

**Ljungkvist, Kristin, 2014. *The Global City 2.0: An International Actor beyond Economism?* Skrifter utgivna av Statsvetenskapliga föreningen i Uppsala 189. Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis.**

Review by Jan Aart Scholte

Kristin Ljungkvist's excellent doctoral thesis completed at Uppsala University explores the role of the so-called 'Global City' as an actor in contemporary world politics. In the broadest sense the dissertation presents a study of how today's 'global politics' is different from the 'international relations' of an earlier era. We live in times of new geographies, new economies, new polities, new identities, new ecologies. How do cities fit into these ongoing global transformations? How are 'global' cities having direct participation in, and influence on, world politics?

As the dissertation reminds readers early on, the notion of a 'global city' goes back several decades, especially to the work of Saskia Sassen in the early 1990s (Sassen 1991). However, Ljungkvist's thesis takes two important steps with the concept. First, the idea of 'global city' is rescued from the hands of municipal branding consultants to become an analytical lynchpin for understanding contemporary world politics. Second, Ljungkvist explores a '2.0' conception of global city, saying that 'the time has come to re-examine what it means to be and to govern a Global City' (p. 287).

The thesis especially places '1.0' economic notions of the global city under critical scrutiny. Sassen and others have highlighted the role of global cities in a new transplanetary economy of finance and communications. Ljungkvist instead puts the focus on ecological and security issues, asking whether and how a global city might be an autonomous actor in these other policy domains. New York City is taken as a case study, including in particular its policies on climate change and counter-terrorism.

The dissertation is impressively interdisciplinary, at the intersection of urban studies (itself already a disciplinary mix) and international relations (which likewise also often draws from diverse disciplinary streams). Ljungkvist is comfortably at home in both spheres as well as their intersections. The thesis is an excellent example of actually accomplished interdisciplinarity, as opposed to empty talk.

In terms of theory the study takes a social constructivist approach to its subject. That is, the dissertation assumes that social relations are as they are because of the ways that persons through their communications with one another come to ideas about their identities, norms and interests. Thus the thesis explores how New York's local authorities narrate their experience of being and governing a 'global city'. The global city is in this sense what its players intersubjectively make it to be.

In addition, the thesis draws on role theory as a way to link constructions of collective identity to political action. So 'role' interconnects ideas about who New Yorkers are, what is the city interest, and local government policy. Ljungkvist highlights three specific types of role formulation: economic neoliberal thinking; governance conceptions; and security and risk constructions. The question then is whether and how far the latter two role-types are at play in New York City government, thereby indicating that the economic of established '1.0' understandings of the global city are incomplete.

The empirical part of the study examines counter-terrorism and climate change policies of New York City. The accumulated evidence shows how remarkably active and autonomous the local government of New York has become in global politics around these issues. The thesis presents compelling accounts of New York City's own 'military' apparatus and its own global 'intelligence' functions, separate from the FBI and the CIA. Likewise, the city decidedly takes its own course on global warming, with committees and programmes

that go their separate ways from the federal US government.

However, the thesis finds more mixed evidence on the question of whether New York City goes 'beyond economism'. True, narratives of the global city cannot be reduced to neoliberal discourses about markets, economic competition and economic growth. However, even regarding issue-areas such as counter-terrorism and climate change, the thesis finds that the economic role construction figures strongly. At its close the thesis concludes that 'sooner or later [everything] will be framed in terms of its importance for the city's economic growth and global competitiveness' (p. 297) and 'economistic ideas and narratives about the Global City will likely prevail in the end' (p. 288). So although the global city in New York has gone beyond economism, perhaps the meter has reached 1.5 rather than 2.0.

Ahead of some more critical reflections it is important to stress that this is a most impressive doctoral dissertation. It makes significant original contributions to knowledge, both conceptually and empirically. The thesis thoroughly reviews the existing literature and firmly stakes its claim to new ground. The analysis builds around very careful consideration of theory and method. Empirically the work is admirably detailed and carefully weighed. All is laid out very clearly and logically. Each time the scrutinizing reader is ready to pounce on a weak link in the argument the point is addressed on the next page. The author's self-criticism is always one step ahead. The dissertation is also very lucidly written.

Given this high quality, as well as the author's openness to debate, the reader is invited to pose deep challenging questions. One such issue is the relationship of 'international', 'global' and 'world', terms which are often used interchangeably in the thesis and not explicitly distinguished. Does it make a conceptual difference to describe urban conglomerates such as New York as 'international

cities', 'world cities' or 'global cities'? Is the designation of 'global' city not a deliberate signal of a different logic from 'international relations'? Trans-local relations within global realms operate with considerable autonomy from relations between territorial nation-states. This point can be blurred somewhat when, as this thesis sometimes does (including in its title), the 'global' city is described as an 'international' actor.

Another teasing question arises concerning the threshold of global-ness: at what point does a city become a Global City (in the upper case that this thesis likes to employ)? How does one determine that Stockholm, Göteborg, Uppsala, Luleå or Köpingebro are (or are not) a 'Global City'? Must certain material prerequisites be met, relating to infrastructure, population, strategic location, etc.? Or, in constructivist fashion, can any human settlement be a Global City if its authorities and other residents reflexively describe and self-identify their locality as being global?

This latter question raises issues about the theoretical approach of the thesis. Certainly it is, as this dissertation amply shows, interesting to investigate how roles and actions are shaped by self-conceptions developed through intersubjective communication. However, can global city-ness be understood wholly as a product of discursive construction? Are there not additional circumstances which would make New Yorkers more likely to narrate a global city script than residents upriver in Albany? Similarly, do economic understandings of the global city arise only because people talk themselves into the situation, and 'economistic assumptions become self-fulfilling' (p. 290)? In other words, does one need alongside examining narrative also to examine forces which generate the narrative itself? The narrative might 'render intelligible' the situation (p. 281), but that is not the same as to generate the situation itself?

Ljungkvist implicitly accepts this general proposition by affirming that 'social structures' of 'the international [sic?] political

sphere' shape the 'role' of a global city (p. 14). A further question is of course to specify the character of such structural forces. However, in common with much other constructivist research the argument struggles somewhat to pin down this diagnosis. Potentially one could understand the relevant social structures as regimes (on neoliberal-institutionalist lines) or capitalism (on critical political economy lines) or disciplining discourses (on poststructuralist lines) or some other pattern. However, on this issue this thesis refrains from pinning its sail to any particular mast.

Certainly the thesis does not adopt a structuralist approach. On Ljungkvist's account the Global City is also 'a politically active agent' (p. 26). The perspectives and initiatives of local authorities make a distinct difference. The dissertation gives the activities of Michael Bloomberg as mayor of New York particular attention in this respect. How the Global City role is performed therefore has much to do with the individuals who are on stage. The empirical analysis of the thesis shows in detail how pivotal players in the municipal government have given precise content and direction to the global city-ness of New York.

To get at these and other empirical details, Ljungkvist has undertaken extensive dissertation research on the ground in New York City. This site was selected as the 'most important case' of the Global City phenomenon. True, one might alternatively wonder whether New York is a 'most exceptional case', along with several others such as London and Tokyo, so that the dissertation's findings might not readily be replicated elsewhere. Whatever the response to that point, New York City is certainly a location where global city attributes and narratives are prominent and thus more easily studied.

Evidence for the dissertation has been gathered mainly from public documents and personal interviews with selected policymakers, experts, intellectuals and media actors. On constructivist lines, the main eye has been on narratives of collective identity. How

do the actors script their global city-ness? How do they construct stories about where 'we' (as global New Yorkers) come from? And how should 'we' (as global New Yorkers) act? Perhaps the research could also have honed in on narratives of 'where we (global New Yorkers) are going', inasmuch as identity is about becoming as well as being. Nevertheless, much rich material is assembled on the other dimensions of identity construction.

In the field Ljungkvist needed to have much patience and initiative to reach the sources, particularly for interviews. It turns out that a global city government – at least in the case of New York – is not necessarily more accessible on questions of economy and security policy than a national government or a global governance institution. Indeed, inasmuch as local makers of global policies are not accustomed to the curiosity of academics, it might actually be more difficult to conduct empirical research on global cities.

The dissertation has therefore had to rely on published documentation more heavily than Ljungkvist originally intended. One might wonder how this pattern of available sources could affect the research results. The author suggests that this weighting towards public statements 'is not necessarily of crucial importance' (p. 122). Yet might private narratives (as revealed through interviews and confidential archives) have revealed stronger inclinations towards economic conceptions of the global city, whereas environmental and security conceptions might flow more readily in rhetoric produced for public consumption?

As for the scope of fieldwork, it is unfair to demand too much of a dissertation that has already accomplished so much in a challenging research environment. Still, one could reflect on the possibilities of broadening the source base of evidence. For example, Ljungkvist focused data gathering on the New York City government. Some mention is made of the importance, in the construction of global city-ness, of relations between the municipal authorities and other

sites of government, such as New York State, the United States Government, and global networks such as the C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group. However, perhaps more attention could be given in future research to the ways that interaction with outside parties shapes New York City government's sense of global-ness.

From still another angle one could perhaps also wonder what sorts of narratives about the global city might have emerged from data collection among subaltern circles within New York City. This dissertation research was limited to role conceptions formulated by elites. The author affirms that these narratives 'appear to be the most relevant' (p. 95). Yet which, and whose, criteria determine this greatest relevance? Why not bring in marginalised city-zens, such as sexual minorities in Greenwich Village or impoverished African-Americans in the South Bronx? Would it not be interesting and important to see how the global city looks through their eyes? It is perhaps not surprising to find 'considerable continuity in these types of stories [about the global city]' (p. 108) if one engages only a sociologically limited circle of informants?

In this regard could one worry slightly at the dissertation's talk of 'the city interest'? Critiques of realist international relations theory suggest that notions of 'the national interest' impose an artificial uniformity on the perspectives and contexts of a country's population: one person or group's 'national interest' is not the same as another's. Indeed, what governing elites proclaim to be 'the national interest' often turns out to be a hegemonic legitimation of their own power and privileges vis-à-vis the general public, whose lives might in fact be better served by other policies. Could ideas of 'the city interest' not be prone to this kind of hegemony as well?

This question takes one, finally, to the issue of democratic legitimacy that Ljungkvist poses at the end of this most engaging PhD dissertation. The global city might be intuitively celebrated as a way to bring transplanetary policy

concerns (such as climate change, financial markets and counter-terrorism) under greater public control. The city government might at first blush seem 'closer' to citizens than the nation-state and suprastate governance. However, Ljungkvist concludes from this research that the local is not necessarily more democratic than other spheres (pp. 298–300) and leaves open the question of how the global city fits into global democracy.

#### REFERENCES

Sassen, Saskia, 1991. *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

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**Lundberg, Erik, 2014. *A Pluralist State? Civil Society Organizations' Access to the Swedish Policy Process 1964–2009*. Örebro universitet: Institutionen för humaniora, utbildnings- och samhällsvetenskap, akademisk avhandling, Örebro Studies in Political Science 38.**

Anmälan av Göran Sundström.

#### SAMMANFATTNING AV AVHANDLINGEN

Denna avhandling diskuterar civilsamhällets inflytande på den svenska beslutsprocessen på statlig nivå. Inflytandet mäts via två tillträdespunkter: det statliga kommittéväsendet och remissväsendet. Det är en sammanläggningsavhandling bestående av en inledande kappa – med forskningsproblem, syfte, frågeställningar, teori, begrepp, metod och resultat – och fyra publicerade vetenskapliga artiklar (tre engelska och en svensk) där studiens empiriska undersökningar presenteras.

Lundberg tar utgångspunkt i den vetenskapliga diskussionen om att den traditionella