



Trends Global, Impact Local

John Shapiro

Reviewed: Sharon Zukin, Philip Kasinitz and Xiangming Chen, *Global Cities, Local Streets: Everyday Diversity from New York to Shanghai*, New York/London, Routledge, 2016.

Global wealth, immigration and capital flow have profoundly influenced local retail districts in world-class cities. In 2016's Global Cities, Local Streets: Everyday Diversity from New York to Shanghai,¹ 16 research partners compared retail transformations in Amsterdam, Berlin, Shanghai, Tokyo, Toronto, and New York. John Shapiro comments on their findings and insights.

Sharon Zukin, Philip Kasinitz, and Xiangming Chen have followed up on Zukin's *Naked City: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Place* (2010, New York, Oxford University Press). Whereas that book was tantamount to a collection of essays focusing on the loss of authenticity in New York City alone, *Global Cities, Local Streets* is a thorough examination of the impact of globalized consumerism and migration on 12 shopping districts, two each in six world-class cities: Amsterdam, Berlin, Shanghai, Tokyo, Toronto, and New York. It is a must-read for anyone engaged in the practice or study of downtown planning, as well as the impact of globalization on local communities.

Sixteen research partners—assisted by students—interviewed shopkeepers, community leaders, and other stakeholders; inventoried types of businesses and their cultural identifiers; and investigated municipal plans. Of the 16 partners, roughly half have credentials in sociology and one third in urban studies and planning. They met at intervals to ensure that the data, analysis, and thinking were in accord. As per the title of the book's final chapter, they succeed in providing “a model of how to put a transnational project together.”

The researchers find significant commonalities in the six cities. Whereas in the past, immigration was from the countryside, it is now generally across national boundaries (Shanghai and Tokyo were the exceptions to this pattern). In addition to globalized distribution of products, there is now globalized taste in shopping among the bourgeoisie, yielding districts dominated by arts-oriented establishments, boutiques, and cafés (they call them “ABCs”). Physically mobile patrons, prodded by social media, can transform shopping districts in advance of neighborhood demographic changes.

Throughout, the authors prefer the gritty to the slick, the idiosyncratic to the homogeneous, indigenous ownership to that of chains, local entrepreneurship to international financing, and the ethnic working class to the globalized bourgeoisie. My first impression was that such preferences reflected a type of conservatism with hints of reverse snobbery. Indeed, the authors mainly chose local shopping districts where such dichotomies are pronounced. A more representative sample of districts might have included the teeming local shopping districts of Global South cities; the

¹ See: <http://globalcitieslocalstreets.org>.

desultory shopping districts found in many impoverished communities; and the slow-changing districts of stable neighborhoods.

Nevertheless, first impressions can be wrong. The authors concede that a policy preference for small stores should not lead to the exclusion of large stores and chains, which are often associated with lower prices for goods and services. They acknowledge the inevitability of demographic changes in cities; their chief ammunition is aimed at cataclysmic, high-speed gentrification. They recognize other forces at play in global retail, inclusive of changes in technology (e.g. refrigerators), infrastructure (e.g. automobile transport), society (a higher degree of inter-class mobility, particularly in Asia), and consumer preferences (e.g. for one-stop shopping). They might have delved further into these topics, as they strike me as far more impactful on a citywide basis than the rise of a newly globalized bourgeoisie.

The authors point out that government has significant power over market dynamics through immigration policy, tax policies, and rules governing real estate. Local government controls building codes, zoning regulations, and their enforcement—or lack thereof, as in one Shanghai neighborhood where the government turned a blind eye to illegal conversions of residences to retail. They report that governments across the globe invariably esteem one type of clientele over another. In Amsterdam, for example, the government not only determines the type of stores by location, but favors majority over immigrant aesthetics to promote more native Dutch presence and residence in immigrant neighborhoods—one would guess to promote mutual acceptance and/or assimilation of immigrants.

Scattered throughout the book are examples of excellent, replicable grassroots actions. The authors praise the participatory outreach and humility of Berlin's planners, who "see their own role as informers and interpreters of the process of demographic and economic change to the shopkeepers, residents and property owners" (p. 130). In New York City, they cite the success of the new Russ & Daughters café on the Lower East Side as both nostalgic and appealing to the district's new hipster clientele. My favorite interventions were from a crime-ridden district in Toronto, where merchants improvised by creating business exchanges, coordinating the sourcing of goods and services, partnering with local schools to paint murals, mentoring local youth, and handing out coffee and snacks to vagrants.

In their final chapter, Zukin, Kasinitz and Chen are reflective rather than prescriptive in making recommendations, as is appropriate given the broadness of their study's geography and the varying political systems they examined. They ask: how can business improvement districts better promote benefits for residents when their controlling parties—property owners and/or merchants—would profit from gentrification? Why not impose extra taxes on automobile-oriented chain stores and shopping centers, to mitigate the environmental impacts of boosting driving rather than walking? Why not limit store size in some places? What about retail rent controls or mandated arbitration to tame destabilizing rent hikes? Or rent subsidies for new mom-and-pop stores? Or retail incubators? One does not have to agree with these suggestions to acknowledge that they deserve to be debated.

The authors do not view shopping districts as simply about the exchange of money for goods and services. They extol these districts as "the spaces where we experience everyday diversity." They claim that "each neighborhood's special character, its 'DNA,'" is important "for social sustainability and cultural exchange" (pp. 1 and 4). They assert that retail gentrification leads to the loss of the moral ownership of local shopping districts to exogenous shoppers or gentrifiers—fostering the alienation and disempowerment of people who for cultural, economic, language, or other reasons have less choice. Their ultimate message: immigrant and working-class shopping districts deserve affirmation. Residents living near these areas generally have less disposable income and political clout than the wealthier, more mobile classes, yet they have no less right to the city. This is the underlying principle—hearkening to Zukin's earlier work—that makes *Global Cities, Local Streets* compelling.

John Shapiro is a professor in the Graduate Center for Planning and Development at Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, New York, following a stint as chairperson of the department. He and his consulting work have won 20 awards, including the national American Planning Association's first Presidential Award in connection with the Comprehensive Community Revitalization Program (CCRP) model for empowerment planning.

To cite this article:

John Shapiro, "Trends Global, Impact Local", *Metropolitiques*, 23 May 2017.
URL: <http://www.metropolitiques.eu/Trends-Global-Impact-Local.html>.