

Book Review

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Reinventing the City? Liverpool in Comparative Perspective.

By Ronald Munck, R. Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, ISBN 0-85323-797-2 cased, ISBN 0-85323-807-3 limp, pp260, £20.00.



In 2008 Liverpool will become the European Capital of Culture in recognition of its rich and diverse cultural heritage. This also marks a significant point in its rehabilitation journey from a much studied and much lamented over, site of distilled social, economic and political ills to the vibrant, cosmopolitan and confident city envisaged by the city civic elites.

In *Reinventing the City? Liverpool in Comparative Perspective*, Ronaldo Munck has drawn together the work of mainly Liverpool based researchers to focus on the concept of globalisation and the diverse links between the global and the local and use this as a lens to examine the city of Liverpool. In the Introduction Munck reminds us of the two broad positions that the literature of globalisation and the city tends to take. One is that taken by Saskia Sassen (who incidentally writes the foreword) whereby:

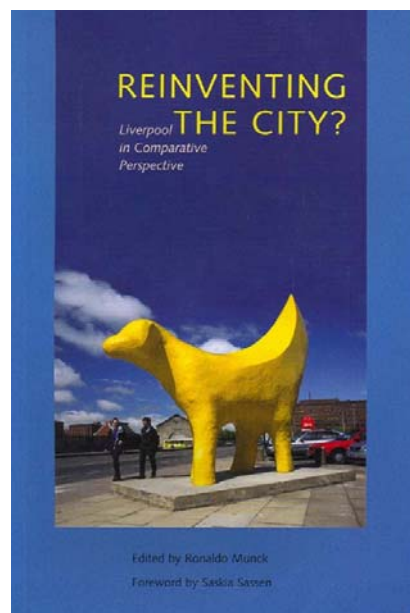
...place is central to many of the circuits through which economic globalisation is constituted (Sassen, 1999, p171, quoted by Munck, 2003 p2).

She places globalisation firmly within a network of mega-cities such as New York, Tokyo and London that have accrued immense economic power to the detriment of those cities that were once manufacturing powerhouses.

The second position is that of Manuel Castells, and this is the position that Munck believes makes using Liverpool as a case study relevant to the globalisation debate.

The global city phenomenon cannot be reduced to a few urban cores at the top of the hierarchy. It is a *process* that connects advanced services, producer centres, and markets in a global network [...] Inside each country, the networking architecture reproduces itself into regional and local centres, so that the *whole system* becomes interconnected at the global level. (Castells, 1996, p380 quoted by Munck, 2003 p3).

Although as the process is uneven so are the outcomes in any particular locale. The chapter then goes on to outline the key issues in urban regeneration.



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The book is sectioned into three with “Regeneration” being the first. The opening chapter in this section is by Karen Evans who examines the general problems experienced by contemporary Western cities with a particular focus on British cities.

This is followed by Stuart Wilks-Heeg who examines the similarities of the development of the global economy during the period 1870-1914 – a period when Liverpool was a focal point both in the national and global economy – and more recent patterns of globalisation. He charts the rise of Liverpool and its subsequent decline against a colonial mode of production. He also shows that whilst Liverpool may not be considered to be a global city today, it was undoubtedly a world city with a global reach prior to the First World War. This global importance has left an enduring legacy both on the fabric and the population of the city.

The chapter by Richard Meegan focuses on the more recent history of the city especially the political scene and how that has affected Liverpool and its image. Whereas the chapter from Peris Jones focuses on the distribution of power within the urban regeneration process and the impacts this has on community participation.

In the second section of the book, “Perspectives”, the authors examine the localised realities of global industrial restructuring. They do this by focusing on two particular neighbourhoods within Liverpool through diverse approaches.

Colette Fagan utilises gender as hers and uses focus groups to explore neighbourhood and quality of life issues. Ola Uduku uses the ethnic minority perspective, examining whether there has been an improvement in the position of a number of ethnic communities over time with some interesting findings. Barry Goldson uses youth as his lens to explore the two communities, in particular disadvantaged young people who are given a voice in this chapter. John Lansley focuses on older people in cities and gives a very clear synopsis of the theoretical development of research in this field. He then uses this as a springboard to examine the two communities.

The final section is “Transformations” and Tony Novak gives a voice to those in the two communities who have been involved in regeneration and community action for change. On the surface this chapter makes rather depressing reading as it is a litany of public service failure at a variety of levels, however, these particular residents refuse to allow their experiences to dilute their belief that something *can* be done.

David Hall examines how various images represent the city and then focuses on the two communities and how they see themselves, how other perceive them and what images of their communities have personal importance.

The penultimate chapter is by Barney Rooney and focuses on community development, social inclusion and social exclusion and examines several case studies within this context.

The final chapter by Gideon Ben-Tovim examines present day Liverpool and looks to its future. There are a number of very positive elements within the city that could point to its renaissance. Unfortunately there are equally as many negative elements that could thwart its rejuvenation and essentially it falls to the civic leadership to ensure the former prevails.

Although this book does a good job of showing the complex, multi-scalar dimensions of global economic changes upon one city it needed tighter editing. The implication of the introduction was that the various sections would be tied into the Castells approach to the

globalisation debate. However, if this were the case then several chapters would have benefited from an indication as to how they fitted into this discourse. Additionally, due to the nature of the research material, it is repetitious in places – to the extent that several authors use exactly the same quotes. This means that it is better to approach this book as an orderly collection of essays with Liverpool as the focus that ranges from the macro to micro scales of resolution rather than a cohesive step-by-step analysis. Nevertheless, this does not mean it is not a good read!