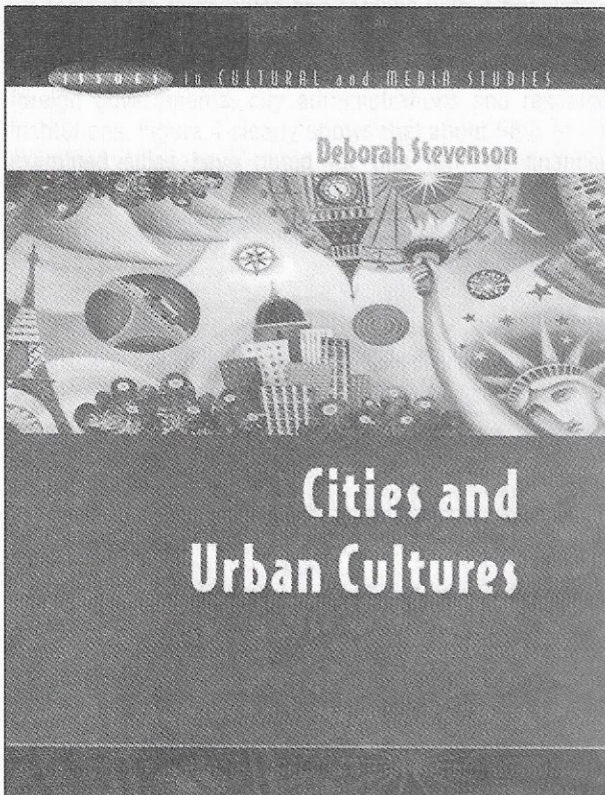




CITIES AND URBAN CULTURES



Deborah Stevenson:
Cities and Urban Cultures.
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164 pages

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The author, Deborah Stevenson, coming from NSW, Australia reflects analytically the problems of cities and urban cultures on sociological basis. Her name is connected with many works published in the fields of Sociology, Urban Sociology, Social Urbanism or Cultural Studies. Central to Deborah Stevenson's book are the questions about cultural imaginings of cities as lived spaces, as she is writing (p.6) about it: „Cities and Urban Cultures seeks to make sense of range of culturally informed theories of the city by considering them alongside broader (established) urban studies traditions“,... „also explores some of the key themes in the study and the development of the city since the industrial revolution“. She has demonstrated it, probably for the first time in this field, through an interdisciplinary approach. In general it can be said that the highest asset of the book is primarily in the field of theory and methodology. The author tackles the concepts that are also under the attention of other authors but she compares, analyses, summarises and redefines them. The most important conceptual fields in her work are:

1. Cities and Towns.
2. Urban Sociology,
3. Urban Anthropology.
4. City and Town Life.
5. Postmodernism and Social Aspects.

When interpreting the concept of urbanism she emphasises the importance of the period since the approach of various theoreticians differ. They are especially different in the characteristics of urbanism in the 19th century, including the sociologists Max Weber and completely different in the characteristics of urbanism in the 20th century, where:

„Urban sociology has connected with and informed the work of many within other disciplines including human geography, urban planning, economics and urban history... and in same time, for instance, were sociology and her established methods and interpretative frames were (paradoxically) both being challenged and augmented by the insights of cultural theory...The result of these differing influences has been the opening of a number of potentially fruitful pathways for urban research and analysis...“ (p. 5). At the same time it is necessary to stress that „Dialogue between the cultural studies and more sociological approaches to the urban has not been easy and attempts to bring, the considerable insights of each together have often been strained (Morris, 1992, Deutsche, 1996)

Several concepts in the Index are included also in the Glossary (pp. 141- 143) where the author also comments on the above mentioned concept of urbanism. Originally considered premise that urbanism was the way of life of people who live in cities, she uses better under the concept of urbanism understood as „ a dynamic process that refers



to people's use of and identification with the places of the city. This process occurs within the context of a range cultural, social and political influences. The terms urbanism and city cultures can be used interchangeably. Urbanization is then „the process of urban expansion that changes the relationship between the proportion of the population living in the country and the proportion living in the city“ (p. 143).

Monograph *Cities and Urban Cultures* is a timely and richly perceptive exploration of a fascinating subject. The author begins the discussion by highlighting the historical and intellectual foundations of the study of cities and urban culture. She proceeds to show how people's everyday experiences of Urban life can be deeply contradictory, being simultaneously sources of exhilaration, fear and apprehension or she proceeds to show the ways in which we know and imagine the city, framing its past but also the prospects for its future renewal. The book is structured into main chapters:

- 1.City cultures,
- 2.Landscapes of shadow and smog: The emergence of the industrial city,
- 3.Cities of difference: inequality, marginalization and fear,
- 4.Meaning and memory: Reading the urban text
- 5.Designing the urban: from the city beautiful to the „end“ of modernism,
- 6.The city of spectacle: Culture and the reimagining of cities,
- 7.Imagining the city: movies, maps and cyberspace

Several of them, we can draw near, for instance :

- in chapter 2, there is an important theme of the book – contrast between the rural and the urban , this contrast has informed the real and the imagined, the lived and the structural
- chapter 3 brings the many discourses of globalization, especially those which celebrate „local“

- the contributions of modernism and postmodernism to the built environment and the discourses of urbanism (including in Architecture and Urban design) is in chapter 5
- chapter 6 informs more about the rural-urban dichotomy, including the number of contemporary visions of urban utopias
- in chapter 7, there are important problems of the virtual city, cyber-community, or popular urban village, they are reworking of the rural- urban dichotomy

The conclusions in the 8th chapter are interested by their considerations: Beyond urbanism? In this discourse the author advocates for the meaning that: „ When culturally informed insights into the fabric of everyday urban life are combined with more structural understandings of the big processes that continue to build cities and construct environments of fear, inequality and disadvantage, the result must be a much richer understanding of the contemporary city and urban cultures. The task of a book such as this, therefore, is to provide a number of pathways through this interpretative maze.“ (s. 136)...

Its only then that we might begin to understand the complexity and fluidity of the city, its cultures and possible futures“...(s.140) Each of the her books is intended to provide a lively, innovative and comprehensive introduction to a specific topical issue from a fresh perspective.

The book contains of 164pages and is written based on extensive reference sources what can be seen in the References (pp. 144-158). The reader is offered a thorough grounding in the most salient debates indicative of the book's subject as well as important insides into how new modes of enquiry may be established for future explorations. The book can be recommended to broad urban and architectural community and is of high value for their professional practice.

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