on the aesthetics and images of slums. Chapter Four, ‘Representing and Interpreting “Reality” in Dharavi, Mumbai’, focuses on

the aesthetics and questions surrounding the dangers of using aesthetics as a means of attracting poverty to a type voyeurism. Chapter Five, ‘Informal Urbanism and the Taste for Slums’, also focuses on images of slums, albeit with a focus on aesthetics and politics. Eleven images are presented throughout this chapter, and the reader is asked to reflect upon questions about whether the ‘impact of voyeuristic gaze of the Western tourist produces an aestheticization of poverty’ (p. 81). Chapter Six, ‘Mobile Imaginaries, Portable Signs: Global Consumption and Representations of Slum Life’, examines how the image of the slum has been used by global consumerism. Examples of how urban poverty is portrayed and dispersed for global entertainment purposes are provided and questioned when urban poverty is portrayed in a stereotypical fashion — often through just a minimal number of images. Chapter Seven, ‘Glimpses of Another World: The Favela as a Tourist Attraction’, explores the *favela*, the word for slum used in Brazil. The chapter describes the favela as a social space and sociological category as well as the commodification of the favela as a tourist attraction. Chapter Eight, ‘Encounters over Garbage: Tourists and Lifestyle Migrants in Mexico’, offers an in-depth discussion of slum tourism through an analysis of a tour to a garbage dump in Mexico. This half-day tour starts at a church and is well-advertised and attended, particular by retired North Americans. According to the author, ‘the tour activities affect marginalized urban spaces in Mazatlan against the backdrop of a particular set of globalization processes, thus producing a distinctive response to

urban poverty, that is, a tourist experience of poverty, framed by discourses of charity' (p. 159).

As a professor who teaches undergraduate students, I feel that aspects of this text — particularly the history of slum tourism and the chapter about volunteering — would be especially useful for students to read before embarking on volunteer work or travel abroad to impoverished areas. From an anthropological perspective, although this text significantly contributes to the field of urban anthropology and the growing field of slum tourism in particular, its link to the field of anthropology could be more consciously bridged. Each of these chapters individually present a view of slum tourism that could be linked together, yet the thread that seems to weave all the chapters together, in my mind, is their common referencing of the sociologist Bianca Freire-Medeiros. The first chapter introduced the subsequent chapters as if they were still papers from a conference. It would have been helpful to this reader if an introductory chapter would have been written for the reader not knowledgeable about slum tourism, perhaps including a more definitive and working definition of slum tourism as well as more background about the subject and an overview of Freire-Medeiros' work. Therefore, I would recommend that Freire-Medeiros' *Touring Poverty* be read as a companion to this text.

All in all, this book was a fascinating read because the distinct case studies shed further light on the ethical and complex issues surrounding tourism to geographies of inequality. The authors carefully document how historical, sociological,

political, and anthropological perspectives differ among geographical spaces; these principles must not be overlooked because a space is deemed a slum. As a result, this text makes an important contribution not only to the field of global tourism, but also to the field of urban anthropology.

Kelly McNeal
William Paterson University
mcnealk1@wpunj.edu

Matthew Gandy (2014). *The Fabric of Space: Water, Modernity, and the Urban Imagination*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

The *Fabric of Space* is an important book that ought to be read by anyone interested in the future of cities. In 351 pages including abundant footnotes, a rich bibliography, photos and index, Matthew Gandy, a geographer who was director of the UCL urban laboratory, wrote a very convincing fresco based on a large variety of data and academic literature, completed by novels and artistic works that provide real sensibility, density and realism to the book. Everybody interested in the past and the future of cities as well ought to read his book. The guiding principle is to highlight some main topics of the modern urban making, from the mid-nineteenth century emergence of water engineering to the present climate disorders. Gandy focuses on six cities that have special relationships with water: Haussmann Paris, Weimar Berlin, colonial and post-colonial Lagos, modern Mumbai, Los Angeles and its concrete river, the inundation of London.

Water makes an excellent thread to describe cities' contemporary evolution: it 'lies at the intersection of landscape and infrastructure, crossing between visible

and invisible domains of urban space' (p. 2). Water connects every home to the public technological networks. Sewers, adduction systems, floods and swamps have been part of the modern transformations of cities all over the world for at least the last two centuries and constitute some of the major technical issues in urban life and policies.

There is no general model of evolution of cities or consistency among models. Water management has often been seen as an index of progress, following the Hausmanian model of Paris. In Nigeria as elsewhere some urban planners still subscribe to it. In every city, urban modernization ought to involve water infrastructures: draining of marshes, safe water supply and sewage disposal. This would imply a public sphere that would be able to undertake expensive public works and powerful enough to implement its policies. During the 1940s, the British colonial administration in Lagos tried to eradicate malaria, but it has been a failure and malaria is still active. In Los Angeles, the Congress approved the construction by the Army Corps of Engineers of a fifty-one-mile-long concrete channel to canalise the river that regularly flooded the city. This is now a concrete linked to thirteen water departments that rarely agree on coordinated strategies on irrigation or renewal of flood defence. In London, the British government built the Thames Barrier to protect the capital from the inundation that could come from the estuary, but lacking confidence in the Barrier, people want to restore an 'idealized ecosystem from the past' (p. 207).

Before the climate crisis, the main contrast to the evolutionist city and the engineering model is the social collapse that occurs more and more. This point is well exemplified by Global South cities: in Mumbai, 'severe disparities in public health can persist because of the array of technological, scientific and architectural innovations that enable wealthy households to insulate themselves from the environmental conditions of the poor' and 'the public health crisis facing slum dwellers does not directly endanger middle-class residents' (p. 135). In Lagos, 'the relationship between disease and segregation established in the colonial era persists in terms of middle-class intolerance (consecutive to the) "miasmatic disdain" for the olfactory proximity of the poor' (p. 108). Dickens and Conrad remind us that, in social imagination, and in reality as well, the Thames estuary was a place of abandonment and social malaise. Consequences of climate change are particularly illustrated by London. 'There is tacit acknowledgment among many government agencies (...) that increased flood risk is inevitable' (p. 196). Technical solutions will not solve this problem, above all in a country that has dramatically weakened the strategic planning role of the Environment Agency. Solutions ought to be found somewhere between the restoration of the traditional ecological role of the estuary and education, individual responsibility and new public policies.

Water policies have never been strictly technical. Hygiene, disease control, comfort and entertainment were used to civilize urban people and to control urban space. Water policies make it possible to better understand public policies in

general, but also contestation, local autonomy and popular appropriation of the urban space. In many places water exemplifies the contested terrain of local policies, strengthened between the knowledge of engineers and the knowledge of the population. During the 1990s and until now, the question of water played a major role in the emergence of the urban political ecology and its connection with the dwellers. But ‘the intersection, between water, democratic deliberation, and the public realm has been extensively occluded’ (p. 14). However, placing democracy and its practical forms in the urban development — particularly managing water resources, combating diseases such as malaria or developing ecological responses to reduce the effects of global warming — probably constitutes one the today’s main issues. In Mumbai local mobilisations organize supplying drinking water. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) convince local authorities to have an emphasis ‘on measures such as rainwater harvesting as a rediscovery of traditional approaches to water management’ (p. 130). Protests over access to drinking water and health, led by some NGOs, via ‘grassroots campaigns to extend citizenship rights to marginalized communities’ and ‘the deployment of repertoires of local knowledge has allowed some of the poorest communities in the city to become visible for the first time’ (p. 130). In Los Angeles, an ‘ecological urban citizenship’ has emerged that initiates ‘a myriad of grassroots initiatives and new forms of public engagement with nature’ (p. 149) where water is a constant feature. They originated with a grassroots organisation called the Mothers of East

LA, which was created in 1984 to campaign against pollution and health-threatening industrial facilities near poor and predominantly Latino and African American neighbourhoods (p. 176).

The possibility of new forms of ‘urban ecological citizenship’ (...) requires reflections on the different modalities of power within the urban arena’ (p. 218). But dramatic events occur even more quickly when a long time [lags] between events and response. Models lose their practical utility, experts’ knowledge becomes inefficient, sources of power are dispersed, ‘and we are left to contend with ideological parameters of science fiction imaginary’ (p. 220). Now, ‘water both constitutes and delimits the public realm, not necessarily as a stable or coherent social formation, but as a set of spheres of contestation and negotiation’ (p. 221). At the same time, inequalities are widening between suburbs and gentrified downtowns; cities concentrate wealth and power to the detriment of their rural hinterlands; private investments are unable to respond to the water needs of the population and to the impact of climate change. Democratic solutions are more needed than ever.

Michel Rautenberg

Centre Max Weber, Université de Saint-Etienne, France

Michel.rautenberg@univ-st-etienne.fr

Susannah Hagan (2015). *Ecological Urbanism: The Nature of the City*. New York: Routledge.

This is a book about urban design that goes beyond design to include anthropology, politics, governance and environment in a

consolidated approach that is termed 'ecological urbanism', a term that the author agrees is not popular but gaining ground. At the outset the reader is told that ecological urbanism is about cultural practice and demands a transformation in thinking from those in charge of the urban environment; architects, planners and power holders. This concept is separated from related terms like urban ecology and sustainable cities; the former is about the green spaces in the city and the latter about maintaining some kind of equilibrium state, but ecological urbanism is neither. It is a modified view of city planning that recognizes that those in charge of building and maintaining the city as well those living in it, must recognize that 'urban apocalypse' (p. 150) is to be attributed to the 'four horsemen' of urbanisation, environmental degradation, climate change and wealth being concentrated in the hands of the few. As the majority of the people in the world are moving to urban areas, not always voluntarily, the dreams of a good life are often shattered as many of them are pushed into unliveable conditions, often having to struggle to find their own solutions to survival, like building on places that should not be built on. Such unplanned growth may cause havoc on the lives of citizens as well as on the environment; a tragedy that is being manifest in climate change, urban pollution and manmade urban disasters.

This volume prioritizes the human elements and focuses on the negative aspects of planning and of governance globally; namely power, profit and the essential inequalities of urban life. Solutions may not be found in absolute terms to deal with problems of inequity

and injustice, as the author realizes that utopian conditions are not possible. Yet as this book tries to explain, design and technology can be used to advantage if planning and architecture incorporate 'an ethics of size, of social mix, of density and public space' (p. 8). In other words, urbanism needs to situate itself within the matrix of human culture and its biophysical environment. One cannot emphasize one at the expense of the other. The author does not talk in metaphoric terms but illustrates her arguments and propositions with examples of real cities and visions of ideal places, like Lilypad.

The first section of the book deals with the definition and understanding of key concepts such as urban ecosystem, cultural ecology, landscape and environment. The second section describes three major models of city planning and design; the Garden city, the city within boundaries and the city unbound; the last being where the rural and urban are seen as shading into one another. The issues raised in this section include the role of citizens, 'civic pride' in maintaining spaces like the garden city and the gradual loss to corporate and capitalist interests that are taking over city planning. This section describes how sacrifice of cultural and human interests to the needs of capital gain and profit has played havoc with many city environments. The compact cities that represent the second model are bound around a strong centre and often the materialist connotations override the cultural and social ones as these are governed by a central power. Here questions of democracy, of control and access to resources may become paramount. In contemporary times, issues

of carbon footprints and pollution may be of critical interest as are questions of density, energy and that of relation of city and suburb, both environmentally and politically. The concept of the Broadacre city brings in thinkers and planners like Patrick Geddes and Ian McHarg, whose visions were to incorporate the natural within the social. Geddes had emphasized mapping histories before planning, an innovation not attempted before. One is introduced to the concept of a 'performative landscape', where any place is evaluated not as empty but in terms of its cultural and ecological content.

The reader is offered several conceptual models with real examples, like Edge city and the Seed Catalogue, to deal with urban intensification and spread. The seed catalogue is an interesting concept that provides various solutions to varieties of environments like wetlands, brownfields etc. The next section describes ideal cities, often small ones that may be real like Auroville or fictitious like Lilypond or simply metaphoric like a future eco-city, the possibility of which remains open.

The book is based on a large corpus of factual data, discussing actual planners and architects, real cities as examples and also contains relevant drawings and diagrams as illustrations. It contains historical material from ancient cities to the very modern ones, bringing in architects, planners and social thinkers ranging from Vitruvius, Le Corbusier, Howard, Henri Levebre, De Certeau and Marx, to give theoretical depth to the understanding of city planning. The ultimate goal of this book is about power and control and its message very clear; unless there is a synchronization of the top

down and the bottom up perspectives, unless there is participation of masses and heed paid to their needs, no city planning can be successful. A dysfunctional city embodies both social and environmental disasters and is ultimately economically non-viable such that even in the interest of future viability, ecological urbanism is a way out and a solution worth considering.

The practicality of wedding technology to humanism, planning to the human element is clearly demonstrated and makes this slim volume an important resource for both analytical and for applied purposes.

Subhadra Channa

University of Delhi, India

channa.subhadra@gmail.com

Tone Huse (2014). *Everyday Life in the Gentrifying City: On Displacement, Ethnic Privileging and the Right to Stay Put*. Farnham: Ashgate.

Tone Huse is a Research Fellow in the Department of Sociology, Political Science and Community Planning at the University of Tromsø, Norway. This book originates from Huse's other book *Toyenghata-et nyrikt stykke Norge* (2010). The book describes how Toyen Street in east Oslo was transformed after 30 years of gentrification. *Everyday life in the Gentrifying City* is actually the expanded and revised version of her previous book. Diane Oatley through translation of the book made it possible for the international and global community to read the book in English. The most interesting and unique relevancy of the book lies in the lively description of Toyen Street. It is the outcome of Tone Huse's three years of

dedicated urban ethnographic study during 2007-2010; that is, her qualitative research on Toyen Street. Huse has efficiently established the fact and effect of gentrification through her observational study which is expressed brilliantly and skilfully with the help of narratives, discourse conversation etc. Tone Huse actually describes a small part of Oslo as the neighbourhood area of her study which is less than a kilometre long. The region of her study may be small in stretch but the varied description with her focus on ethnic minorities and how far they feel disconnected from Norwegian culture and society as the new culture is totally different from their culture, is immense. She represents everyone, from the disadvantageous immigrant minority to the advantageous native Norwegians. She illustrates locality details and the real story of Toyen Street with every colour expressed in her urban ethnographic study. Her writing gives voice especially to the ethnic minor community who struggle every day to survive amidst Norwegian culture and to live a challenging but decent life with limited or very little resources in an unknown world. Tone captures their effort to integrate and feel the sense that they belong and are accepted in a new society. Gentrification started the moment when Toyen Street became part of the immigrant's everyday life and a meeting place for their physical and psychological existence.

The book starts with an introduction and then is divided into nine chapters. Tone Huse wisely uses these nine chapters to outline the different consequences and stages of gentrification and everyone's opinion about their experience and how

they are affected. In the well written introductory note she refers to her previous research and theories in the field of gentrification and their impact in Norway. However, what is missing is the historical part of the ethnic minorities' arrival, as the main focus of the book is to give them a voice and highlight their efforts to stay in and around the central business area. But she is successful in giving the historical account of Toyen Street in context with all stages of the change that is taking place through the inclusion of everyone who witnessed or is witnessing it. She collected a huge pool of information which is relevant to the transformation process of east Oslo. After the introduction, Chapter 1 starts with 'Renewal and Eviction', which are shaped by politics and then gentrification process through which people are facing the outcome of gentrification. For them, their family members, and friends, the outcome may mean displacement that leads to separation from each other. It is a good documentation and analysis of everyday life of a particular place (Toyen Street) focussing on everyone - privileged and underprivileged- residents, businessmen, artists, officials. She portrays not only the voice of the unfortunate immigrant population of their own words through quoting them in her research canvas but also documents every scenario which transformed Toyen Street into its present form. This book will certainly add knowledge to scholars about certain ethnic populations in Norway. It is also a really good script for urban studies and other social science disciplines, especially those who are doing research in migration dynamics – in and out migration of certain

ethnic populations. The ethnographic descriptions are good and its findings likely to hold true anywhere in the world where immigrants face hardships as they have to adjust to new cultures and languages in their struggle for survival. However there may be some opportunity to improve upon the continuity or flow of events to increase the interest and provide the quality of readability.

She embraces everyone on and off the record. She uses semi-structured interview questions. She also admits honestly to the problem of the cultural differences she faced while taping interviews. The off record conversations become more important as the people tend to participate more freely in such discussions which is normally absent in a formal interview. People's responses in these discussions make reality so genuine and personal. Some photographs are good. The black and white photographs (Carsten Aniksdal) go well with the theme and ethnographic description of the book.

This book reiterates that there is always a gap between policy and practice. In reality politicians and policy makers use certain policies to attract and use the public for their own gain. They attract public attention with policies which may mitigate some social injustices, but ultimately the system stays the same.

The book highlights the fact that the initial settlers in one area, which eventually grows and prospers as it becomes an urban city, become evicted by the calculated game of builders and replaced by the new and affluent people and their new culture. The immigrants who were doing business have to move out due to an increased cost of living and resettle

on the outskirts of the city. Once again they face culture shock. They are compelled to emigrate to a new and alien community where they begin again the process of survival.

Psychological trauma impacts everyone, from children to the elderly. Some people become alienated from their own community, due to the arrival of new people and culture in their own surroundings. The psychological shock is immense and the author throws light on both physical and psychological trauma people are faced with. For some people the psychological attachment or detachment can create such a trauma that it leads to death. On page 56 where one of the author's interview participant Bjorn described some situations after gentrification – '...they lost one another. They did not feel safe, in their new surroundings. They locked themselves inside and died. At number 29 alone, there were six elderly people who died the year after they were moved out.'

The book also emphasizes the interplay of economic disparity, migration and religious dynamics; how a poor ethnic minority living in poverty tries to stay in the core area of the city. The power of bonding and togetherness is their ultimate strength to fight against the calculated game of eviction and displacement.

In Chapter 9, 'From Toyen Street', which is also the concluding chapter of the book, she mentions that the average Norwegian is living in the Golden Age. The chapter reflects the ethnographic depth that her research has uncovered. Here she focuses on the issue of shrinking social housing and on the municipal officials who promote multiculturalism in words, but

then implement policies that drive ethnic minorities away from the central or core area of the city where they feel most comfortable both in terms of their livelihood and mental health.

One-sided decisions made by elected members of political parties and developers ignoring the residents, both immigrants and citizens should not be the accepted practice. Instead, policies and practices must involve the participation of everyone in society- the rich, the poor, the homeless, activists, immigrants, and long-time citizens. Everyone has a role to play in the enrichment of Oslo. The author expresses the hope that the authorities in cities such as Oslo should plan the future of the city with all the residents of the city and not just with the developers and investors. Only then will the diversity of individuals and groups become a true resource for Oslo.

Sweta Banerjee
sweta.wilderness.banerjee@gmail.com

Ian Lindsay (2014) *Living with London Olympics: An ethnography*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

In this book Iain Lindsay explores the process of the geographic, economic, and social transformation of the London borough of Newham as a result of organization and production of the 2012 Olympic Games in London. This book makes an original contribution to the study (ethnographic and otherwise) of sporting events and their impact on host cities. Lindsay explores the phenomenon of the Olympic Games through a dual perspective which compares the rhetoric of the Olympic Delivery Authority with the

perceptions of the local community of Newham. Lindsay contrasts the top-down, sensationalistic rhetoric, which considered the coming of the Olympic Games as a saviour, a bearer of development and progress, and contrasts it with the view from ‘the bottom’, from the direct observation of the everyday life of Newham and the relationship of its residents to the city’s urban spaces.

In many editions of Olympic Games, host cities have taken the chance to advertise ‘a particular urban geography to an international audience.’ Yet, as the mayor of Newham, Sir Robin Wales, noted, in London 2012, ‘for the first time in history the Olympics were used to transform a deprived area completely.’ (p. 26) Indeed, before that point, the sporting event had never been taken as a way to redesign the whole city area. The choice to designate Newham — one of the poorest areas of London and the entire country — as the main venue for the most important sporting event in the world, should be situated within the broader trend that sees the opening of international capitals as a way to achieve an ‘improvement’ of urban areas. Lindsay remarks that the organizing committee and local authorities considered Newham ‘the absolute embodiment of East London’s “gash” (...) that needed to be healed by the Games’ (p. 31). This view was based on statistical evidence, according to which Newham ranked highly in the various constituents of the index of deprivation that can be considered precedent to regeneration (see Armstrong, Hobbs, and Lindsay 2011). The neighbourhood’s stigmatization as a deprived place (to be redeemed and assimilated) along with a utopian vision of

improving the neighbourhood and giving a 'better life' (p. 18) to the local community were among the central tenets promoting London as a candidate for the 2012 Games.

The author bases his criticism of the Olympic Delivery Authority's rhetoric on these two aspects, laying the premises for his ethnographic exploration. Unlike other studies on the Olympic Games, observation of the neighbourhood was not limited only to the duration of the Games, as it involved the entire time span of its preparation as well. This let the author explore the process of transformation and renegotiation of the relationship between the people of Newham and its urban spaces. The rhetoric of the Olympic Delivery Authority presented the 'pre game' and 'post game' and the 'pre Newham' and 'post Newham' as two opposite poles of its utopian view, which was also seen as marking the passage from a deprived community to a regenerated place. He contrasts this with a gradual observation equipped to understand the slow, contradictory metamorphosis of the relationship of the neighbourhood locals with its urban spaces. Lindsay's ethnographic discovery of the neighbourhood leads him to a conceptual redefinition that contrasts starkly with the representation of the Olympic Delivery Authority's rhetoric.

Drawing inspiration from the ideas of writers like Augé and Lefebvre, he seeks to give a theoretical organization that succeeds in representing the neighbourhood's transitory nature: 'Newham's diverse, deprived community lacking a holistic identity, a shared history, and even a shared relational culture may be defined as residing in a non-place' (p. 20).

Yet, he notes how the lack of homogeneity cannot in itself be considered proof of a lack of identity. Lindsay borrows Lefebvre's phrase (1991) to term Newham a 'strange entity' (p. 40). The absence of such identity-affirming uniformity would make Newham a 'strange entity' (Lefebvre 1991: 53); that is, a place that, though aspiring to be 'real,' fails to produce its 'own space' or simply lacks those distinctive qualities that, according to Augé, characterize a place.' (p. 154)

The second aspect of his observation was about appreciating the neighbourhood's differences and its heterogeneity. Lindsay sharply criticizes flattening representations of Newham that portray it as a homogeneous world made up of consistent traits. He writes, 'A holistic definitive definition of what constituted Newham, and indeed the Newham community, remained elusive and ephemeral' (p. 38). According to the author, it is actually the neighbourhood's cultural, ethnic and social heterogeneity that define it. In order to observe and understand the multiple, diverse nature of his object of study, Lindsay made a mobile, decentralized observation so he could explore it through different perspectives, changing his point of observation often and listening to the multiple voices of its inhabitants. 'I participated in clearing out cupboards in community centres, sweeping floors with those on community service orders, supervising bouncy castles at Islamic religious functions, overseeing sport events, working in youth clubs, and much more' (p. 108). This let him discover a heterogeneous world where the relationship between the locals and the

urban places is constantly renegotiated. An essential concept here is habitus, as the ‘social re-negotiation that can only be maintained through exchange, and evolves through continual experiences and exchanges’ (p. 22) through which Lindsay finds one of the most important interpretive keys for his object of study. Newham is far from a static, uniform world, and it can be explored through an ongoing process of resignification through which its residents relate to its urban places. The Olympic Game organizers’ elite viewpoint, with its linearity and consistency, fails to grasp the heterogeneous aspect and cannot consider the personal aspect of internalization of spaces by local residents as it simply presents idyllic visions with a single-voiced, unilateral view.

In the second part of the book, Lindsay offers more detailed discussion of the discordant points that emerged between the organizers, local authorities, and neighbourhood residents during the preparation of the Olympic Games. Here he focuses most on the concept of hegemony as ‘the dominant representations and practices of those in power who maintain the ‘dominant story lines’ to consolidate their standing’ (Agnew 1998, p. 6). He notes how even the moments of dialogue between these groups can be used with an end to keep control (...) by conceding some pre-determined acceptable ground, thereby placating opponents with the illusion of progress, and maintaining their hegemony.’ (p. 174) He then makes a clear, detailed description of how often strategies of assimilation and integration promulgated by the heads of the Olympic Game organization often end up actually

marginalizing the local population.

The book’s essential merit is Lindsay’s ability to produce an ethnographic discourse that contrasts with the urbanized viewpoint of power. The rigid dictates of the top-down discursive production are shaken by observing the urban world through a mobile, delocalized viewpoint that can grasp its contradictions and changeability.

References:

- Agnew, J. (1998). *Geopolitics: Revisioning World Politics*. London: Routledge.
- Armstrong, G., Hobbs, R., and Lindsay, I. (2011). Calling the shots: The pre-2012 London Olympic contest. *Urban Studies*, 4-8 (15), 3169-3184.
- Augé, M. (1995). *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity*. London: Verso.
- Lefebvre, H. (1991). *The Production of Space*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Giovanni Spissu

University of Manchester, U.K.
spissugiovanni@hotmail.com