
The volume is divided into three major sections. The first part provides a conceptual, contextual, and methodological framework of the whole book. Empirical studies of Polish (Łódź and Gdansk) and Czech (Brno and Ostrava) cities are presented in the second part of the volume. It offers a valuable insight into ongoing inner-city changes through the lens of mixed methods, bringing together statistical evidence, experiences of residents, and perspectives of local experts. In the third, concluding, part the editors summarize the main findings of the comparative research and situate them into a broader context of European urban debate.

The studies of Polish and Czech second-order cities reveal some important and valuable findings. Their validity is strengthened by the comparative approach to the study of inner-city residential change, an approach that is urgently needed in the context of postsocialist urban research. A simultaneous operation of diverse and often contradictory processes in neighbourhoods (upgrading and downgrading, depopulation and repopulation, rejuvenation and aging, gentrification and segregation, etc), identified by the contributors in the four case-study cities, may be regarded as a more general feature of inner-city residential change across East Central Europe. The evidence presented on a variety of processes and patterns coexisting in postsocialist inner cities provokes an important conceptual challenge and leads the authors to question the application and adequacy of established Western concepts (eg, gentrification, segregation, polarization) to different national and local contexts. As the editors suggest, “understanding and interpreting urban processes is highly dependent on the theoretical concept used”, which is not just a highly important remark in regard to the study of inner-city residential change but is directly relevant to urban research in postsocialist contexts generally. The existing realities of postsocialist urban development might be obfuscated or misinterpreted if their constituent processes, phenomena, and patterns are studied exclusively through the lenses of segregation, gentrification, and other overarching Western concepts.

Overall, this book is really valuable in comprehensively laying out the issues of demographic shifts and inner-city residential change during the period of postsocialist transition. It provides an inspiring point of departure for further research on urban development in East Central Europe. One of the areas where the empirical attention could be directly expanded on from the book is lifestyle-based explanations of residential patterns and developments in postsocialist inner cities. Pluralization of lifestyles brings about diversity not only in demographic behaviour and living arrangements but also in other aspects of peoples’ lives, including consumption, use of time and space, and daily mobility. Intertwined with each other, they impact on mobility decisions and locational choices of residents and contribute to residential change across urban regions. The continuing differentiation of lifestyle strategies and cultural preferences in Western society is likely to diversify urban populations and spaces, inner cities above all, and even more so in the future. Be it a fine-scale or coarse-grained fragmentation of urban lifestyles in particular districts and neighbourhoods, it will presumably alter the existing patterns of segregation and mixing in urban space in Central and East European cities.

Jana Temelová

Charles University in Prague, Faculty of Science, Department of Social Geography and Regional Development, Urban and Regional Laboratory Albertov 6, 128 43 Prague 2, Czech Republic

Local business voice: the history of chambers of commerce in Britain, Ireland, and revolutionary America, 1760–2011 by R J Bennett; Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2011, 921 pages, £95.00 cloth (US \$175.00) ISBN 9780199584734

Local Business Voice aims to provide the first scholarly and systematic study of chambers of commerce and related organisations from their early historical origins in the 18th century up to the present date. It is based on new archival information and provides detailed coverage of all UK and Irish chambers, in addition to the examination of chambers in the US. It seeks to provide, to both researchers and the chamber movement itself, a comprehensive overview of both local variations and broad trends and dynamics. It also constructs a resource of long-term aligned local data that can be used for long-term comparative research and future benchmarking. The topic is highly relevant, now chambers are one of the lead partners in the UK’s ruling Liberal–Conservative Coalition’s Local Enterprise Partnerships around England.

Robert Bennett is well qualified to write on such issues. He is an international expert on small businesses, business associations, and local economic development. In 1990 he was asked by the British chambers of commerce to provide advice on their development strategy. The book demonstrates his

unique knowledge of the chambers of commerce and their relationship to local and national business associations and to government. The reason the UK, Ireland, and early America are chosen is that “this grouping has common origins and the unifying characteristics of being formed under common law as voluntary bodies” (page 3). These differ fundamentally from the continental European system where ‘public law’ status (essentially government legislative support for chambers) applies. It has often been argued that the British system of chambers is at a disadvantage given its lack of public law status and compulsory membership which most of its continental European counterparts enjoy. However, although Bennett is justified in his ‘case selection’, there is a sense in which he underplays the European Union dimension (for example, few references to the EU appear in the index). Bennett acknowledges that “recently, the most marked shift of chambers’ geographical focus has been the emergence of the EU” (page 436). However, he covers this in only a few lines of text, when more detailed coverage would have been beneficial.

Given my work in this area (Greaves, 2005; 2008), I had a particular interest in what Bennett writes about both the Devlin Report (1972) and the Michael Heseltine initiatives of the 1990s. It is particularly helpful that Bennett focuses on both of these, given that there remains too little reference to either (particularly the latter) in the literature. The Devlin Report considered the whole issue of representation of business with government. Although the report did not recommend public law status (it remained neutral on the matter), it was encouraging of some of its benefits. More significantly, Devlin proposed the merger of the Association of the British Chambers of Commerce and the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) into a Confederation of British Business. It offered a chance for chambers to “use the perceived weight and status of the CBI to enhance local chamber presence” (page 498). Bennett recalls that the CBI rejected Devlin “almost in its entirety” (page 498). As a CBI member put it, in an interview with Wyn Grant and David Marsh in 1976: “I was a chairman of a chamber of commerce ten years ago. My successor was an ice-cream merchant, followed by a furniture trader ... I wouldn’t be prepared to sit under that sort of chairmanship” (Grant and Marsh; quoted on pages 498–499). Devlin offered perhaps the biggest opportunity for reform in the postwar period, and it would have been helpful to hear more of Bennett’s thoughts on the matter. In other words, was it simply a ‘mismanagement of the process’ or were there deeper underlying (perhaps cultural) reasons why reform proved so difficult? Was there more government could have done to intervene in the process?

Bennett provides a more thorough discussion of public law status, including outlining the views of Heseltine. In *Where There is a Will* (1987) Heseltine had been an advocate of public law status, but he would later acknowledge that “a Tory government would never introduce public law status” and that “there is no prospect of it coming about; culturally it would be seen as interference” (Greaves; quoted on page 271). That said, as President of the Board of Trade in the mid-1990s, he did see an increased role for the chambers through Business Links and so on. Again, it would have been interesting to hear more of Bennett’s thinking as to whether government could have done more to intervene.

Despite these minor points, there is no doubt that this is a work of real scholarship. It is superbly researched and will no doubt become a defining work in the field. The book retails on the Oxford University Press website at £95.00. The pricing makes it very much a book for specialists and for university libraries. However, it is a fine-looking (and weighty) book that will look impressive on any bookshelf. Perhaps, given its length, it is a book to dip into, rather than to be read in full. Another minor quibble is that academics are not indexed, and this could hinder the researchers using the book as a resource. However, there is no denying the significance of this work. For anyone interested in chambers of commerce or business representation (whether a political scientist, sociologist, historian, or economist) this is essential reading and highly recommended.

Justin Greaves

Department of Politics and International Studies, University of Warwick, Coventry CV4 7AL, England

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