

# Urban Studies

<http://usj.sagepub.com/>

---

## **Book review: Orienting Istanbul: Cultural Capital of Europe?**

Tahire Erman

*Urban Stud* 2011 48: 2195

DOI: 10.1177/0042098011410736

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://usj.sagepub.com/content/48/10/2195>

---

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

On behalf of:

Urban Studies Journal Limited

**Additional services and information for *Urban Studies* can be found at:**

**Email Alerts:** <http://usj.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

**Subscriptions:** <http://usj.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

**Reprints:** <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

**Permissions:** <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

**Citations:** <http://usj.sagepub.com/content/48/10/2195.refs.html>

>> [Version of Record](#) - Jul 14, 2011

[What is This?](#)

## Book Reviews

### **Orienting Istanbul: Cultural Capital of Europe?**

Deniz Göktürk, Levent Soysal and İpek Türeli (Eds), 2010

London: Routledge

336 pp. £95.00 hardback; £34.99 paperback

ISBN 978 0415 58010 6 hardback; 978 0415 58011 3 paperback

The book is about Istanbul at a time when both its images and places, and its past and present, are being refashioned in the process of making the city a ‘capital of culture’. It is presented by the editors as “the first book to capture Istanbul’s rise to the world stage set up by post-industrial capitalism” (p. 3). The overarching theme is the cultural aspect of globalisation that is witnessed locally in the context of Istanbul.

The book is a collection of essays ranging from heritage sites to the cinema and art in and about the city, from the Istanbul Biennial to the European Capital of Culture Programme (ECoC). The first section includes two essays, very different in terms of their approaches and writing styles, one about the restructuring of Istanbul in the era of globalisation (ch. 1) and the other one about the impressions of the author, after his journey through the streets of the city, about Istanbul as a city of *keyif* (pleasure) (ch. 2). The second section includes a heritage site inhabited by locals (ch. 4), another one renovated for new uses as the site of neo-Ottomanism (ch. 5), and a miniature theme park, the Miniaturk (ch. 6); this section also includes an essay about resistance to ‘regeneration’ projects (ch. 3). (This term is troublesome since it assumes an organic and

natural change; see N. Smith 2002.) The third section is titled the ‘mediated city’. Following a brief essay on how cinema is articulated in urban life as an agent of modernity at the turn of the last century (1896–1928), it includes the images of the city as experienced by migrants from the countryside, demonstrated in two movies (one shot in the 1960s and the other one in the 2000s) that represent two different paradigms (ch. 8). These are, first, the images of the city as presented “in a virtual tour of Istanbul from the air” (p. 169), embedded in the story about different lives and places in the city brought together by a coincidence (a thief living in the inner city, a Mafia boss and an upper-middle-class family, all living in a gated community on the outskirts of the city)—the movie *Magic Carpet Ride* (ch. 9) and, secondly, a documentary located in specific sites and accompanied by music. “The mediated production of local specificity” (p. 181) of the latter demonstrates the multicultural character of the city and how its local culture is remade through transnational lenses (ch. 10). The fourth section ‘art in the city’ includes chapters focusing mainly on the Istanbul Biennial (chs 11–13). While a comparison of the Istanbul and Berlin Biennials illustrates the convergence of economic interests, cultural policy and artistic practices (ch. 13), the criticism of the Istanbul Biennial demonstrates the contestation it brought over the art in Istanbul when native artists and their works of art are affected by global interventions (ch. 12). The fifth section concerns the project of Istanbul as a European cultural capital. It includes the introduction of the European Capital of Culture Project

(ECoC) that aims to support “cities which are traditionally cosmopolitan and thus able to transcend national identity” (p. 253), promoting European identity. It also covers the uses and misuses of ECoC by local governments (ch. 14), the failure of ECoC in fulfilling the promises to be a participatory project, which would pave the path to a ‘participatory culture’ (ch. 15), the Turkish Jewish community as an emergent political agent in the on-going negotiations of the Turkish state with the EU (ch. 16) and the future of Istanbul as a ‘civilising project’ (ch. 17). The book ends with an Epilogue.

The authors come from various disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, architecture, art and cinema. The essays are also varied: some are descriptive, some are theoretical and some are impressionistic; some are based on field research and some on archival materials. There is one chapter in which an authority figure in the culture industries (curator of the Tenth Istanbul Biennial) is interviewed and one chapter has been written by a practitioner in the Istanbul 2010 ECoC Agency. Hence, the book is as diverse and multifaceted as the city itself, suggested in the picture on the cover of the book. Some essays are more at the core of the book’s main theme and some others remain somewhat peripheral. The editors have done their best to make it a coherent book by dividing it into sections and providing brief introductions for each. Yet, ch. 3 seems not to belong to the section in which it is put; this essay, with more essays on the issue of ‘regeneration’, could have developed into a separate section and for ch. 3 there could have been an essay on the Sulukule urban transformation project, which is referred to in several essays in the book. Special care is given to produce a book worthy of scholarly attention. The introduction written by the editors is useful, setting the framework. Also, photographs, drawings and maps, by bringing in the visual dimension, contribute to giving the reader a better grasp of the issues.

As the title of the book suggests, the general question pursued throughout the book is whether Istanbul has become or is becoming a cultural capital of Europe. The answer given in the essays is not a simple yes or no, but concerns the contested nature of the process. Overall, the book points to the contestations over the city and the interventions into its spaces, both cultural and physical, by various actors to make Istanbul a ‘European capital of culture’.

‘Heritage’ is one of the buzz words in today’s cultural industries. Questions over how to represent the city’s heritage and heritage sites emerge as a potentially contested domain. In recent years, there has been a severe contestation over the country’s identity, which confers special importance to the construction of its past—namely, whether the early Republican era and its reforms of secularisation and modernisation, or the Ottoman era and its being the capital of the Islamic world and its multiethnic communal character will form the basis of contemporary Turkey’s identity. Yet when the focus is on Istanbul, as is in the book, there is consensus, at least on the surface, on highlighting its ‘cosmopolitan’ past; this is rejuvenated and celebrated today, slotting into the so-called politically correct discourse of multiculturalism in the West. Istanbul is presented as *the* cosmopolitan city and hence as the global city *par excellence*. In the Miniaturk, part of a recent trend towards a new era in which heritage becomes a commodity to be consumed both by tourists and natives alike, the share of Istanbul’s monuments is more than half of the whole country’s (ch. 6). In this quest for the cosmopolitan identity of Istanbul, Islamists try to represent the city by accentuating its Ottoman/Islamic past. In the new Ottomanism, Islamic spaces and buildings are increasingly restored and some have become the sites of Islamic institutions and *wakfs* (ch. 5). By so doing, the neo-Ottomans take pride in the multicultural character of the city’s Ottoman past, during which, as

they claim, different religious communities lived side-by-side peacefully. Interestingly, by their investments in the religious building complexes, they not only reproduce the city's past, but also create today's Istanbul and envision its future.

In this tribute to multiculturalism, the Jewish community in particular becomes 'politically present' in the spaces of the city by transforming the derelict neighbourhoods of the Pera quarter—an inner-city district famous for its non-Muslim presence in the past—into Jewish neighbourhoods, reconstructing Istanbul's past as a multicultural city (ch. 16). In this endeavour, the political centre addressed is Europe and the aim is to appeal to the European Union by showing the city's multicultural character embedded in tolerance for difference, past and present alike.

The present of the city is also highly contested. In the restructuring of the city to make it a 'world city', interventions both into its spaces and images take place. The actors of these interventions are both global and local: supranational institutions such as UNESCO with its list of World Heritage sites and the EU with its Istanbul 2010 European Capital of Culture project, globally celebrated curators and artists in culture-led formations and projects, art brokers, real estate tycoons, the urban élite (both secular and Islamist), artists and performers with their movies and music, the city governments, now equipped with excessive power and acting as agents of capital, with their massive urban transformation projects, and local and global NGOs, as well as the mafia with their interest in real estate speculation and easy money (ch. 9), all attempt to create an Istanbul that fits the present vision of the city (an essay on the 'creative class', and their TV series and commercials would be a plus). And this vision, as aptly put by M. Herzfeld, is much shaped by the neo-liberal paradigm of the city. Urban coalitions are formed and some actors are empowered over others, depending on the political conditions of the time—local, national and global (in the

case of today's Istanbul, the EU, a conservative pro-Islamic government, a neo-liberal economy and culture industries are among the actors that define those conditions).

Practices of resistance emerge as a result (ch. 3). In an asymmetric power position, local people as agents of resistance can be also present among the actors. Ethnic local culture (especially music) can be a means of attracting global attention, bringing artists and activists into the struggle against the urban transformation project in the locality (ch. 10).

All this is happening in the era of globalisation in which the nation-states' power and control over their societies, both economically and politically, is eroding. In the case of Turkey, this means the diminishing power of the Republican élite over the wider society. This increases the power of Istanbul over the Republic's capital city Ankara, Istanbul's glamour putting Ankara in the shade. Interestingly, it is the nation-state that takes advantage of the presentation of Istanbul as a cosmopolitan city of tolerance and diversity; in its negotiation with the EU for full membership, it uses this trope as a strategic tool.

Moving beyond the Istanbul case, the contribution of the book to urban studies would be to shed light on the multiplicity of actors in our global era involved in the process of making a city a cultural product to be consumed both locally and globally, each with its own vision of what the city was in the past and what it should become in the future; and the contestations and conflicts it involves, as well as the new constellations it produces as resistance sites.

The book is successful in bringing together different issues, actors and discourses around the project of making Istanbul a cultural capital of Europe. However, it fails to pay enough attention to the massive displacements taking place in the city, which is the other side of the coin. There are only 2 essays out of 18: in one of them, the attempt to clear city spaces from *gecekondu* (squatter houses/shanty towns) by the joint action of

the Mass Housing Administration (TOKİ in Turkish) and municipalities that have gained “extraordinary powers” (p. 30) is integrated into the article’s framework of urban restructuring under neo-liberalism (ch. 1) and, in the other one, the focus is on ‘regeneration’ and the local resistance it entailed (ch. 3). They contribute to the book by revealing the other face of Istanbul as it is made into a ‘cultural capital’. There is also one essay in which the dislocation of occupants in a historical building where they have their small stores is implied (ch. 4), but this subject is not pursued further. Curator of the Tenth Istanbul Biennial, Hou Hanru, talks about “state-led gentrification in Sulukule” (ch. 11), but his interest may be more in its Roma community than in its poor residents, which fits well with today’s celebration of ethnic identities while the poor are increasingly stigmatised and rendered invisible. Thus, the undesirable outcomes for the city’s poor as Istanbul is restructured by culture-led formations are not adequately addressed in the book. Some essays are critical of the “top-down urban restructuring projects” (p. 195) and “‘urban regeneration’ campaigns” (p. 246) (chs 10 and 13), but in some others, one gets the feeling of some unawareness of the dramatic outcomes of the interventions into the spaces of the poor. For example, presenting *kentsel dönüşüm* (urban transformation) as “a much more poetic and seemingly less loaded phrase than gentrification” (p. 303) hides what really goes on on the ground in Istanbul today. It is ‘gentrification’ in the Western context and ‘urban transformation’ in the Turkish context which have become the dominant means of displacement today.

As more and more people are displaced and forcibly relocated in faraway places, often put into pay schemes that they can never afford, the city Istanbul turns not into a place of *hüzün*/melancholia (O. Pamuk) or a place of *keyif*/pleasure (E. F. Işın in ch. 2), both of which are attributed to the city by the members of the educated élite, but a place of *yas*/

grief, people grieving for their lost homes and communities (Fried, 1963). It is not only the urban poor whose lives and places are disrupted by urban transformation projects, but also the traditional middle classes who are displaced by market-led gentrification and whose lives and spaces are affected by the insertion of the culture industries into the city as more and more art galleries are opened in their localities. (The recent event in Tophane during which violence broke between the local people and the art gallery people is an example of the reaction of the traditional community to the newcomers. The irony here is that, in the art galleries, works of art about displacement brought by gentrification may be on display.)

The celebration of the cultural developments in the city as a ‘civilising process’ fails to recognise this other face of Istanbul—those who are excluded from the process and who are rendered invisible, or are attempted to become so, by displacing them from the profitable inner-city spaces to open those spaces to use for cultural consumption. Some attempts are made to integrate ‘culture’ into the lives of *gecekondu* dwellers—for example, in the Istanbul 2010 Istanbul ECoC (by taking people to museums, displaying art objects in the ‘margins of the city’, etc.). Yet they remain naïve as long as they fail to acknowledge structural constraints and socially constructed cultural asymmetries that impinge on the lives of the poor. The ‘Dem(art)cracy Village’ project in the 2010 ECoC programme, which was “aimed at the transformation of Istanbul’s shanty towns into artistic centres, or bringing modern art into them” (p. 262), sounds like a joke when one considers the increasing threats of demolition, the economic hardship (unprotected and insecure job market) and the social stigmatisation (as shameless invaders of precious urban land and as criminals) *gecekondu* dwellers experience today. Nevertheless, when global actors in the art sector (curators, artists) attempt to make ‘marginal’ lives and spaces

visible, as in the Istanbul Biennial, they may be aptly criticised by Turkish artists for being orientalist, exoticizing the Other (ch. 12), yet they may still be helpful by drawing attention to these places and people that are largely ignored by the globalising élite.

What makes the book succeed is the Epilogue written by Michael Herzfeld. Herzfeld, by his critical stance to the issues presented in separate chapters, unfolds the logic behind them; he weaves the chapters into a whole by connecting ideas across the chapters to make a critical argument about 'Orienting Istanbul', which could be used in its double meaning—making it the Other in the Western gaze ('Orientalising') and directing the city towards becoming a cultural capital of Europe. He rightfully brings in the hidden/unspoken, and usually the dark, side of various issues introduced in the chapters. And by doing so, he tells us what the civilising project, heritage concerns, the celebration of the Jewish minority, the international cultural events and projects may mean in today's political (Europeanisation) and economic (neo-liberal) globalisation affecting Turkey. He goes behind the rhetoric and brings into the light why these discourses and practices are celebrated today, who celebrates them and who benefits from these celebrations. Today, minorities are rediscovered and celebrated in the politically correct discourse of multiculturalism, but this happens in the Turkish context after many members of the minority communities were forced to depart in the aftermath of violent acts against them. Instead of recognising the 'dirty past', today a 'frozen' and 'sanitized' past is re-created to feed into a 'nostalgia industry' (p. 313), in which 'cosmopolitan Istanbul' is made into a politically correct resource and hence an internationally marketable commodity. According to Herzfeld, the 'civilising project' is nothing but a "neo-liberal recreation of the aesthetic and ethical values that in the 19th century sustained the European project of colonial domination" (p. 313). It may thus be "the

next phase of a process of European domination" rather than "a convergent process of post-national civilization" (p. 314). The ideal 'diversity' today is "no less Ethnocentric" (p. 315) and the 'civilizing project' can be the "discursive face of Ethnocentric globalism" (p. 315). As acknowledged by Herzfeld, this Europeanisation of culture through the city Istanbul also creates its opposition. The city, with its *keyif*, is not easily assimilable. City residents, especially those of the lower classes, in their life worlds, find ways and spaces to enjoy their lives. Yet I argue that this can be only true until the moment when they can no longer keep their presence in the city, until they can no longer save their homes and neighbourhoods from the aggressive urban transformations in the neo-liberal city. Unfortunately, the demolition of *gecekondu* in the transformation of the city to make it a cultural capital, and the forced eviction of the poor, are not acknowledged by Herzfeld.

**Tahire Erman**

*Department of Political Science  
Bilkent University*

## References

- Fried, M. (1963) Grieving for a lost home, in: L. J. Duhl (Ed.) *The Urban Condition*, pp. 151–171. New York: Basic Books.
- Smith, N. (2002) New globalism, new urbanism: gentrification as global urban strategy, *Antipode*, 34(3), pp. 427–450.

## The Local Dimension of Migration Policy Making

Tiziana Caponio and Maren Borkert (Eds), 2010

Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press

204 pp. €39.95 paperback

ISBN 978 90 8964 232 5 paperback

Recent statistics and studies since 2004 have shown that cities are the most common

gateways of immigration to the countries that the United Nations classifies as 'advanced industrial economies'. Especially in Europe, most foreign immigrants' labour market careers start from and circulate in these urban labour markets. As shown by Eurostat statistics, immigrants concentrate heavily in urban areas. These issues have a great impact on the pre-conditions of immigrants' integration into the labour market and the society.

These pre-conditions have been previously studied—for example, in urban sociology (Sassen, Portes, Saxenian, the EU Commission's Metropolis network) and in migration studies (the fore-mentioned, Penninx and the EU's Imiscoe and Ercomer networks).

The back cover of this book promises that "this ... study offers a fresh perspective on immigrant integration policy in European and North American cities". Indeed, the text actually keeps this promise. The book consists, moreover, of an introduction, five research articles and a conclusion. They constitute a good comparative research design that studies whether European immigration policies are actually national (as has traditionally been thought) or whether there is significant variation at the local level, within each country. The study convincingly challenges this traditional pre-condition of migration research and policy-making. The empirically precise comparative research design shows that the country-level understanding of migration policy is merely a Westphalian illusion.

The book is produced by Imiscoe, an EU-co-ordinated research network that seeks to make migration policy-making better informed about research results. Previous research shows that immigrant integration is greatly affected by the local /city level in the receiving country.

Traditionally, immigration and immigrant integration have been seen as issues at the country level. However, since the year 2000, comparative empirical research has shown

that the typical immigrant integration process is different between cities within each country: in other words, the primary independent variable seems not to be the country level, but instead the local level.

The book suggests that the ground-breaker for migration research that focuses on the local level was a European research project that took place in the first years of the 21st century (the MPMC). Previously, multiple researchers focused on the local level (Portes, Sassen, etc.), but they did not run across this kind of revolutionary hypothesis and, as a result, not the kind of research design that would test such a hypothesis. My own interpretation is therefore that, instead of Sassen, Portes, etc., the roots of stressing cities as a primary entrance gateway and the field of integration go back to the MPMC project and the Dutch research tradition, mainly that of Rinus Penninx.

Since that project, several studies have questioned the country-level approach to immigrant integration. Time and again, empirical studies have shown that the integration process is different in different localities. The key to this finding has been studying cities and the use of comparative research designs. Comparative city-level studies show the differences, whereas country-level studies (for example, Borjas) without the comparative design (Portes) do not. The comparative city-level studies have produced the previous data and research literature that have led to the hypothesis behind this book's empirical research contributions.

The chapters focus on three aspects of migration policy and on four countries. The themes are citizenship, welfare services and religious diversity; the countries are Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, Italy and Switzerland. The countries represent different kinds of societal settings which make it possible to assess impacts at the local level. Do similarities at the local level have more of an effect on the integration process than do differences at the country level?

The chapters are classified under three themes: the legal-political domain (citizenship), the socioeconomic domain (welfare services) and the religious domain. The first domain is studied by Marc Helbling in the case of Switzerland. The second one is studied by three research articles: Tiziana Caponio looks at Italian cities, Can M. Aybek focuses on German cities and the second generation, while Floris Vermeulen and Rosanne Stojin compare a Dutch and a German city. The religious aspect concerns Canada and is addressed by Aude-Claire Fourot.

The chapters represent several different theoretical and methodological approaches but they all test the same hypothesis: does the local level play a crucial role in immigration policy-making, as previous research suggests? The chapters are research reports that describe how the different aspects of the main hypotheses were tested. The great number of countries enables a fruitful comparison that seeks to find out if the local level affects immigration policies more than the national level. Different contributions focus on different countries and measure different variables.

The research designs are constructed so that the results measure the impact of local policies vs national ones. The datasets are collected in order to test the hypothesis and the methodologies are chosen on the same grounds. The studies in this book support the hypothesis: the local/city-level effect has great relevance despite country-level differences. While previous research has led to this hypothesis, this study confirms it and thereby makes the hypothesis a solid research result.

With these results, the book seeks to affect migration policy. One of the key purposes of the Imiscoe network is to disseminate research information to policy-makers, so one can expect that this information will reach policy-makers through established channels. Whether it will have an impact on immigration policies is another issue but, in any case, research-wise the book is a good

piece of work in my view. The research design is impressive and future research should pay attention to the results.

**Perttu Salmenhaara**  
*University of Helsinki*

### **Dubai: Behind an Urban Spectacle**

Yasser Elsheshtawy, 2010

London: Routledge

294 pp. £65.00 hardback

ISBN 978 0 415 44461 3 hardback

Dubai has attracted significant attention in the international media over the past few years, but rarely has the city been the subject of sustained academic analysis. Yasser Elsheshtawy's *Dubai: Behind an Urban Spectacle* is the first monograph to focus on the city's transforming urbanity. Subtly engaging with wider literatures on globalisation, consumption, migration, geography, urban planning and architecture, the book makes a hugely welcome contribution to a subject field otherwise dominated by political and economic analyses and to the interdisciplinary field of urban studies. The main argument of the book is that we must go beyond the widespread and dominant caricature of Dubai evident in representations of its iconic and spectacular architecture, to seek instead evidence of the 'hidden' spaces of the city. This is an ambitious project in relation to a city "whose very name evokes artificiality" (p. 135), with an image "distinguished by superlatives" (p. 134), yet Elsheshtawy successfully introduces us to a Dubai more often obscured by hyperbole in contemporary debates on urban space.

In the first two chapters, Elsheshtawy sets up the intellectual rationale for taking Dubai seriously, a project both necessary and timely, by situating his analysis within a wider project of understanding the impacts of globalisation in Arab cities, as well as issues in Middle Eastern urbanism more generally. The next

section documents the urbanisation of Dubai, providing a historical perspective on the city's origins and development and tracing the emergence of the modern city. A more widely known historical-political narrative (of treaties, federation and infrastructural projects) is supplemented with more intimate portrayals of the city's changing 'urban character' in the 20th century (gleaned from Western travel writing and newspapers), discussion of successive urban master-plans through which Dubai has been envisioned and a detailed discussion of three significant mega projects that have been central to the 'spectacularisation' of Dubai's urban space: the Burj Al Arab Hotel, Palm Island and the Burj Khalifa. Elsheshtawy returns to these mega projects in his final chapter with reference to 'Dubaisation': the way in which 'the Dubai model' is being adopted globally.

With their focus on the everyday practices of migrant residents, chapters 7 and 8 are for me the most exciting part of the book. Ninety per cent of Dubai's population are migrants, a demographic statistic that Elsheshtawy highlights not to dismiss the city as 'fake' or 'temporary' as others have done but, rather, as the basis for arguing that "Dubai is perhaps the ultimate transnational city" (p. 25). These chapters provide insight on an informal mode of urbanism emerging in Dubai, which itself acts as "a counterpoint to the dominating hegemonic quality of the 'spectacle'" (p. 170). Elsheshtawy acknowledges migrants (albeit partial) agency to navigate spaces and turn them into sites of resistance, evident in the 'migratory traces' (for example, ethnic restaurants and money exchange points) of otherwise bypassed neighbourhoods and labour camps, as well as the use of 'transitory spaces' (for example, parks, streets, bus-stops) by migrants to gather, talk, share a meal or just hang out. This is "the other city" (p. 229): little understood and rarely acknowledged.

One of the key strengths of the book is the visual imagery. The photographs, in

particular, play a central role in the documentation of Dubai's urban fabric and practice. The most obvious evidence of this can be found in chapter 3's photo essay, 'Distance, framing and inner life' (including 18 full-page and 16 half-page photographs) which overtly contests more common representations of Dubai that are limited to iconic architectural mega projects. In these photographs, such buildings become part of their wider urban setting or are displaced by other subjects. The lens is also turned towards neighbourhoods of Dubai which never make it into either the glossy magazine articles condemning Dubai's excesses or the television advertisements aimed at tourists and property investors. Instead, we see the traces of transnational residence revealed by material culture: the adverts for 'bed space' that adorn hoardings and lamp-posts are particularly evocative.

Further critical engagement would be of benefit in relation to the dichotomy set up between 'spectacular' architecture and the 'authentic' city which currently pervades the book (albeit for the most part implicitly). The multimethod fieldwork has been designed such that the 'real' city is found only in neighbourhoods where architectural mega projects are absent. Yet, the landscapes of the spectacular might also be examined further as sites where everyday practice could offer resistance to the dominant narratives projected within and beyond the city by these signature buildings. By focusing on particular neighbourhoods as the location of the everyday for low-skilled migrants, the text implies that their exclusion from other urban spaces is complete. More could be said about how cleaners, retail assistants and *baristas*, for example, navigate the malls, hotels and residences which are their workplaces. Further-more, the highly routine, localised and 'parochial' forms of transnational urbanism that are enacted by wealthier city residents also complicate this binary division between urban mega projects and the 'real'

or everyday. This problematic notion of ‘authenticity’ can also be traced in the historical narrative in which the Bastakiya district of Iranian windtowers that have been central to UAE ‘official’ heritage projects are contrasted with informal sites (a Hindu temple, an Iranian restaurant and a neighbourhood square) evaluated as possessing “a greater sense of authenticity and history” (p. 88).

Nevertheless, Elsheshrawy’s *Dubai: Behind an Urban Spectacle* should be celebrated as an alternative and empirically grounded reading of this city, without the hyperbole or ridicule that has been evident more widely. Dubai is now an advanced economy, intimately entangled with both the developed and developing worlds through transnational flows of culture, finance and people: influenced and influential, shaped by and shaping other societies. As a result, this book will be of interest to anyone who has ever wanted to go beyond the headlines, lecturers looking for new readings for courses on urban studies, transnationalism and migration, as well as those reflecting critically on emerging forms and sites of urbanity.

**Katie Walsh**

*Department of Geography  
University of Sussex*

### **Planning the Night-time City**

Marion Roberts and Adam Eldridge, 2009

London: Routledge

256 pp. £90.00 hardback; £27.99 paperback

ISBN: 978 0 415 43617 5 hardback; 978 0 415 43618 2 paperback

An expansion of the night-time economy, an increasing everydayness of late-night work and leisure activities, tourism and changing household-structures—these are major driving forces behind the ‘night-time city’ according to Marion Roberts and Adam Eldridge. The book’s main concern might be

carved out as a claim for the better reintegration of town planning’s and urban design’s skills into the regulation of these trends in England and Wales. In order to develop possible relationships, the authors set out by unfolding the various aspects of night life in the public realm from lighting to work habits to narratives on the night, but focus particularly on alcohol-related developments subsequently because “in Britain its expansion has been problematic” (p. 1). From this point of view, the analysed material is—as the first word of the title suggests—oriented towards recommendations for urban politics and planning guidelines.

The first four thematic chapters are dedicated to the “City at night” as already mentioned (ch. 2), relevant external influences (like a cultural turn in urban policies, licensing or perceptions of the nocturnal city, chs 3 and 4) and factors that relate to the individual (like drinking priorities or health issues with a focus on “Binge-drinking Britain”, ch. 5). These chapters, which act as a sort of lengthy introduction comprising nearly half of the book, are symptomatic of both the book’s strengths and its weaknesses. On the one hand, Roberts and Eldridge are very considerate of regarding the heterogeneous, contested and contradictory character of a city’s night and manage to keep that up throughout the book. Based on very rich material such as interviews with experts and focus groups, observations, countings and documents, they present different experiences and attitudes on various topics without judging one or the other as ‘right’ or ‘better’. The tensions between fear and pleasure, between criminality and prosperity or between individual responsibility and economic or political pre-conditions are maintained. On the other hand, a research question and potential main findings get lost in this diversity. A missing research question also makes it difficult to understand the role of the descriptions of night life in foreign cities in countries like Spain, Finland,

Denmark and Australia. Those appear relatively arbitrarily chosen, whereas the Scottish example (p. 133) helps us to understand how health issues could be integrated into the English and Welsh licensing laws. Moreover, the problems that come with heavy drinking practices like binge drinking and its regulation by licensing may be a good reason to elaborate on that, but then it remains elusive why all the other aspects of an urban night have been described.

Concerning drinking practices, the authors note that licensing and town planning are the key instruments for regulation (p. 5, although they remind the reader at the end of the book that not everything has to be regulated). Town planning, however, plays only a minor part in the current political debate on night life, according to Roberts and Eldridge. As the authors are planners and urban designers themselves and the book's title is *Planning the Night-time City*, the reader expects to read more about past and future planning processes that are tailored to night activities in urban spaces. The main topic is, however, how licensing (not planning) regulates the night life (ch. 6) and how different approaches are made in other countries (ch. 7). The last three chapters then approach the field of planning. Yet instead of either proposing planning measures or questioning what planning could bring about, the authors take another step back and fan out further aspects that already influence the urban night, like policing, local authorities or transport (ch. 8) and various possible consumer perspectives (ch. 9). For each of those two chapters, they briefly sketch out some thoughts about planning possibilities. Physical and functional aspects like the concentration of venues or the width of streets get five pages in chapter 8 itself. The social aspects of chapter 9, however, seem to become an issue of planning guidelines and discourses (ch. 10) that foster another image of the night that is cultural rather than just

economic and just drinking-focused. The authors hint at stronger neighbourhood structures, at shifting the focus from solely the inner city to the whole city or at considering the need of the non-extreme party-goers like families (p. 215).

It is not an easy task to evaluate what a reader could learn from this book. On the one hand, it draws on a rich material and provides much information—about varieties of consumer needs and above all about the role of licensing for night time activities. On the other hand, it is not clear what this information aims at. Is it supposed to suggest planning measures? If so, the part on planning itself would be too short. Is it supposed to assess best practices of regulating drinking from an international perspective? If so, the chosen examples seem very random and too idealised. Conflictive moments of the 'continental style of drinking' are rarely mentioned. Is it supposed to remind us that the night city is not only about drinking and not only about the inner city (as the last chapter on night time futures emphasises)? If so, the focus on drinking as well as licensing makes the book heavily imbalanced. It would have been useful then to think about types of night activities and to suggest respective planning guidelines—without denying that these types cannot reflect all individuals' varied needs.

As mentioned, one connecting frame might be the link between planning and licensing. Those instruments are presented as the regulatory ones at the beginning of the book (p. 5) and their better integration becomes a claim in its end (p. 214). Yet then the space within the frame is filled with information that does not really assess possible or even missing links. However, seeing the book's strengths and weaknesses in the same facets, with the overall material perhaps being analysed too little and a common thread missing, its overall broadness gives the book the character of a dictionary. Anyone

who wants to know something about images of the night time city, about drinking practices in Britain or about the deregulation of licensing in Wales and England should have a glance at this book. While leaving questions open, the book also shows that there are

many answers to be searched for in an 'urban studies of nights'.

**Anne Vogelpohl**

*Center for Metropolitan Studies*

*TU Berlin*