



*Interdisciplinary Political Studies*

<http://siba-ese.unisalento.it/index.php/idps>

ISSN: 2039-8573 (electronic version)

*IdPS*, Issue 4(2) 2018: 141-145

DOI: 10.1285/i20398573v4n2p141

Published on December 15, 2018

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Markets, Places, Cities, by Kirsten Seale. New York: Routledge, 2016, pp. 134.**

**Lionel Francou**  
*UCLouvain*

*Markets, Places, Cities* falls within the books that succeed brilliantly in the risky comparative adventure. Kirsten Seale, a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the University of New South Wales (Australia), compares markets in nine cities - located in all continents except for Africa - through a convincing in-depth analysis of different social, cultural and economic contexts. After a first book devoted to informal urban street markets (Evers & Seale 2015), the author is expanding her interest on markets by focusing in this new book more largely on markets' locations, their social effects and transformations in global cities around the world. It questions the relation between globalization and urban transformations, on the one hand, and the pair formed by formal and informal economic and social practices, on the other hand.

Seale develops an interesting critical approach of how several processes in a globalized and capitalist world threaten urban markets (both formal and informal),

---

Work licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non commercial-Share alike 3.0 Italian License

IdPS, ISSN: 2039-8573 - Copyright © 2018 - University of Salento, SIBA: <http://siba-ese.unisalento.it>

which are central parts of cities as they play an important role in spatial and social representations, among others. Her denunciation of the effects of capitalism comes with the presentation of some alternatives, like social mobilizations and innovative projects of urban development. She also underlines the fact that formal and informal economies and spaces are often close to each other, as they are more complementary than opposed, even if the latter are subject to controls and attempts to erase them.

By resorting to various and numerous data and modes of data collection, the author succeeds to approach the complexity of urban markets. While resting on a solid review of literature, the analyses take shape gradually, leaning on direct observations and photography in order to capture markets' atmospheres, but also on a heterogeneous corpus made of literature, press archives, documentaries, and even videos posted on Youtube or blogs like Tumblr. This abundant documentation enables the author to precisely describe how markets work and how urban transformations structure and affect them.

One could expect that local particularities draw specific markets model in cities located in Europe (London, Antwerp, Amsterdam, and Paris) as well as in Oceania (Sydney), Asia (Beijing, and Hong Kong) or North and Latin America (San Francisco and Rio de Janeiro). However, despite the geographical differences and some specificities, markets are neither entirely local nor entirely global. If "in the popular imagination, few urban sites are more resonant of local place" (p. 46), in these global markets, the author highlights similar kinds of markets and social imaginaries, but also the same manufactured (or counterfeit) objects, for instance. The markets atmospheres and organizations can vary, depending on what they have to offer and what people are looking at (cheap stuff, quality food, quotidian objects,

art, handicrafts etc.). However, these variations between different markets tell us more about the types of markets than about local and cultural specificities.

Urban markets are places where people can come across diversity, experiencing individually as much as collectively, living conviviality or familiarity in an environment characterized by an increased proximity. Some social representations, images, and narratives are also attached to them, influencing how they are perceived and experienced. Seale proposes critical views on the effects of capitalism on people, planet, cities, places or even neighborhoods. She underlines the death and life of urban markets, their transformations, from decline to renewal, through rebranding. Besides slow developments, she demonstrates the influence of some big events like the Olympics or the World Cup (like in London or Rio de Janeiro), which contribute to a political acceleration of these changes and to a standardization of urban spaces and markets around the world.

Indeed, the author enlightens several processes caused by global process linked to local contexts that contributes to a decrease of the number of differences between markets. Gentrification and urban renewal policies make original markets disappear or push them outside of city centers, at its margin, out of sight. In addition, this leads, for instance, “to occlude waste’s presence even more by presenting second-hand goods as a statement of cultural capital or taste, rather than a material necessity or consequence of consumption.” (p. 33). The influence of creative city’s social representations and the increasing competition between global cities, linked to tourism attractiveness and expected consumption, is also leading to more urban policies designed and implemented to the detriment of original markets features and atmospheres. Public authorities and private companies create numerous copies of authentic markets, producing a tendency to “placelessness” which is not without ef-

fect on the qualities of places and on what one can feel and live in there. In other words, not only the physical configuration of spaces and goods sold there are affected, but also the experience one may have in them in the sense of an increased impersonality.

If the streets can provide opportunities for informal economic activities, numerous political measures try to regulate them. Public policies, as well as privatization of public spaces, tend to marginalize informal markets and unauthorized street trading, missing to recognize their inputs. Its workers face a “lack of political or symbolic representation in the urban economy” (p. 38), despite their economic and environmental roles (regarding waste valorization, for instance).

This book offers a good contribution to the literature on urban markets and urban transformations in a global world thanks to its demonstration that regardless different socio-economic and geographical contexts, capitalism and privatization have made most markets look the same. Concerning the form of the book itself, we may regret that the pictures illustrating the markets analyzed by the author are not printed in colors, which does not always do justice to the forms and layouts offered for comparison. In addition, on the background, the use of Lyn H. Lofland’s (1998) typology of public spaces (which she names the public, the parochial, and the private realms) would have helped to polish the understanding of markets. Her analysis would have helped the author to describe in a deeper way what is happening into these specific urban public spaces, for example when you meet strangers or when different social groups share a space and are attached to it in various ways. However, it does not affect the fact that this book will be of great interest for researchers in numerous disciplines such as town planning, sociology,

geography or history and for practitioners having to deal with planning or redesigning cities and urban markets.

### **References**

Evers, C & Seale, K. (eds) 2015, *Informal Urban Street Markets: International Perspectives*, Routledge, New York; Abingdon.

Lofland, L H 1998, *The Public Realm: Exploring the City's Quintessential Social Territory*, Aldine de Gruyter, New York.

*Lionel Francou*