

# URBANITIES

The Journal of the IUAES Commission on Urban Anthropology

---

Volume 4 • Number 1 • May 2014



ISSN 2239-5725

interesting, ethnographically engaged piece, which offers real insight into the world of Irish paganism in a post-Catholic context. Together, through an ethnographic engagement with the lived experience of urban change during the Celtic Tiger, the essays impress upon us how the intersections of migration, religious dynamism, and economic disparity created a new Ireland.

This collection of essays came about after what are comparably short stints of fieldwork. What is most welcome then about these essays is the ethnographic depth and intellectual insights they offer up. *Cultural Contrasts in Dublin* is not alone a lovely read, but is, undoubtedly, a book which makes an important contribution to a now radically different anthropology of Ireland.

Fiona Murphy  
Dublin City University  
[fiona.e.murphy@dcu.ie](mailto:fiona.e.murphy@dcu.ie)

---

Sharon Zukin, *Naked City: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places* (Oxford University Press, 2010)

Sharon Zukin is a professor of sociology at Brooklyn College and the Graduate Center, City University of New York. Her latest book, *Naked City*, is the result of a series of works devoted to the culture of cities (Zukin 1982 [1989], 1991, 1995 and 2004). In *Naked City*, she develops a conversation with Jane Jacobs' (1916-2006) seminal work *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961). This book was highly critical of urban policies of wholesale

slum clearance and highway development. Jacobs sought to preserve the simple qualities of diverse local urban life, especially for pedestrians. Zukin agrees with Jacobs' intellectual and environmental sensibilities and suggests that the city has 'lost its soul'. In the present day, reinvestment in cities is taking place, suburbanites are returning to spaces they had abandoned, and industrial buildings are being retrofitted for residential uses. These economic dynamics also have a powerful cultural dimension.

Zukin links this urban transformation to the emergence of middle-class gentrifiers who seek authenticity by sinking their roots into particular, culturally rich, neighborhoods. She explored this broad issue by focusing on the concept of authenticity, which raises some questions: Is the idea of authenticity only a tool preserving a city's elite cultures? Can it be used to ensure everyone has right to stay in the place where they live and work? What do educated urbanities see as 'authentic' in urban life? — aging buildings, art galleries, small boutiques, upscale food markets, neighbourhood old-timers, funky ethnic restaurants, old family owned shops? The sense of a place's authenticity is contrasted to the bland standardization of the suburbs and exurbs. But this demand for space also led to a rise in real estate prices and, consequently, the eviction of the social groups that made the 'authentic' atmosphere of the neighbourhood: immigrants, working-class residents, and artists. Like Jacobs, Zukin looks at

what gives neighbourhoods a sense of place, but argues that over time, neighbourhood distinctiveness has become a tool used by economic elites to drive up real estate values. The result is that the neighbourhood 'characters' that Jacobs so evocatively idealized are pushed out. She also examines the role of local government in providing security for the authentic city. From the privatization of public spaces (such as Union Square Park and the new Harlem renaissance) these operations attract the white middle- classes into onetime ghettos, thereby redefining many once marginal New York City neighbourhoods.

Zukin examined authenticity in New York City in six chapters, six stories: Williamsburg (Brooklyn), Harlem, the East Village, Union Square, Red Hook (Brooklyn), and a community garden in East New York. In each chapter Zukin describes the feeling of the neighbourhood, gives historical context to the place, and then portrays the place as real, not abstract, with a history, and as active and changing places of interest. Zukin portrays a sociological tour of New York; a story of gentrification through the collective memory of the city. Thus, she raises the question of the history of the transformation of cities as reported by residents, businesses and governments. These snapshots of the city touch on the ways various neighbourhoods change: such as the role of artists and media in defining areas as 'cool'. She underlines the impact of digital media, food, and shopping. Zukin notes that many bloggers reside in Brooklyn

neighbourhoods that have experienced the most transformations in recent years. She underlines the role of food culture (healthy and tasty). She describes restaurants and stores which people prefer to patronize. According to Zukin, 'Authenticity' is the main thread running through all her observations in the city. Consumption is also elevated over everything else in terms of how we interact with the city. But authenticity may not be the solution to urban transformations that privilege some groups over others.

For a Parisian sociologist, the narrative that Sharon Zukin offers presents interesting similarities with New York. Indeed, as noted by Simmel (1900), an urbanite is par excellence foreign, rootless and without strong attachments. As shown thirty years later by the Chicago School of sociology and anthropology, no urban district is exempt from the phenomena of invasion or succession of people who change local society. Paris is no exception to this rule and we have neighbourhoods that have become 'gritty' with restaurants serving 'nouvelle cuisine', old rehabilitated buildings, terraces and pedestrian streets, and increasingly higher real estate prices. However, we cannot uncritically translate American urban analyses to the French situation. For example, in the Goutte d'Or Parisian popular neighbourhood I studied, gentrification has not evolved on a landlocked urban desert: there are jobs, businesses and governments that have not been erased from the common scene. A large part of the local population belongs to the working class,

and it still has a large number of foreign nationals. One reason for this resistance to gentrification is the social housing built by the city of Paris. The other major reason is that even when residential gentrification takes place, there is strong resistance to commercial gentrification because the non-gentrifiers who live in the neighbourhood continue to frequent the local shops. Thus, on the one hand in gentrifying neighbourhoods we see the influx of wide variety of middle class residents experiencing the flexibility of employment, teachers, artists, as well as heirs of wealthy families. On the other hand, we observe how the poorest resist, and try to stay in the core of the city. What Zukin shows as to gentrification in New York City has much in common with the Parisian scene. Thanks to her insightful work, it is possible to make a comparative study of gentrification, and consolidate the scholarship on how cities are being transformed in XXI century. For this enterprise Sharon Zukin's *Naked City* is fundamental.

#### References

- Jacobs, J. (1961). *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. New York: Random House.
- Zukin, S. (1982). *Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press (Revised. Edition, New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989).
- Zukin, S. (1991). *Landscapes of Power: From Detroit to Disney World*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press
- Zukin, S. (2004). *Point of purchase: How shopping changed American*

*culture*. New York and London: Routledge

Zukin, S. (1995). *The Cultures of Cities*. London: Blackwell.

Yankel Fijalkow

Professor in Social Sciences  
National school of Architecture Paris Val de Seine, UMR LAVUE CNRS

[Yankel.fijalkow@paris-valdeseine.archi.fr](mailto:Yankel.fijalkow@paris-valdeseine.archi.fr)