

Introduction

Key Issues and Themes

The introductory chapter begins by presenting two exemplar stories of urban economic development in recent times (Beijing and Bilbao), illustrating the complex relationship between globalization and the urban experience. Globalization is understood as an inherently conflictual process and as an assemblage of narratives and representations.

The field of urban politics is outlined and reinterpreted as a 'triad' (reflected in the structure of the book): politics as representation, as government and as contestation.

Part One 'Politics as Representation' is concerned with the ways in which politico-economic elites produce and circulate images and discourses sustaining strategies of urban development and capital accumulation.

Part Two 'Politics as Government' explores the ways in which cities are being governed in a neoliberal and global era, through the mobilization of a variety of technical, intellectual and policy tools.

Part Three 'Politics as Contestation' takes into account the role of resistance movements forming around issues of social justice and urban citizenship.

I.1 Globalization and the urban experience

This book analyses the ways in which the intimately interconnected processes and forces of globalization, post-Fordism, postmodernity and neoliberalism have given rise to path-breaking changes in our urban experience. In this context, an 'urban change story' helps the reader – perhaps more convincingly than any theoretical framework – to understand what this book aims to offer: namely, a critical exploration of the variety of trajectories and strategies of urban development coexisting today within an increasingly globalized world economy. The two stories of urban change which will be presented in the following pages, despite their obvious differences, powerfully highlight the strong relationships linking the so-called 'new urban politics' to globalization, in the first instance, but also to other key phenomena of our times.



I.1.1 The new Beijing

The city of Beijing grows and evolves at a rapid pace, radically transforming its economic, social and institutional foundations. The general features of the process of widespread change currently under way in the Chinese capital, like in the whole country, are now widely known. However, in order to understand the relationship between globalization and contemporary urban issues in China and in many respects also in the larger East Asian context, it is worth analysing in greater detail the ways in which the process of change in this city is leading its urban community to experiment with radically different lifestyles and modes of societal organization. The multitude of physical changes, the new high-rise buildings and shopping malls (such as the spectacular Oriental Plaza), the demolition of vast portions of the historical built environment (including the traditional alleys called Hutong), the reconversion of old, Soviet-style factories into exhibition sites for local and international artists: these are only some examples illustrating the wide array of socio-spatial changes presently being observed in Beijing.

Over the three decades of Mao Zedong's leadership (from the late 1940s to the mid-1970s), Chinese governing elites largely neglected urban development and regeneration issues. In fact, during those decades government policies embraced an explicitly anti-urban stance towards economic and regional planning issues: migration flows from the countryside to the urban regions were severely regulated; urban dissidents and minorities were persecuted in the name of the 'cultural revolution'; civil society suffered from a lack of autonomy from the established authorities; private consumption was strongly limited. In this context, Beijing appeared as a city with an austere life and an inward-looking identity, with the economy being limited to the industrial sector, and its inhabitants forced to wear the Maoist uniform. Automobiles were almost unknown, as were places for leisure and nightlife. On the whole, the city was far from experiencing the vibrancy of urban life and the cosmopolitan imaginary which were already common in the major cities of the advanced capitalist countries. In the 1970s, only a quarter of the existing hotels were open to foreigners: at that time, a conventional belief held that there were more visitors in London over a week than in Beijing over a year. It was only in 1978 that, at the dawn of the epochal economic reforms undertaken in the subsequent years, the Central Committee of the Communist Party proclaimed that cities should play a role as drivers of 'socialist modernization' and as places where material and immaterial resources had to be concentrated and processes of industrial growth and economic internationalization had to be based on. During the 1980s, the changing approach to economic and spatial planning led to the establishment of four 'special economic zones' and fourteen 'coastal towns', in order to attract foreign direct investment, including capital inflows originating from the then British overseas territory of Hong Kong (Cook, 2006).

In the subsequent years, cities across the country experienced high growth rates, testifying to the success of the new strategy of economic and spatial development.



In light of these achievements, national elites became increasingly aware of the importance of urban development in strengthening China's economic competitiveness. As a consequence, China's major urban agglomerations (such as Beijing, Shanghai, Canton and Tianjin) started internationalizing their economies. Within the space of few years, the internationalization of urban development would become a key factor in China's rapid ascent in the global economy. In particular, political elites believed that large cities and metropolitan regions needed to be endowed with adequate infrastructures and producer services in order to enhance economic and cultural relationships and exchanges with existing 'global cities' across the world, and prospectively even to challenge their hegemony. As the country's political capital, Beijing was expected to play a crucial role in this strategy, attracting large amounts of public and private (foreign) capitals for investments in transport infrastructures, urban renewal projects, research and development laboratories, and the like. Today, just after Hong Kong, Beijing boasts the highest concentration of multinational firms in China. In this process, political motivations have been inextricably intertwined with economic interests: the lack of transparency in the public sector induces private firms to locate their headquarters in the capital, so as to take advantage of the spatial proximity to the sites of political power (Zhao, 2003). The 2008 Olympic Games, with their slogan 'New Beijing, Great Olympics', were the event in which this strategy of urban competitiveness reached its peak, celebrating worldwide the destiny of Beijing as a global city.

The changing approach to economic and spatial governance and planning has been accompanied by a process of political and administrative devolution (for example, on matters of fiscal responsibility) from the national level to the local level. The liberalization of domestic markets along with the attraction of foreign investors has enabled local governments and private actors to be less dependent on state revenues. On the whole, these changes have weakened the primacy of the state within the politico-economic realm (Logan, 2002). When Mao was President of the People's Republic, urban-renewal initiatives were promoted and directly managed by the central government. Today, municipal authorities play a growing role in the regulation of land use, in cooperation with other administrative entities operating at the sub-urban level. The private ownership of urban land is now allowed, even though each city and metropolitan area has its own regulations in this field. However, despite the process of economic liberalization and politico-administrative devolution, ordinary citizens find it hard to act as collectively organized actors and to actively contribute to the formulation of economic and regional policies through transparent mechanisms of negotiated decision-making, because of the persistent lack of institutions representing civil-society interests. Urban policies and planning processes are, therefore, no longer an exclusive domain of the national government, but are managed and supported also by local and regional elites. The latter, however, are reluctant to allow emerging actors and social groups to become involved in the decision-making processes.

The most marginalized social group is undoubtedly that of rural migrants residing in urban areas. Regular immigrant flows from the countryside overlap with irregular movements directed towards cities where the economic boom has vitalized the job market, even though the majority of available jobs are unregistered, poorly paid and offered on a casual basis. Migrants associate on the basis of regional origin and they support each other within informal neighbourhood communities, mostly located in poor and geographically peripheral urban areas, giving rise to networks of social cooperation and mutual help. In such 'urban villages', migrant communities reproduce and reinvent their collective identities through the sharing of local dialects, the socialization of cooking spaces and the pursuit of community-based survival strategies. Informal networks take the form also of spontaneous protest movements contesting the repressive regime in China. These movements act in unusual ways according to Western standards: under the rule of a persistently authoritarian regime, those in the forefront of grassroots movements are committed to building not only horizontal ties of solidarity and mutual help, but also 'vertical' connections with members of the local power structures (Shi and Cai, 2006).

The event of the Olympic Games has provided an exceptional opportunity for a variety of urban actors: the politico-economic elites have enthusiastically celebrated the country's modernization project as well as its hegemonic ambitions at the international level; urban social movements have striven to acquire visibility and legitimacy in the attempt to renegotiate on more democratic bases the relationship between the state and civil society. The Olympic Games, therefore, have set the scene for the assertion of a wide range of claims and protests: for religious freedom and against the repression of pro-Tibet movements; for human and social rights; and against the expropriation of private properties for the building of Olympic facilities and shopping areas. In conclusion, the evolution of contemporary Beijing shows that globalization has not only vigorously fostered economic growth and created opportunities for processes of urban and regional development, but has also prepared the ground for the rise of a lively urban community claiming a variegated set of political, social and human rights.

1.1.2 Bilbao after the Guggenheim

Until the 1990s, Bilbao was far from being an example of socio-spatial innovation and change. Fifth biggest agglomeration in Spain (today it has about 350,000 inhabitants), the city's image was commonly associated with its heavy industries, especially the iron and steel factories located in the industrial belt of Greater Bilbao. Like most European cities and regions specialized in the industrial and manufacturing sector, in the 1980s Bilbao witnessed a process of deindustrialization and structural decline. In 1986, the unemployment rate rose to an unprecedented 26 per cent of the workforce.

The situation of economic crisis and restructuring was concomitant with the transition occurring at the political and administrative levels. Until the mid-1970s, the Franco dictatorship prevented civil society from undertaking any independent



Figure I.1 Urban transformations in Beijing's Olympic Village (2007)

Source: photo © Alberto Vanolo

initiative, but the process of devolution started in 1978 when the recognition of the Basque Autonomous Community in the Spanish Constitution created new opportunities for urban and regional regeneration. In 1989, after the adoption of Bilbao's first strategic planning scheme, a series of ambitious urban projects were launched: the cleaning of the highly polluted river Nervión (known as the 'estuary of Bilbao'), the relocation of the harbour area outside of the city centre, the building of a new metro system. These initiatives were managed by newly established governing bodies, such as 'Bilbao metropolis 30', a public-private partnership committed to promoting the image of the city, and 'Bilbao Ría 2000', which was responsible for projects of physical renewal and redevelopment of the built environment.

During the 1990s, these initiatives of physical renewal were conducted within the framework of an emerging vision laying emphasis on the opportunities offered by a stronger connection to the global economy. Local elites became increasingly concerned with the generation of a cultural economy capable of positioning Bilbao within the cross-national flows of people, commodities and ideas. The shaping of this context preceded the ground-breaking event in Bilbao's recent history: the



Figure I.2 The Guggenheim in Bilbao: an urban icon (2007)

Source: photo © Alberto Vanolo

opening of the Guggenheim Museum in 1997. The related mega-project financed the construction not only of the spectacular museum building, but also of skyscrapers (such as the towers designed by the Japanese architect Isozaki), of a new airport and a pedestrian bridge designed by the famous Spanish architect Santiago Calatrava. The Guggenheim Museum, designed by the Canadian archistar Frank Gehry, has rapidly become a major cultural attraction: millions of tourists coming from all over the world have enjoyed the spectacle of a building which has rapidly become a landmark of the new Bilbao. It is estimated that 82 per cent of tourists visiting the city have chosen the Basque capital only for the Guggenheim (Landry, 2006). The museum has been so successful that it has been imitated worldwide: a phenomenon known as McGuggenheimization, which has been narrated even in the popular TV series *The Simpsons* as the imaginary town of Springfield (see Chapter 2). To put it briefly, one building has proved capable of shedding a new light on a declining city as was post-industrial Bilbao in the 1980s.

The pathway leading to the reinvention of the image and the economy itself of Bilbao, with the prominent role played by the tourist sector, has been based on

material and discursive strategies of urban development which are typical of the times in which we live. As Sara Gonzalez (2006) has argued, the strategy devised by the Basque political-economic elites has dynamically re-positioned the city within the globalising world. This process of re-scaling has shifted the city's prevailing identity from being a regional capital, peripheral even at a national level, to an emerging positionality as an internationalizing city striving to re-connect itself in innovative ways to the material and immaterial flows of globalization. As said above, this process has to be regarded as an achievement of the local government as well as of other regional and local authorities, including the public-private coalition 'Bilbao Metropolis 30'. These actors have shared the goal of turning Bilbao into an internationally competitive, service-oriented city. The responsibilities that have been devolved to international private actors such as the Guggenheim Foundation, along with the cooptation of globally renowned architects, have been central to the strategy of economic regeneration and symbolic change (cf. Sklair, 2005).

Without denying the important changes that have been just shortly described, Bilbao's urban-change story can be told from a different perspective. In Guggenheim's opening day, a museum employee was injured when a bomb exploded nearby. The urban vision conveyed by the politico-economic elites collided with the reaction of ETA, the armed Basque nationalists, an organization with socialist background actively participating in the anti-Franco resistance whose reputation has been subsequently ruined by countless terrorist attacks and horrendous crimes against politicians, civil servants and civilians alike. Not only the Basque terrorists, however, have been opposing the new Bilbao strategy. The image of the Basque capital as a 'city of culture' appears to be detached from the social values of large portions of the population, accustomed to the hardness of factory work and the working class culture. It is no surprise then that, in light of Bilbao's example, the announced opening of other branches of the Guggenheim Museum aroused protests and dissident voices in New York City and São Paulo. In conclusion, Bilbao's path of urban change has drawn the attention of both those willing to exploit the regeneration potential of the global economy (the politico-economic elites) and those from an oppositional side (the grassroots movements) protesting over the effects of cultural homologation and societal annihilation.

What do these urban change stories have in common? Despite their obvious differences, they tell us about the transformations linked to the advent of globalization and the geographical diffusion of the so-called 'new urban politics' (centred around issues of inter-urban competition and internationalization) beyond the original boundaries of Anglo-American and even Western capitalism. In particular, the described urban pathways point to the ways in which globalization takes shape in different and at the same time similar forms across the globe, producing changes within the urban governance strategies and regulations which do not arise from the abstract realm of urban-management theories and normatively defined 'best practices', but from the tremendously wide array of social, cultural and institutional realities of cities and

regions across the world. Urban success strategies, on the one hand, and resistance movements claiming 'rights to the city', on the other hand, mobilize varying and in many respects contrasting networks of actors, coalitions and partnerships. The city is, therefore, a crucial field in which globalization gives rise to dynamics of economic development that are concrete and visible but also based on conflicts and constantly evolving power relationships between spatialities and social groups.

1.1.3 The contested terrain of globalization

The distinguishing features of globalization – namely, the re-scaling of societal and spatial governance, the expansion of social and economic relationships at a potentially global scale, the widespread belief that our lives depend on events originating somewhere distant and rapidly migrating elsewhere – have urged scholars to revise the commonly held stance towards cities and urban issues. For instance, classic theorizations of the urban process and the city morphology in terms of living 'organism' are clearly no longer adequate. Cities, alongside the socio-spatially uneven fragments within them (the 'quartered cities': Marcuse, 2000), are to be viewed as nodes of a multitude of urban networks and as sites partaking in wider spaces of flows, producing multi-scalar and qualitatively variegated spatialities. Observing the process of globalization from the vantage point of urban-development trajectories throws light on the materiality of social phenomena and the interplay of local and global issues, as defined by dynamics of connectivity, cooperation and antagonism mobilizing a wide range of spatialities and temporalities. In the following pages of this book, these themes and issues will be addressed from a specific standpoint: one focusing on the relationship between the political and the urban in its multifarious variants. Until recently, spatial planning and the management of urban issues were either of national competence or were devolved to the local and regional levels of government. Recent transformations that are conventionally ascribed to the advent of globalization – such as the shift towards nationally and regionally differentiated varieties of neoliberalism, the establishment of influential international bodies of regulation, the belief that economic actors and processes are 'out of control' for the nation-states – have radically changed the meaning and the practical experience of urban politics (opening the way for the 'new urban politics', as was defined almost twenty years ago by geographer Kevin Cox, 1993): the 'global city', the 'entrepreneurial city', the 'creative city' and most recently the 'resilient city', along with other powerful representations of the contemporary city, paradigmatically testify to the radical changes that have occurred within the urban realm.

The social sciences and the broader public debate are informed, therefore, by the commonly held view that globalization has given rise to groundbreaking transformations all over the world: in the 'global North' and in the 'global South', as the conventional lexicon puts it. Without entering the rich and complex debate about globalization, two ways of approaching this theme can be identified: globalization as a social process and as a discursive practice.

First, globalization should be understood as a 'social process', which is characterized by an increasing interdependence between actors being conscious that, while operating 'at a distance', their lives are being increasingly socialized on a planetary scale (Elliott and Urry, 2010). The general social-science literature widely accepts the idea that globalization is not a 'final stage' in the development of human civilization, but should be viewed as a dynamic process exerting influence on the evolution of a multitude of simultaneously separate and interrelated dimensions of social life: economic, political, cultural, social and environmental. The process of globalization is typically marked by features of unevenness and imbalance: regions across the world unevenly take advantage of, or conversely are threatened by, globalization. As regards urban-development trajectories, evidence shows that the experience of globalization in São Paulo, for example, has a number of converging as well as diverging aspects with that of New York City. In particular, by looking at the societal formations of contemporary cities one cannot fail to notice the multitude of differences and similarities and the ways these are reflected in the collective senses of belonging variously based on gender, ethnicity, age as well as on urban citizenship. A Catholic woman of the Philippine diaspora, employed as a cleaner in Rome in Italy, is likely to cope with social integration issues that are similar to, and at the same time different from, those experienced by a Muslim man of Turkish origin employed in a German manufacturing industry, or by a self-made entrepreneur of Chinese nationality setting up a commercial business in San Francisco.

Cities across the world witness, therefore, the shaping of a contradictorily globalizing human condition: the duality of globalization is typically epitomized by the situation of hopeless exclusion and inequality affecting the so-called 'underclass' in capitalist cities (Mingione, 1996) and by the disproportionate affluence enjoyed by the new global elites (Sklair, 2002). On the other hand, rigidly dualistic representations of globalized societies are inadequate to describe the present situation, as social boundaries are increasingly blurred, and collective identities constantly change, evolving towards hybrid configurations. An individual or a territorial entity (a city, a region, etc.) is likely to develop multiple allegiances, partaking in a number of economic, social and cultural networks under conditions of relational proximity as well as time-space 'distanciation' (Amin, 2002). Likewise, while some urban areas and neighbourhoods find themselves to be highly connected to the process of globalization, other areas in the same city are relegated to a condition of marginality and physical decay. Underlining the contradictory and indeterminate character of globalization entails embracing an explicitly politically orientated perspective: the globalizing world is constitutively unstable, and the present and the future of cities are subject to largely unpredictable trajectories of evolution and change. The globalizing world can take the form either of an arena characterized by unchallenged individualism, ruthless competition and unregulated capitalism, or of a space imbued with values and practices of egalitarianism, democracy and exchange between equals. It is the political connotation of inherently conflictual processes, many of which take place at the urban scale, that makes the difference in the evolution of

constitutively contingent and unpredictable socio-spatial realities like those of contemporary cities.

A second way of approaching globalization looks at this term as an assemblage of narratives and representations shedding light on different and even contrasting meanings of the present politico-economic context. Of course, there is no agreement on whether globalization is a positive or a negative phenomenon. On the one hand, there are those conveying an optimistic view of the globalizing world, such as those commentators that since the early 1990s have portrayed globalization as a promising horizon for humankind, opening spaces for a 'borderless world' (Ohmae, 1990) and for a pattern of social development providing novel opportunities to the poor (Baghwati, 2004). On the other hand, there are the critical views of those stressing the weaknesses of mainstream approaches to economic development and the related policy recommendations adopted by established institutions and international organisations (Stiglitz, 2002) and envisaging an incipient process of 'de-globalization' in the world economy (Bello, 2004). The ongoing global recession, which started in 2008 in the mortgage and financial sectors and then quickly spread to the wider economies, particularly supports the sceptical views, questioning the neoliberal orthodoxy that has driven the early stages of globalization. In any case, it is evident that each vision of globalization reflects the role of specific cultural, political and economic actors, intervening in the scholarly debate and the public sphere in order to exert an influence on the evolution of social and economic processes and on the way in which globalization is concretely managed: from the neoliberal elites leading the most influential international organisations to NGOs activists and representatives as well as the intellectuals and advocates of new social movements. Globalization is not to be regarded, therefore, as a process whose qualities are generally accepted by political, social and economic commentators. On the contrary, it is a discursive category which is created and sustained by 'experts' and opinion-makers voicing the interests of the emerging global elites and, on the other hand, is contested and deconstructed by those advocating alternative strategies of development and post-development.

Such a variety of subjective positions takes form along ideological lines, but has also strong economic motivations. Discussions over urban-regeneration processes and strategies provide evidence of the diversity of positions and related policy 'recipes': for instance, the discourse and the related academic theory stressing the economic potential of the urban creative class have been enthusiastically welcomed and in many cases translated in the policy realm by urban elites and city managers across the world, but critical scholars and social movements have warned about the gentrification effects and the commodification of the arts and culture associated with creative class policies and initiatives (see Chapter 2). The future of cities is, therefore, a highly controversial issue, especially when it comes to defining the way in which the process of decision-making is actually pursued: identifying an urban-development strategy is alternatively (or jointly) the outcome of a decision taken 'from above' by one legitimate authority or of a consultation process involving a

plurality of policy options and actors. In conclusion, globalization is not an objectively definable historical-geographical scenario, but is a meta-narrative having multiple meanings and capable of directing individual and collective agency towards prefixed objectives. Globalization is also mobilized as a discursive device by economic and social actors on the basis of their positionality in terms of power and political role: local and global elites make use of globalization as a rhetorical justification of their development and wealth accumulation strategies (Jessop, 1997); justice movements, on the other side, refer to globalization as a convergence space for protest actions as well as for experimental practices of solidarity and grassroots cooperation (Routledge, 2003).

BOX 1	KEY WORDS
<p>What do we mean by ‘politics’?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Recent decades have seen a resurgence of political theorizing in academic research, which has exerted an important influence also on the interdisciplinary field of urban studies. North American universities have been at the forefront in what has been defined ‘the return to political philosophy’ (Rancière, 2001). This process has occurred in at least three stages. First, in the 1980s the academic departments of humanities and philosophy in the US (particularly those in the progressive Western coast) made a decisive contribution to the academic popularization of the ideas of contemporary thinkers and critics from Continental Europe (most notably France) such as Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, Gilles Deleuze. According to some commentators, this import of philosophical ideas from the old continent has significantly transformed an originally loose and diversified intellectual movement into a sort of academic commodity commonly labelled as ‘French theory’ (Cusset, 2003). Even so, there is no doubt that this strand of thinking has been central to the ‘poststructuralist’ turn that has occurred within the human and social sciences, with an increasing emphasis being laid on discourse, representation and deconstruction (see Part One, ‘Politics as Representation’). ○ A second stage in the resurgence of political theory can be associated with the debates on the changing forms of societal government, most notably those conducted within the framework of discussions on ‘dialogic democracy’, on ‘governance’ and lately on ‘governmentality’. These debates, which have been <p style="text-align: right;"><i>(Continued)</i></p>	

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particularly lively since the mid-1980s onwards, were originally inspired by the following strands of thinking: the work of social and political theorists, led by Hannah Arendt and Jürgen Habermas, dealing with the dynamics of pluralistic democracy and the communicative turn in late-modern societies; the theoretical perspective elaborated by institutional economists and political scientists such as Oliver Williamson and Paul DiMaggio investigating the fragmentation of governmental processes within socio-economic organizations (the governance paradigm); the neo-Foucauldian rethinking of government as a complex assemblage of procedures, intellectual techniques and strategic agency (see Part Two, 'Politics as Government').

- Finally, a third stage in the resurgence of political theory has occurred in more recent times in the form of a radicalized stance towards politics. In the late 1990s, this 'radical turn' has found fertile ground in the rise of the so-called anti-globalization movement across the world, which has posed demands for a new progressive and democratic politics transgressing conventional North–South geographical dichotomies and cultural boundaries (see Part Three, 'Politics as Contestation'). The main streams of this radical political movement have been the following: first, the feminists and the ethno-racial scholars that since the mid-1980s have placed notions of difference, subaltern subjectivity and positionality at the centre of critical political theory (from Donna Haraway to Judith Butler to Cornel West); second, a heterogeneous neo- and post-Marxist movement, including Italian Marxist 'autonomists' theorizing the potential politics in post-Fordist capitalism (Antonio Negri, Paolo Virno), the French theorists of absolute and libertarian democracy such as Jacques Rancière, and finally the advocates of a renewed idea of revolution tracing its origins back to the ideals of the twentieth century, such as Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek.

I.2 The triad of urban politics

The origins of the field of enquiry which can be conventionally defined 'the politics of urban development' trace back to the pioneering studies of the 1960s and 1970s dealing with issues of spatial organization and planning in the urban agglomerations of the United States and Western Europe. Those in the forefront of these foundational studies dealing with the politics of urban development were prominent human geographers and urban planners such as Jean Gottmann (1961) in France and subsequently in the US, Peter Hall (1966) in Britain, Allan Pred

(1977) in the US and Francesco Compagna (1967) in Italy. From the mid-1980s onwards, these studies have been revived by the advent of globalization as a discourse and social process and by the related greater emphasis being placed on the role of cities and regions as relatively autonomous agents of internationalization in the world economy (most notably by scholars of global and world cities such as John Friedmann, Saskia Sassen and Peter Taylor). This recent scholarship has revitalized the post-war tradition of studies on urban and regional development, but it has also gone beyond the established approaches in this literature, exploring the wider politics of place and space, and not just that related to economic development and spatial organization issues. Therefore, it is worth attempting to offer a definition of what is meant by 'politics of place and space' as a point of departure for this book.

Let's start from an identification of the substantive focus of research in urban political studies. A tentative list of issues and themes falling within this field of enquiry might include: the contradictory relationships between politico-economic elites and urban citizens (as showed by the case of Beijing); the role of culture in urban regeneration processes (as showed by the case of Bilbao); the transformations of public space and the struggles over the 'rights to the city' (enacted by subaltern actors such as migrants, sexual and gender minorities, the homeless); the politics taking shape around goals of sustainability and the management of environmental change; the evolution of the housing sector and related policy initiatives, institutional processes and social conflicts; the integration of ethnic and religious minorities within mainstream urban societies. Obviously, the list could be longer, covering a potentially countless set of issues and themes pertaining to the urban realm. Identifying a 'triad of urban politics' will help us to orient ourselves towards the complexities of city life. The spheres of this triad, which are at one and the same time autonomous, interrelated and antinomic, are the following: politics as representation, as government and as contestation.

1.2.1 Politics as representation

In the first instance, the politics of space can be dealt with in terms of representation. This line of interpretation draws inspiration from the writings of Michel Foucault on the 'dispositifs' (the devices) producing the 'order of discourse' as well as from those of Jacques Derrida on the critique of language and on deconstruction methodology within the literary work. These strands of thinking have led to the conviction that representations have an intrinsically performative potential, generating in our mental and cultural universes different modes of framing social phenomena and issues and thus opening the way for a variety of interventions and discursive tactics, as Foucault puts it.

This line of enquiry has been influential within the human and social sciences, especially after the publication of *Orientalism* by Edward Said (1978). In this book, the intellectual and literary critic of Palestinian origin famously showed that the

Orient should be regarded as a discursive category, which was constructed in the context of the project of Western civilization at the time of the European colonial rule in the Middle East. Representations, therefore, are capable of framing social phenomena in terms of negativity, inferiority or as sources of danger and threat, as recently experienced by Muslims in Western countries in the years following the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

The Other (social, cultural or geographical) is not only identified as a target of stigmatizing representations within contexts of colonial dominance and geopolitical conflicts. Annihilating the Other through the power of representations is a common practice also under 'ordinary' conditions. Today, for instance, cities are increasingly concerned with the position held in rankings assessing the attraction of investments and other indicators of economic growth. These rankings are formulated and presented against the background of the neoliberal discourse on competitiveness, which builds on the assumption that cities are homogeneous collective actors, behaving like individual agents and private firms. This representation draws a veil over uneven social formations and power relationships, which are distinguishing features of the urban experience. Existing socio-spatial contradictions are obfuscated not only by the conventional neoliberal rhetoric of competitiveness and entrepreneurialism. A related process of 'framing' takes into account also intrinsically positive goals and values such as the participation of citizens in public affairs, the equality of opportunities, the levels of social cohesion in liberal democracies, or the struggle against poverty in the developing countries. With regard to the latter, for instance, critical development studies have provocatively stressed the 'invention of poverty' associated with pro-Third World programmes: economic investments and anti-poverty initiatives have been supported by international organizations and Western countries in order to reinforce their cultural and economic hegemony on developing countries, rather than effectively empowering local populations and national economies (Escobar, 1995).

Those urban representations which implicitly prescribe the ways in which cities should act, regardless of their historical, political and socio-economic backgrounds, lead to the selection of specific policy recipes and thus end up imposing exogenous modes of conduct. For instance, cities are not really competing one with each other and cannot be considered 'collective actors' as such: the representations conveying these beliefs are instrumental in the reinforcement of hegemonic projects and related economic-political interests. From this point of view, it is worth drawing on the work of those critical political geographers that have offered a conceptual framework for the analysis of narratives, representations and metaphors uncovering the 'political unconscious' in the conduct of established spatial entities such as nation-states, cities and regions (Ó Tuathail, 1996). Even seemingly objective cartographic representations are associated with power relationships and specific visions of the world, as shown by European continental geographers who have discussed the rise and the subsequent crisis of 'cartographic reason' in the modern and contemporary ages (Farinelli et al., 1992).

Because of the importance of representations in the social consciousness, cities and larger metropolitan regions are faced with a complex and in many respects contested 'politics of translation', which is fostered by a variety of linguistic and cultural codes (see Mondada, 2000). Most typically, discursive and communicative practices and strategies selectively identify and target urban spaces, distinguishing between attractive neighbourhoods and those being stigmatized as 'deprived', 'unsafe', 'declining'. The representation process exerts an influence not only on public policies, but also on the conduct of private actors: take, for instance, the discrimination policy covertly adopted by banks and other financial institutions operating in the mortgage market in the United States, which are used to 'red-lining' off-limits neighbourhoods, where loans are considered too risky and are given at less convenient, even predatory rates and conditions. This example shows that representations wield an intrinsically performative power, which forges discursive objects, making a decisive contribution to the reproduction of existing socio-spatial inequalities in contemporary capitalist cities.

I.2.2 Politics as government

The politics of representation is intimately linked to the practice of governing cities. Within this sphere, the politics of space draws on a variety of intellectual technologies and practical tools which are created and used by local and national governments in order to improve the well-being of an urban community. Administering spatial entities such as a city or a neighbourhood requires the deployment of a wide range of technical and intellectual instruments (such as commissioned studies and reports, statistical indexes and the like) as well as regulations and policy tools (zoning laws, city and regional planning schemes, urban projects and initiatives, negotiation and consultation processes). Taken together, these measures and devices engender a 'governmental rationality', aiming to adapt the conduct of individuals and the whole citizenry to the government's moral imperatives and related institutional goals (Rose, 1999). The politics 'as government' draws on the combination of these politico-administrative procedures and tools, along with the related knowledge implications and moral imperatives.

An understanding of the 'politics as government' along these lines is heavily indebted to the analytics of power originally proposed by Michel Foucault (2004) and subsequently developed by 'governmentality' scholars, such as Nikolas Rose and Peter Miller above all. Geographers at the intersection of the Anglophone and Francophone academic 'traditions' have made important contributions to these debates and reflections, by dissecting the socio-spatial implications of this approach to the study of power relationships (Raffestin, 1980; Allen, 2003). The expanding Foucauldian literature, which has gone beyond the prevailing philosophical and sociological focus of the beginning, touching upon a tremendous variety of research themes and disciplinary fields, illuminates the ways in which power relationships are exercised and reproduced by a multitude of collective and individual agents, which

are not always affiliated with the established institutions and the state sector. The state itself should not be viewed as a static and monolithic entity, but as a mobile and contingent constellation of institutions, agents and social groups. As already anticipated, contemporary reflections focusing on the exercise of power and the art of government have converged on the discussion of 'governmentality'. This term has been used by those authors debating and scrutinizing the institutional and political processes giving rise to a governable space, through the deployment of government techniques, administrative procedures and discursive-ideological repertoires.

The government process does not consist, therefore, only in the execution of laws and other formal regulations, but is based also on specific techniques by which social and economic problems and issues are presented, governing bodies interact with the populace and with public and private actors, and by which societal advancement is understood. In the view of Nikolas Rose and the other theorists of 'governmentality', a distinguishing feature of globalization and the advanced liberal societies lies in the advent of an anatomy of power which replaces conventional patterns of political representation and social consensus (based on class consciousness and on the state provision of social services), turning individual citizens and local communities into increasingly responsible subjects in pursuit of their own well-being, as regards for instance issues of safety, social security and other fields in which the state once retained an exclusive role of regulation (Osborne and Rose, 1999).

Contemporary cities powerfully witness the shaping of the emerging 'governmental rationality'. Cities represent themselves as 'collective actors' and as such they are deemed responsible for the accomplishment of their own economic development goals. This is put into practice through the adoption of entrepreneurial modes of conduct dictating an attitude reconciling strategies of cooperation and competition with other cities at national and international levels. This new urban policy materializes in a wide array of initiatives: today, cities devise strategies aimed at the regeneration of the urban environment and the attraction of external investors, through the organization of hallmark events, the development of techno-poles, the invention of exhibition spaces for the arts and a host of other initiatives capable of enhancing the material and imaginary positionality of the city within the political and economic space of globalization.

1.2.3 Politics as contestation

Unlike Foucault and those authors whose work has followed in the wake of his intellectual legacy, for the French philosopher Jacques Rancière, one of the most distinguished exponents of today's critical thought, politics has not to do with the exercise of power, which is primarily an intellectual activity. In his view, one should distinguish between police ('la *police*') and politics ('la *politique*'): the former refers to the preservation of a pre-fixed social order and to the position 'naturally' assigned to the members of a polity, on the basis of a rational partition of the space of opportunities; on the other hand, the latter is fostered by the process of contestation of

the order being imposed by the 'police', which is inherently controversial and modifiable, in the name of equality and social justice (Rancière, 1995, 1998). Therefore, according to Rancière, politics is not to be identified with the set of power relationships described by Foucault, but with the common space created by the contestation of the police order, which is produced by the existing government arrangement. The police thus creates an order which treats members of the community as governable subjects. The politics of contestation questions this relational and physical arrangement, in the name of an egalitarian and democratic city (Dikeç, 2005). This act of contestation produces a number of 'minor geographies' (Katz, 1996; Galluccio, 2007), which are made of – and nurtured by – a wide array of socio-spatial practices and invisible as well as visible claims. Despite their 'minor' status, this book argues that such geographies are expressions of a potential majority of subaltern actors prefiguring a horizon of 'absolute' democracy (see Virno, 1996).

The sphere of the 'politics as contestation' is qualitatively different from the other mentioned spheres in that it reintegrates an egalitarian and progressive view of urban politics (see Boltanski, 2009), which would be otherwise reduced merely to the capacity to represent and reproduce the dominant image (the 'politics as representation') or to govern and administer existing societies ('politics as government'). In addition, in concentrating on life-related issues (the main being housing, health care, the income, as well as citizenship and sexuality), through their politics of presence these movements shed light on a 'living politics of the city', which can be considered as the other face of the coin of the government-led urban biopolitics aiming to the control and the disciplining of bodies, urban spaces and social relationships, as well as of the conventional politics of urban economic development being driven by the goal of making cities more competitive and productive.

The space of contestation is commonly represented as a niche or an interstice by the mass media and wider public, because it is produced by apparently marginal and invisible actors, such as the angry young proletarians of the French banlieues, the international migrants struggling for citizenship, the students in authoritarian countries claiming access to civil and political rights, the 'irrepresentable' workers employed on casual bases identifying the urban field as a privileged terrain of struggle. In light of these struggles, contestation space appears in its foundational and constituent potential as a 'new beginning', one in which the emancipatory claims put forward by subaltern groups are recognized and accepted as sources of constitutional change and reform. The space of contestation gives rise, therefore, to a political sphere which is ontologically alternative to that produced by the 'politics as government', being the latter focused on the improvement of the relationships between governing entities and those being governed within the given political-spatial order. On the other hand, contestation space has an ambivalent relationship with the 'politics as representation': social movements constantly combine the refusal of mainstream representations of social and spatial processes with the elaboration of their own practices and strategies of expression and autonomous representation as a way of establishing their material and immaterial presence within the urban realm.

BOX 2

KEY WORDS

What is a city?

- Providing a definition of the city as a spatial entity is a difficult task, as the urban process can be observed from different points of view. Different aspects of urbanization can be identified along lines variously relating to the organization of the built environment (the high density of people and buildings), to cultural phenomena (the distinctiveness of urban cultures, its embodied symbolisms and meanings), to political processes (cities as sites of political action and representation), to economic issues (the economies of agglomeration and diversity generating at the urban level). Whereas in the last three decades or so critical geographers, sociologists and political scientists have placed the economic process at the centre of their interpretations of the evolution of cities, other logics underlying the development of the urban process can be identified. For instance, in his classic book Lewis Mumford (1961) related the culture of cities to the religious factor, the urban form being in his view the materialization of the perpetual dialectic between the human and the transcendental. From a more materialistic perspective, cities can be also understood as magnets attracting people, social relations and networks (Soja, 2000; see the concept of *synekism* in the next chapter).
- Broadly speaking, the city is a multifaceted physical, relational and governmental space. In purely geographical terms, there is no doubt that distinguishing features of the urban environment are those of ‘density’ and ‘diversity’ (Lèvy and Lussault, 2003). However, reducing urbanism to the idea of the physical clustering of human settlements and artefacts is misleading: as stressed by Soja (2000) in his account of the *exopolis* (see also Gottman’s classic analysis of the *megalopolis*; Gottman, 1961), in contemporary cities the urban fabric is inherently fragmented and spatially discontinuous, comprising edge cities, sprawling regions, suburbs, outer cities, new towns. Moreover, even more significantly in a context of globalization, cities are re-shaped by relations developing under conditions of distance and non-proximity (Amin and Graham, 1997). Cities and metropolitan areas tend to become polycentric in their spatial form, multi-networked, stretched across transnational spaces and dispersed through a multitude of socio-economic flows. From this vantage point, cities are irrepresentable spatialities, taking the form of fluid and porous rather than bounded spaces, developing around relations of connectivity arising from persistently path-dependent development pathways (cf. Jones, 2009).

- As this book will show, urban political processes reflect the co-existence of contrasting spatial ontologies of the city. However, spatial determinism should be avoided in critical interpretations of urban politics, even in those formulated from the standpoint of human geography: urban politics is dependent on, but also relatively autonomous from, the contingent form and the spatial ontology of cities.

I.3 Overview of the book's structure

The structure of the book is organized on the basis of the three spheres of urban politics which have just been identified and briefly illustrated in conceptual terms. Part One begins with Chapter 1 introducing the reader to this theme by re-examining the overlapping imaginaries of the contemporary city in recent decades: from the post-Fordist and postmodern city to the global and entrepreneurial city. Chapter 2 unpacks one of the most influential urban narratives in the last decade: namely, the public discourse prescribing the requisites for a city to be 'creative' and more generally emphasizing the role of culture as an urban growth driver. As the latter example powerfully demonstrates, urban representations can be understood as discursive devices mobilized by urban elites in pursuit of strategies of urban development. These representational processes exert an important influence on the paths of urban development and most notably on the selection process that is behind the inclusion or the exclusion of issues and problems within the policy agenda of local governments. From this point of view, it can be concluded that representations offer major standpoints for understanding urban politics.

Part Two of the book deals with the sphere defined 'politics as government'. Chapter 3 offers a critical reconstruction of the trajectory of urban neoliberalism: from the apparently irresistible ascent in the late 1970s, passing through a stage of global circulation and expansion, until the recent regulatory and accumulation crises generated by the 2008–09 'credit crunch'. Urban entrepreneurialism, the imperative of growth and the strong emphasis placed on cities as self-governing entities and 'collective actors' competing with each other within the political and economic space of globalization are the 'pillars' of the urban politics that has taken shape around the rise of neoliberalism as a mode and style of regulation over the last three decades. Recent decades have witnessed, therefore, the shaping of an increasingly autonomous urban governmental realm, a process which has taken place in the broader context of the reconfiguration of the spatial scales of governance and regulation, particularly involving the nation-state as well as sub-national geographical entities such as the city and the region. Along with the entrepreneurial turn, the empowerment of cities as self-governing entities has also entailed devolving to local governments greater responsibilities concerning the regulation of violence and the

public order: today, sovereignty and violence appear to be intimately interrelated spheres even at the urban scale. Chapter 4 thus describes the disturbing scenarios of contemporary 'urban geopolitics', most notably those related to the regulation of violence at the urban and metropolitan levels. The surveillance and militarization of urban spaces, the pre-emptive repression of the 'external enemies' of urban civilization, are the distinguishing features of an urban order increasingly regulated by the actual or only threatened use of force.

Part Three dwells on a dimension of urban politics which can be understood as the 'reverse' of the 'politics as government': the politics taking shape around claims of expanded democracy, substantive egalitarianism and deep recognition of cultural, ethnic and gender-sexual differences. The protagonists in this sphere of urban politics are social movements and 'organized' minorities committed to asserting their presence in the urban field. Chapter 5 engages with this theme from the point of view of the struggles arising around social and spatial justice. The 'urbanization of social justice' is a long-standing theme and matter of concern within urban critical scholarship, particularly since the 1970s in the wake of the diffusion of neo-Marxist and radical positions in the field, which explicitly politicized academic debates and related research programmes. Contemporary struggles for socio-spatial justice arise from conflicts and public controversies developing around a wide range of issues, such as: the regeneration and physical renewal of decayed neighbourhoods and the gentrification effects of these processes; the management of the urban environment and the ways in which existing socio-spatial inequalities are reflected into phenomena of environmental injustice; the grassroots demands for policies led by the principle of 'redistribution' rather than of growth, in contrast to the dominant neoliberal agenda.

As already anticipated, however, contemporary social movements and struggles do not mobilize only around issues of socio-spatial justice, but increasingly take form as a way of establishing a recognized 'presence' in the urban field. This important, in some contexts even prevailing, dimension of the 'politics as contestation' is examined in Chapter 6 of the book, which focuses on the 'politics of presence' from the standpoint of international migrants and dissident sexual minorities demanding access to citizenship, including urban citizenship. Subaltern or minority groups are protagonists of an ambivalent dialectic with the established authorities: they are invited to integrate into mainstream society preserving their identities and even to profit from their cultural diversity in economic terms, but on the other hand the radical manifestations of their claims and shifting positionalities are persistently marginalized. For this reason, the selected groups paradigmatically exemplify the complexity and ambiguity of citizenship politics in the neoliberal era.

Even though this book seeks to offer a broad view on the current state of affairs in urban politics, it would have been impossible to provide the reader with an all-encompassing account of the relevant themes and issues in the field. Indeed, the majority of social, economic and cultural aspects of human societies potentially fall within the field of urban politics to the extent in which they arise from the assertion and negotiation of material interests, geographical imaginaries and public discourses

at the urban level. The realm of everyday life particularly comprises a wide variety of phenomena that can be investigated from a perspective of critical urban politics: from those relating to the ways in which individuals and communities interact with 'nature' and technologies to those throwing light on the dynamics of power associated with recurring and apparently meaningless actions, for instance when we eat, walk or even sleep. This book is not concerned, if not just peripherally, with the 'micro-political' dimension of socio-spatial life. Today, this dimension attracts the attention of increasingly numerous authors (poststructuralist geographers being at the forefront in this intellectual movement) embracing an expanded and radically pluralistic perspective on city politics, which emphasizes the importance of the 'small things' of everyday life and the unexplored spatio-temporal relationships between humans, technologies and other animated environments and entities (Amin and Thrift, 2002; Hinchliffe et al., 2005; for a recent philosophical account of this 'vitalistic neo-materialism' see Bennett, 2010). However, although these debates are fascinating, we will call attention mainly to those aspects of urban politics in which visible and organized (or deliberately invisible and disorganized) actors become involved.

While being aware of the inevitably selective character of the critical overview of urban politics offered in this text, we hope that this book will encourage readers to engage in a constantly creative deconstruction of the urban settings in which they happen to live or just occasionally spend part of their lifetime. In times in which economic and political issues and processes are commonly presented as 'natural' and 'inevitable' – from inter-urban competition to the privatization of public services, from the Westernization of the forms of urbanization to the entrepreneurialization of social behaviours – this may turn out to be an exercise less predictable in its outcomes than it would appear at a first glance.