



## Review of *Global Cities, Local Streets: Everyday Diversity from New York to Shanghai*

**Sharon Zukin, Philip Krasnitz, and Xiangming Chen, eds. *Global Cities, Local Streets: Everyday Diversity from New York to Shanghai*. 2015. London: Routledge. 242 pages, ISBN 978-1-1380-2393-2 Paper (\$43.95).**

We are living in an era when cities want to become ‘global’ to accommodate the flow of capital and attract investment. For precisely the same reason, this is an era in which it is becoming much more difficult to distinguish between a ‘truly global’ city and a cosmopolitan urban place where people from different origins temporarily reside. Some cities can be sophisticated and diverse, but once we look beyond the glittering facade of high-tech industrial zones and postcard images of picturesque row of skyscrapers, we see a place where most of the people are simply ephemeral tourists, and the residents are there only because of the opportunities for seasonal employment the tourists create. As we have seen throughout various phases in our modern history, the residents in such cities do not settle. They move as soon as opportunities emerge elsewhere.

What, then, distinguishes a truly global city? The fifteen co-authors of *Global Cities, Local Street: Everyday Diversity from New York to Shanghai* argue that representative of truly global cities are the lives and livelihoods of the local streets. What differentiates New York from, say, Dubai is the sense of belonging deeply rooted in not only the distinctive urban form and streetscape, but also in the intergenerational familiarity of the locale—the special kind of close acquaintance that would make it hard for those who feel closely it to want to leave and rebuild a life elsewhere.



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According to urbanist Jane Jacobs, local streets are the cradle of a functioning urban place. The selected cities in this volume are important in the sense that they are historical and financially viable; yet, what makes these cities global is the coexistence of highly sophisticated financial networks and local shops. A city, by nature, is a place of strangers. It is a community in which most of its members do not know each other. For members of this community of strangers to feel at ease with one another, both diversity and density are essential for a sense of safety. Who would rather not be walking on an empty sidewalk than a street full of ‘eyes’ who are making sure that nothing out of ordinary is going to happen? Yet, these eyes only operate if there are activities on the streets. Despite the grandiosity of the adjective ‘global,’ we human beings best experience a city on foot. Thus, walkability of the footpath juxtaposed with lively local shops becomes the most memorable impression of residents and tourists alike. In a world driven by liberal economics, what is a better way to keep these streets active and safeguarded with these eyes than commercial activities? As the chapters about global cities on three continents – New York, Shanghai, Amsterdam, Tokyo, Berlin and Toronto – show, the presence of active local streets are the critical ingredients in the cultural ecosystem that undergird these cities’ sense of globality.

For a city to be global, it needs to be unafraid to change. Local streets, by definition, are local because they maintain a sense of locality, including services that cater to the needs and sensibilities of the locals. What happens, however, when the local streets need to change to meet the demands of the global? In a way, the paradox of globalization is how a place becomes global because of its uniqueness, but then becomes vulnerable to homogenization by the same forces that brought about its global fame. The dilemma facing each of the six cities in this book is precisely how to make use of the economic benefits brought about by globalization while retaining its sense of locality.

The three editors of this volume, prominent sociologists and urbanists Professors Sharon Zukin and Philip Kasinitz of the City University of New York (CUNY), and Trinity College Professor Xiangming Chen, argue that the challenges facing local streets in global cities are the two inevitable ‘g-forces’: gentrification and globalization. Underlying the argument of this book is the editors’ ardent support for the survival of local streets and their shared conviction that gentrification and globalization create a rather bleak future for local streets, eroding their ability to serve as a city’s source of diversity, livelihood and identity. Each chapter begins with a compelling narrative about a particular case, accompanied by a map showing the location of the site in the greater context of the city, unstaged photos of the site, and lively ‘shopkeeper stories’ that reveal the personal and humanistic side of those who have experienced the process of social change firsthand and in situ. These perspectives on lived experience differ from how scholars see or like to see urban change from afar or, for that matter, in hindsight.

Chapter One introduces the design of the book, explaining that each chapter deals with two different case studies in a single city. The Philip Kansnitz and Sharon Zukin co-authored Chapter Two, “From ‘Ghetto’ to Global: Two Neighborhood Shopping Streets in New York City,” benefits from these two scholars’ geographical expertise, weaving a concise social history of commercial development in New York City. Kansnitz and Zukin worked with their students at the CUNY Graduate Center to study Orchard Street in Manhattan and Fulton Street in Brooklyn, two districts historically labeled as ‘ghettos.’ The two streets have gone through a similar transformation from providing, for most of the twentieth century, bargain shopping streets for the locals to a neo-bohemian district for artists and creative professionals and a contested ethnically-mixed neighborhood. Kansnitz and Zukin argue that immigration has produced a highly diverse cultural ecosystem that complicates the sense of identity (what they refer to as “moral ownership”) among the original residents. The resulting exponential increases in property values and rents along both streets is similar to what happened to the neighborhoods in New York City that their predecessor Kansnitz and Zukin’s predecessor Jane Jacob studied. There is high demand for the homogenization of these streets to suit middle-class tastes. Such pressure creates enormous challenges for these neighborhoods to be transformed in spite of their deeply rooted histories.

Closest to my area of expertise is Chapter Three: “Commercial Development from Below: The Resilience of Local Shops in Shanghai.” This chapter focuses on Shanghai and is co-authored by the editor Xiangming Chen and two prominent academics: Hai Yu and Xiaohua Zhong, professors of sociology from Shanghai’s Fudan and Tongji Universities respectively. It presents us with a historiography of commercial development in Shanghai from the beginning of the semi-colonial period (1842-1945) when local shops catered to local demand, to the high Communist period (1949-1978) when most commercial activities were run by the state, to the reform and opening up (1978 onward) period, which saw a surge in collectively-, privately- and individually-owned businesses. This chapter shows how the government co-opted the residents’ efforts to benefit from renting their ‘technically residential’ spaces to businesses. Two commercial districts were compared. *Tianzifang*, a famous present-day commercial district that was revamped as an artists’ paradise, is the first district. While its charm comes from its architectural uniqueness and prime location, it was only a matter of time before it was completely commercialized, homogenized, and Disneyfied into a replica of authentic Shanghai alleyway shophouses. The second street is *Minxinglu*, located in the northeast of the city, and probably chosen not only because it is radically different from *Tianzifang* but also because of its proximity to the universities where Yu and Zhong teach, in the district of *Yangpu*, Shanghai. Comparing the celebrated *Tianzifang* to a neighborhood like *Minxinglu*, which was gradually changed by local demands, one can see the spectrum of a large commercial ecosystem in China’s largest city. This chapter reminds

me of how local Shanghainese residents may be frequently asked to identify a place off the beaten path in Shanghai that still feels authentic. This is a tricky question. To answer it would run the risk of turning the few local streets that remain secret gems into a popular ‘Michelin Starred’ place tourist local (which, in the end, is almost always turned into another homogeneous *Tianzifang*). The authors argue that the continued existence of such places depends entirely on commercial development from below.

Complicating the issue of the globalization-driven gentrification of local streets is the notion of heritage. In Chapter Four, “From Greengrocers to Cafes: Producing Social Diversity in Amsterdam,” Sharon Zukin and three academics from the University of Amsterdam, Iris Hagemas, Anke Hendriks and Jan Rath, discuss the way that heritage complicates the issue of how to upgrade an urban village to an enclave of cosmopolitan middle-class residents who regard heritage as a form of cultural capital. *Utrechtsestraat*, located at the southern belt of the UNESCO World Heritage Canal Belt of Amsterdam, is undergoing a process of ethnic homogenisation by capital. The city was a poster child for classic gentrification. Compared with *Utrechtsestraat* is *Javastraat*, a local street located east of the Canal Belt that has been affected, over the years, by the government’s policy of supporting local shopkeepers’ rights on the one hand, and expediting the gentrification process in the name of public good on the other. The shopkeepers’ stories from the neighborhood of *Javastraat* reveals how businesses need to adjust to the capital brought about by the wave of middle-class consumers, who demand different kinds of services and urban experiences from their streets.

Chapters Five and Six deal with arguably the most and the least affordable global cities: Berlin and Toronto. In the case of Berlin, the chapter “Life and Death of the Great Regeneration Vision: Diversity, Decay, and Upgrading in Berlin’s Ordinary Shopping Streets,” by the University of Hamburg’s Christine Hentschel and Humboldt University’s Talja Blokland, presents a picture of urban regeneration on two streets marked by a stark misalignment between the expectations of policy-makers and those of local store owners. The result of this misalignment is that shops and a residential buildings become gradually divided. Shop owners who used to live above or near their shops have moved elsewhere, diminishing the sense of belonging and the sentiment for place that is essential to the sustainable ecosystem of the streets. Presenting a much more urgent issue is Chapter Six titled “Toronto’s Changing Neighborhoods: Gentrification of Shopping Streets” by Katherine N. Rankin and Kuni Kamizaki from the University of Toronto, and Heather McLean from the University of Glasgow. These authors argue that the gentrification of Toronto, evident in Bloordale and Mount Dennis, will do away with affordable commercial spaces. In the case of Bloordale, art galleries and boutique shops have replaced most of the local businesses and all

efforts to prevent the homogenization process from taking over have proven ineffective. The authors leave us with the question of the right to the city.

The final case, Chapter Seven “Tokyo’s ‘Living’ Shopping Streets: The Paradox of Globalized Authenticity,” presents us with a dilemma faced by local shopping streets that are well known to tourists. Meijigakuin University Professor Keiro Hattori, and Sunmee Kim and Takashi Machimura from Hitosubashi University present this chapter as local Tokyonites’ casually taking the readers around the *Azabu-Juban* and *Shimokitazawa* shopping streets and their surrounding neighborhoods. What distinguishes these two streets are not what they sell, but the sense of “authenticity and nostalgia” they provide window-shoppers. As big transnational chains seek to capitalize on this intangible sense of place, local shops then need to adapt, strategize, and employ different methods to survive in the face of this commercial competition. At the end, actively putting themselves on the “global shopping list” of shopping destinations helps them to stay alive, though it seems obvious to the shopkeepers that simply selling authenticity and nostalgia will not keep them afloat for long (much as in the case of Shanghai discussed in Chapter Three).

The concluding chapter summarizes the key themes that these six case studies offer. Re-emphasizing the importance of local shopping streets as key to the sense of place and urban sociality, Kasunitz, Zukin and Chen also recognize the variety of commercial experiences in the modern world, some of which are alternatives that better fit the lifestyles of new residents, such as convenient store chains and online stores. Recognizing the change, also, of the position of some of the local stores from local to elite (e.g., artisanal, craft), they do not blindly advocate for the preservation of small shopping streets, but rather a balance between adapting to changing needs and preserving the existing ways of life. Rent will continue to rise and those who do not have the means to own or operate their business will be pushed out of local streets. To maintain the sense of a place, it is essential to maintain some sense of continuity, diversity, and cultural vitality—all of which could come from supportive public policies from local governments.

The “Research Note” epilogue of the book, in which the collaborators pedagogically discuss how they put this project together, is a treat for students of comparative urban studies. One might wonder about the difficulty of doing such a comparative project about twelve sites in six cities with fifteen co-authors. As this epilogue reveals, the process requires a high level of cross-cultural cooperation, flexibility and mobility among the collaborators. We learn that a face-to-face meeting among the potential collaborators in the form of a workshop was still key to the project’s success, even in the internet era. From then, themes that would guide research questions – change, community, government, and homogenization – arose almost naturally, as researchers related their cases to one another’s. With the consensus that a ‘thick’ ethnographic description is the method by which empirical findings from each city would be derived and compared, the collaborators dealt

with individual difficulties in their own field sites in answering the aforementioned guiding questions. Some of these difficulties were as practical as how to conduct ethnographic research if one had a full-time job elsewhere (i.e., as a professor) and did not have the luxury of living in the field site to conduct fieldwork. In four of the six cases, these professors used their cities as laboratories to give their students hands-on research experiences: In-depth interviews with store owners and careful observations were methods used to compensate for not living in the field sites. These students shared their difficulty of being looked upon by the locals as outsiders. I personally resonate with this particular difficulty, having done research in a popular field site where many fieldworkers (students, journalists and professional alike) simply arrive, get the data they want, and then take off, leaving the local informants feeling that they have been used. It is true that a research project like this can only do so much to meet the expectations of the locals. This book, however, has the potential to empower these locals with both the deep analysis of their own stories in global, comparative perspective, while also giving them a sense of how academic projects such as this come together.

*Global Cities, Local Streets: Everyday Diversity from New York to Shanghai* provides a coherent picture of how students of urban studies can understand the effect and impact of globalization on the scale that all of us actually experience: everyday life. Unlike many sociology textbooks and monographs that tend to focus on abstract concepts concerning social change, narratives provided in the introduction and conclusion and the six case studies give us a deep ethnographic understanding of those places. Through personal stories and contextual engagement with the communities studied, the authors tease out the unique, yet generalizable, dilemma that each of the cities is facing. Nevertheless, because of the variety of narratives, I felt that each chapter would have benefitted from a short conclusion. Such a conclusion, in offering systematic responses to key questions regarding the two g-forces, would help readers see each case as an elucidating instance of a unified whole, which is the overall goal of a volume such as this. This book elegantly tells us, in vivid detail, about what we can learn from comparative urban studies. It is a book that I have used and will continue to use for my undergraduate courses in anthropology, sociology, urban planning and design, and urban studies. I would like to call for the next installment of this series to include cases from Central and South America, Africa, and Oceania.

In the end, the authors have convinced me that local streets are important to the long-term development of a global city. It is not difficult to resist, and yet there is a tendency for us to accept the winner-takes-all logic of the kind of capitalism that is operating in today's global society. For us academics, there is indeed something to fight for, if not for the sense of diversity, vibrancy and safety that urban living provides, then for the pursuit of justice, as we seek to protect those who might otherwise be forced to leave the city. Written in plain English, the narratives in this book

make these cities come alive. I personally found this book so entertainingly written that I forgot I was reading a book published in an academic genre by an academic publisher. For travelers who visit these places, the case studies can provide many nuances and deeper human sensibilities of the streets on which they are walking.

In fact, I would go so far to argue that this is the kind of book that should replace the ubiquitous *Lonely Planet* type guidebook, especially for those who appreciate the beauty of the ecosystem of knowledge made available to us by globalization. This book would make them not just superficial travelers, but responsible visitors aware of the nuances of urban sensibilities. Gentrification, for instance, can easily be taken for granted by those who do not live in a place affected by it. These nuances and the sociocultural “fine grains” of different cities can reveal so much more about their places in the current landscape—as well as our roles in contributing to positive change therein.

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