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definition of regional development as GDP/capita or median household income growth, the book offers an internally consistent and comprehensive story with a particular emphasis on the relational ecosystem of, and elite networks in, a region. For readers who agree with this definition of economic development, the book offers a great synthesis of existing ideas, a wealth of original and detailed data, and compelling ex-post explanations of the evolutionary trajectories of San Francisco and Los Angeles.

Those who see economic development as something broader—including social and environmental sustainability, equality, poverty and welfare rather than just in terms of efficiency gains—may find the book too narrowly focused. But even the acceptance of median income as an indicator of development throws up questions. The selection of theoretical frameworks produces a story highlighting the correct decisions of clever entrepreneurs tied together in dense social networks allowing them to exchange ideas from diverse, but related, sectors, moving their companies and, in turn, the regional economy into novelty-generating and rapidly growing sectors. The need for networks of small firms arises from the short product cycles in the IT sector and the uncertainty about commercial viability of innovations in the biotech sector. However, the chosen theoretical approaches bracket out the need of those industries for other forms of flexibility. The fact that the Bay Area lost, and has never fully recovered, approximately 500,000 jobs during the dotcom bubble suggests that flexible labour markets, in addition to the flexible organization of firms, allowed the region to maintain its relatively high wages and productivity levels. The second form of flexibility required to cope with short product cycles is a flexible manufacturing workforce and that is predicated on socially unacceptable labour standards in other parts of the world. This allowed Steve Jobs to assemble in record time a workforce to produce and bring to market his newest products. Profits that make possible continual innovation and high wages in the Bay Area are, in part, achieved on the backs of Chinese workers. Production in China not only saves labour costs but, even more importantly, also reduces corporate tax bills. Exploitation and tax avoidance may thus be equally or more important in accounting for rapidly rising median wages in the Bay Area than its social ecology, entrepreneurship and innovative milieu. Los Angeles, with its specialization in entertainment, logistics and aerospace, may have been less able to profit from lower wages abroad to boost its workers’ wages.

None of those points invalidate the relevance or veracity of the arguments made in the book, but they suggest that those arguments are the result of the theoretical foci of the book. Inclusion of political economy approaches would have shifted the analytical lens to other processes and factors as potential drivers of metropolitan economic performance that may be equally important for the Bay Area’s success, but that are at present excluded from the explanatory framework.

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Urban Neighborhoods in a New Era is a collectively authored book that analyzes how six North American cities (Baltimore, Chicago, Phoenix, Los Angeles, Denver and Toronto) have responded to neighborhood distress since the second world war. The authors insist that neighborhood distress is more than a range of social problems such as crime, poverty, unemployment or family instability and emphasize it as ‘a political
problem that tests a community’s capacity to engage in constructive problem solving’ (p. 4). They divide their period of investigation in two distinct parts. During the redevelopment period—roughly from 1945 to the early 1980s—cities were governed by cohesive coalitions composed of major business interests and the city government. These actors jointly defined clear-cut agendas prioritizing economic growth and physical redevelopment of the CBD while neglecting neighborhood-related issues. They were able to mobilize the necessary resources to implement these agendas and therefore held an influential position over the long term that marginalized local communities.

The book’s main argument is that the redevelopment period is over and city politics has shifted progressively since the mid-1980s into a new era in which urban governance schemes are more open and fragmented. The influence of corporate businesses has decreased and new actors like community leaders, philanthropic foundations or educational and medical institutions have come into play, thanks to their ability to mobilize human capital as a new key resource. Therefore, neighborhood concerns such as crime control, education, youth job opportunities, affordable housing or quality of life more generally have gained major political recognition and are now perceived as complementary to economic growth. To create positive sum-games targeting both objectives at the same time, new tools such as community benefits agreements negotiated bilaterally between community leaders and real estate developers, transit-oriented development plans foreseeing the construction of subway stations in marginalized neighborhoods, or mixed-used and mixed-income housing developments have been widely adopted.

The authors identify several factors contributing to this shift. First, the longstanding marginalization of neighborhoods led to major security issues threatening economic prosperity (increasing rates of crime and violence, drug trafficking, youth delinquency) that forced local governments to consider these issues more seriously. Second, the creation of several federal programs dedicated to neighborhood revitalization provided city governments with the necessary financial resources to address them. Finally, local factors played a role. In Baltimore, Chicago and Denver the election of mayors from ethnic groups affected by the marginalization of particular neighborhoods (African American or Latino) contributed to the shift. In Phoenix and Toronto electoral reforms, reducing partisan politics and allowing for a more diverse representation of minorities in the city council, also had a significant impact.

However, the authors warn that this ‘shift in the local governing pattern does not mean that neighborhoods have entered a golden age’ (p. 213). On the contrary, ‘neighborhoods politics in the postindustrial city involves a scramble to assemble resources in a period of great scarcity’ (p. xvii). As a consequence, there is a significant gap between political discourses and intentions on the one hand, and the implementation of programs dedicated to neighborhood revitalization on the other. In most cities, neighborhood development projects emerge as ad hoc initiatives in response to particular opportunities. Their realization relies on a precarious equilibrium of mixed funding from a combination of sources (federal and state aid, foundation grants and financial agreements with private third parties). In most cases, this modus operandi leads to a lack of coordination that prevents the transformation of various disconnected initiatives into a coherent policy improving living conditions in the long run. Among the cities under study, Phoenix is the only one providing a stable institutional foundation for strategic action in distressed neighborhoods through a specific administrative service dedicated to this issue.

Given that much previous work in urban politics concentrated on policy actions targeting the CBD to analyze power configurations in cities, a book investigating urban power through the lens of neighborhood politics is definitely to be
welcomed and will probably become a landmark in the field. The six case studies (chapters 3 to 8) are impressively well-documented and insightfully combine a city-wide historical perspective on the increasing political attention granted to neighborhoods with specific foci on how revitalization initiatives were concretely implemented in some distressed neighborhoods. However, the authors are ambiguous about the influence of business organizations. On the one hand they state that their influence has decreased in the new era, but remain evasive about the factors leading to this phenomenon. On the other hand the revitalization projects they describe as successful are located in neighborhoods that are close to the CBD, and so benefit from strong market potential attracting investors (e.g. Regent Park in Toronto, Boyle Heights in Los Angeles and Garfield in Phoenix). Does this not reveal a classic growth machine mechanism, as the CBD is enlarged through the incorporation of its closest neighborhoods?

It is also noteworthy that the authors avoid referring to the concept of urban regime in the whole book and prefer the terms ‘patronage politics’ (pp. 71, 110, 135), ‘progrowth coalitions’ (p. 4) or ‘machine politics’ (pp. 82, 85). The authors persuasively claim that, because power is more diffused and urban politics more complex in the new era, the Stonian social-production model of power centered on the capacity to act gains analytical strength. But what about the regime concept itself? Does it completely lose its relevance in the new era or does it need serious refreshment? Given that several of the book’s co-authors contributed to the development of this concept and that the shift they describe profoundly modifies its core properties (involved actors, agenda’s priorities and relevant resources), it is slightly disappointing that there is no explicit discussion of these issues in the concluding chapter.

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Lars Maier has edited a timely, insightful and well-written volume exploring the interplay between locality and the social identities of ‘migrant professionals’. It analyses how locality matters in shaping social identities of a mobile group and how migrants’ social identities shape local encounters in their places of destination. The ‘migrant professionals’ concept the book presents refers to well-educated migrants, who differ from other migrants in one crucial respect: they can work as fully fledged professionals after migrating, and their skills and formal education are accepted in the destination country. This makes them more privileged than other migrants, as they are in a position to maintain relatively high status in the destination country and enjoy preferential treatment in many areas, such as easier access to the job market and privileges linked with their careers. The volume covers many urban settings, from London and Dubai to Jakarta and Melbourne, and offers an extensive variety of data, completed by interviews and participants’ observations, to provide us with valuable accounts of the ways local encounters and social identities of migrant professionals shape each other in view of such privileges, all of which deserves our attention and praise.

At first glance, a book on the relevance of locality for shaping social identities and the relevance of social identities in local encounters may seem dated to some readers—the overall scholarship on the ‘urban’, either from a sociological, anthropological, geographical, political or economic standpoint, is based on the fact that locality matters for shaping social identities, processes or mechanisms. And yet, not many books successfully manage to give us detail and rich evidence of why, when, to whom