Bridging Divides: Enabling Urban Capabilities

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Cities benefit from two key conditions, both with direct implications for social, cultural, and economic integration. One is a large middle class and a large sector of modest profit-making firms, distinct from a sharp concentration of incomes and profits. The other is a well-distributed urban economy: robust neighborhood subeconomies preventing excessive economic concentration in the center, and good transportation for people and goods—not only to the center but also transversally. Securing the conditions cannot solve racial and sexual violence, environmental destruction, and other problems. But the weakening of the middle sectors since the 1980s has not solved these problems either, bringing new economic negatives. Cities worldwide have seen growing inequality, devastated neighborhood subeconomies, and rising racial and sexual violence. These developments signal that extreme inequality is not good for cities or most urban residents.

The post–World War II decades into the 1980s best illustrate the growth of the middle sectors—from Europe to large swathes of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Cities were generally poorer than they are today, as measured by municipal GDP and municipal government budgets, and as a share of national wealth and income. But their economies were better distributed, with far more small firms and middle-class households. Despite some brutal exceptions, such as apartheid in South Africa and racial segregation in the United States, cities in this era generally had less violence, crime, and religious conflict. Many cities with diverse religions that are today aflame saw peaceful coexistence, bordering on indifference, in that earlier period.

We cannot go back to that era. Indeed, even the cities that continue to benefit from such basic conditions today must confront rapid population growth and the associated challenges of integration in labor markets, housing, and transport. The urban economy is marked by capture at the top, poorer middle classes, larger destitute populations, and more crime and conflict. These challenges, though present in cities the world over, play out differently in smaller, prosperous cities in Europe and North America than in megacities in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

But cities today are also seeing a massive upgrading of infrastructure in city centers and high-value neighborhoods. This is due partly to the expansion of high-end business districts and residential areas—and their associated expulsions of more modest firms and households. One outcome is widespread homelessness and destitution, even in cities where these problems had become rare by the mid- to late 20th century. The reasons for this juxtaposition vary enormously due to the differences among cities and among the national economies and societies in which they function. Some cities are sinking under the weight of the negatives, while others are, more recently, succeeding.

**When clashing visual orders obscure economic articulations**

Two aspects are often overlooked in discussions about urban economies, whether small or large, global or local. One is that there are multiple articulations between backward and advanced sectors, no matter how different their urban spaces. The second, a critical instance of the first, is
that a particular type of manufacturing is very much a part of today’s urban service economies, including the most advanced.

How advanced economic sectors interact with backward sectors is a key indicator of a city’s economic health. Considered by some a relic from days passed, many backward sectors actually serve the advanced economic sectors and their high-income employees. Today’s cities have a type of urban manufacturing geared to design sectors of all sorts (from jewelry to furniture design, architecture, and interior decoration); cultural industries (theaters and opera houses need sets and costumes, and museums and galleries need display settings for their collections); building trades (customized woodwork and metalwork); and other sectors of advanced service-based economies (the staging in luxury shops and restaurants, displays in corporate headquarters). Because urban manufacturing is deeply networked and operates in contracting and subcontracting chains, it inverts the historical relation between manufacturing and services. Moreover, because urban manufacturing is often fairly customized and hence needs to be near its customers and a diverse pool of top craftspeople, it should be seen as infrastructure for integration.

But the visual orders and topographies of major cities do not help us see these articulations. The increasingly homogenized environments of the glamour zone are visually disconnected from the informal economy and urban manufacturing and, at their most extreme, with slums in global south cities. Making these articulations visible would help policy makers and urban civic organizations interested in more urban integration.

Some types of material economies, including those I refer to as urban manufacturing, are critical even in advanced knowledge sectors. These kinds of urban material economies matter enormously for cities and vice versa. Urban manufacturing, both formal and informal, thrives in cities and, if properly recognized, could contribute to a better distributed economy that produces more mid-level jobs and firms with mid-level profits rather than large profits.

Urban manufacturing is often highly specialized—but just as often in ways that analyses of the knowledge economy overlook. Unlike mass manufacturing, it needs to be in cities or urban areas because it is networked, is based on multiple supplier and contractor links, and needs direct contact with customers. And it varies enormously across cities, reflecting their differing economic histories. For instance, when major producers of fiber optics, light-emitting diodes, and other advanced glass components sought to expand, one potential site was Toledo, Ohio. This old industrial city beat out high-tech cities, such as Austin, Texas, for these factories. The key was that Toledo had a long history of manufacturing traditional industrial glass products and a knowledgeable workforce that could be trusted with the new types of glass production.

In cities with extreme inequalities, where the advanced economy captures most of the income and profits, urban manufacturing partly shifts to slums. This is evident in cities as diverse as Istanbul, Mumbai, and São Paulo. All three have long histories of manufacturing and have seen
the emergence of a new type of urban manufacturing that services advanced sectors—from design to culture. Whether in cities or in slums, urban manufacturing often goes unrecognized by economic development experts and planners or is misunderstood as an impediment to an advanced urban economy. The spaces and visual orders of urban manufacturing do not fit the image of the advanced economy and are thus easily seen as backward leftovers.

In cities where the advanced economy captures a disproportionate share of income and profits, initiatives that cut across the divide of the economic center and economic periphery can make an enormous social and economic difference for the city at large. A growing number of municipal governments have recognized this, instituting diverse strategies that incorporate marginal areas and groups into mainstream economic circuits. We see a significant effort to overcome barriers that keep the poor from realizing their work capacities simply because they cannot get to their workplaces. Much can be done through transport initiatives that recognize the importance of connecting workers and economies, city centers, and their peripheries. Examples can be found in many cities.

More generally, today’s political economy clearly needs and generates a growing number of global cities. Together, these cities form a multisited, advanced infrastructure for global actors—economic and cultural, professionals and immigrants. But far less recognized is the rise of global slums in major cities of the global south. Most slums are not global, just as most cities are not. Yet, despite the immobilities of their inhabitants, some slums are becoming actors with global projection. Dharavi in Mumbai, perhaps the best known of these slums, is one of the most developed, with its many informal enterprises catering to some of the city’s major economic sectors. São Paulo has several major slums, some quite international, with migrant workers and small entrepreneurs from Peru and other neighboring countries. And La Salada in Buenos Aires, drawing both locals and immigrants into its manufacturing and trading activities, is now South America’s largest informal market.4

One way to capture these less visible dynamics is to think of the urban economy as traversed by myriad specialized circuits connecting sectors to a far broader range of urban activities than is usually understood. Even finance, when disaggregated into these circuits, has been shown to be linked to urban manufacturing suppliers, often through the design and building trades.

Many smaller cities have the skilled workers and potential for developing an urban manufacturing sector linked to somewhat routine corporate services. This is due to the urbanization of a growing range of economic components of nonurban sectors; for example, mining and large-scale manufacturing firms buy many of their corporate services in cities. Firms in all economic sectors nowadays are buying more insurance, legal, and accounting services. The services needed by the more conventional economic sectors (heavy manufacturing, mining, industrial agriculture, transportation) can be produced in smaller cities. Further, the presence of a corporate services sector, along with the resulting growth of a high-income workforce that prefers urban living, in turn generates a demand for urban manufacturing. Such urban living
entails a bundle of demands—for high-end restaurants and shops, for museums and cultural events, for customized furniture and metalwork, and for the renovation of older buildings, many of which create demand for urban manufacturing. A lack of support from policy makers, and even from analysts and researchers, can quash the potential for developing a healthy urban manufacturing sector.

A network effect lies at the heart of urban economies. The sector connections described above is one reason to reject the widespread tendency among city governments to privilege the advanced services and neglect most other sectors. Such privileging is a profound mistake. It means missing the opportunity to articulate the multiple components of urban economies more strongly and effectively. And to a city’s advantage, most firms, whatever their sector, cannot move out without losing this effect, and so are more likely to stay. A city that puts in the effort and resources necessary to develop most of its sectors can have a diversified urban economy, including the extremes of urban manufacturing and advanced services. This also means a diversified social structure and neighborhood subeconomies. Dynamic advanced services and cultural sectors can drive demand for urban manufacturing products. Indeed, that is a condition for having a dynamic urban manufacturing sector and, as I argue, specifies it.5

These types of economic articulations across sectors, which look as if they have nothing to do with each other, are a solid infrastructure for social integration policies, because they feed job growth across a broad range of jobs and incomes. This can help reduce the violence and anger growing in so many cities worldwide where elites grow richer and the rest see their earnings fall and their jobs disappear.

Women in cities: obstacles and vectors to urban inclusion

There are many ways that gendering promotes the types of inequality that can be an obstacle to making cities inclusive, some going well beyond hurting women themselves. But in urban space, the absence of a gendered perspective is the main obstacle to urban inclusion in gendered societies. It is the failure to recognize women’s needs for public space, transport routes, street safety, and more. Genderless urban planning in societies that are mostly still gendered works against many women, though not all. Women face challenges in access to essential services, housing security, livability, and mobility. The fear and insecurity women experience in many cities is often invisible to men, though young boys and children generally do experience their own forms of fear.

Cities, urban cultures, and the safety experienced by women, men, and children varies enormously across the world. Here I examine a few aspects of this vast subject.

A solid body of research documents the ways that women are disadvantaged in the use of urban space—be it public parks, feeling safe, or access to transport. Thus, while there is good critical work on cities, much of it is based on neutral concepts as they relate to gendering: family, population, transport, business districts, and so on. There is urgent need to revisit urban planning
from a gender perspective. Basic urban systems do not respond to women’s needs. Falu and Segovia (2007) observe an appropriation of women’s time through inconvenient distances to transport, shopping, schools, health services, and possibly jobs. For instance, men commute to and from their jobs, and traffic systems are geared mostly to this pattern, albeit with significant differences in quality and frequency by an area’s income level. Women, however, often combine work and family and need short interconnected trajectories given their fragmented uses of time.

These urban patterns point to an appropriation of women’s time and a devaluing of their economic contribution in both their homes and their paid jobs. Ana Falu takes this a step further and argues that the different values assigned to their activities are the central gender system for organizing urban space. For instance, the public sphere is marked mostly masculine, so it acquires economic and social value; the private sphere, marked mostly feminine, is given only symbolic value.

Such gendering effects often take on specific forms within a female population through ethnic, race, status, and religious variables, with certain combinations producing the most devastating effects. In South America, being a poor indigenous woman produces the sharpest negative outcomes. Indeed, they are likely to be the lowest paid but also the most threatened in public space. Another particularly vulnerable and growing population are immigrant women, who even if lawful residents face the threat of deportation if they should report abuse or mistreatment. Box 3.1 describes an initiative in Hong Kong that helps immigrant household workers. Fear itself, even without actual violence or abuse, can become a deterrent for women to claim their rights or to use public space and public transport. Wars can bring some of the most acute needs for women. One initiative addressed this in Afghanistan, a country racked by more than three decades of war. The damage to the country’s human capital, especially that of women and girls, has been devastating (box 3.2).

**Box 1. Foreign domestic worker rights, Hong Kong**

Hong Kong relies heavily on migrants to meet the demands of the local labor market. In 2012, some 230,000 foreign women—mostly Filipino, Thai, and Indonesian—worked in the city as live-in cooks, nannies, and maids. Under Hong Kong’s immigration law, foreign domestic workers (FDWs) are bound exclusively to their employers by two-year contracts. The contracts require FDWs to live in their employer’s home, and should they be fired, they have just two weeks to find new employment or be deported. The ever-present threat of deportation is a significant constraint on FDWs’ ability to report abuse or mistreatment, and many employers take advantage. Indeed, of Indonesian domestic workers in Hong Kong, 42 percent were paid less than they agreed on with their employers. In 2001, more than 25 percent of FDWs reported verbal or physical abuse, with a high prevalence of sexual abuse.

The Bethune House Migrant Women’s Refuge was founded in 1986 to help migrant women in need, especially those fired by their employers or who have fled their abuse. The refuge’s goal, beyond freeing women from unsafe or abusive working conditions, is to develop their ability to advocate for themselves—both in society and in a court of law. The refuge provides legal aid and arranges for FDWs to observe legal proceedings so that they can become familiar with the process and empower themselves as self-advocates. Some former FDWs use the skills and knowledge they gained through the Bethune House to advocates for other migrant workers.
Box 2. Female Youth Employment Initiative, Afghanistan

Afghanistan has been racked by more than three decades of war, and the damage to its human capital, especially of women and girls, has been devastating. In 2006, the United States Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization estimated that the literacy rate among adolescents ages 15–24 was at most 20 percent.1 During the Taliban’s rule (1996–2001), women were excluded from the education system, and literacy for rural women fell to as low as 10 percent. In 2007, six years after the fall of the Taliban, women made up less than a third of students in school.2 With the U.S. military’s withdrawal on the horizon, along with the rollback of international aid, Afghanistan needs to maximize its human capital to integrate into the global economy.

To help tackle this challenge, the World Bank, the Nike Foundation, and the Government of Denmark have partnered to fund the Afghanistan Female Youth Employment Initiative. The pilot program, launched in 2009, targets women ages 15–27 living in Mazar-e-Sharif, the capital of Balkh Province, and seeks to equip them with nontraditional skills so that they can participate in export opportunities made possible by the city’s proximity to Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.3 Urban Afghanistan has received disproportionately little aid money for education; the pilot seeks to redress this imbalance and give Afghan women not just education but also marketable skills. As of 2012, the pilot project had created opportunities for some 1,300 young women to receive education and occupational training from private nongovernmental organizations in Afghanistan.4

But women have organized in cities across the world to get men, communities, and governments to address their disadvantages. They have pushed or forced their governments and employers to provide needed facilities. For instance, a common issue is the long work commutes for poor working women and their children. This is particularly acute for breastfeeding women in poor countries, who lack the options available to working women in the developed world (including sterile and refrigerated receptacles for storing milk). Breast milk should not be wasted given extreme food insecurity and malnutrition in poor countries. Box 3.3 describes an initiative that addresses this challenge. Another type of initiative that has benefitted women is cash transfers through diverse mechanisms. One targeted effort that has worked well is Peru’s Juntos project (box 3.4). These cases illustrate initiatives that could work anywhere.

Box 3. Childcare for factory workers, Bangladesh

Bangladesh’s booming export economy is built in part on the backs of working women. Discounting associated industries, garment factories produce 10 percent of the country’s GDP and employ 3 million workers, 80 percent of them women.1 Each year, roughly 500,000 Bangladeshis migrate from the countryside to Dhaka, the capital, to find work.2 And even if they find work, their struggles are far from over. In 2010, 67 percent of people living in Mohammadpur slum, one of the city’s oldest and largest, earned less than 5,000 taka a month (roughly $60). The average household spent 3,232 taka a month on food and 933 taka a month on rent.3 These low wages and high expenses make it nearly impossible for mothers to stay home with their children, even in families where fathers are the primary wage earners. Children are often left unattended in dangerous conditions while their mothers work to support the family. If possible, older children stay home to care for their younger siblings—but at the expense of their education.4 In any case, poor women struggle to care for themselves and their families as they integrate into the urban workforce.

Many humanitarian and international organizations have provided significant aid to Bangladesh. The nongovernmental organization Phulki, however, identified a key problem—breastfeeding is all but impossible for mothers working in factories.5 Options available to working women in the developed world, such as expelling milk throughout the day and storing it in sterile, refrigerated containers, is not possible due to a lack of infrastructure and
education. Given Bangladesh’s high food insecurity and malnutrition, the discomfort that lactating women experience when they cannot discharge their milk, and breastfeeding’s many health benefits for both mothers and children, solving that problem alone would have been extremely valuable. But Phulki’s solution has grown to address other struggles that working migrant mothers face. Working directly with factory owners and employees, Phulki established factory-based daycare centers for children ages six weeks to two years. The organization establishes the centers, provides start-up support, and then turns their management over to factory owners. Factory employees gain access to affordable childcare and can breastfeed nursing children. Moreover, many of the factory owners take advantage of their relationship with Phulki to offer adult education classes on topics like family planning, literacy, and nutrition. Over 20 such factory-based childcare centers have been established.

Box 4. Juntos program: conditional cash transfers targeting women in Peru

Poverty in Latin America remains highly influenced by gender. But inequality is not static across the region. As many countries narrowed their wage, poverty, and education gaps, Peru fell behind. Despite a constitution that provides for equal rights, women hold only about 25 percent of land titles. Also, the legal tradition of “informal ownership” allows husbands to sell their wives’ property without permission, women earn about 46 percent less than men, and 38 percent of women report being victims of domestic violence.

Juntos, a conditional cash transfer government aid program established in 2005, has made significant headway not only in reducing family poverty and malnutrition but also in empowering women. Like other conditional cash transfer programs, Juntos pays needy families a small monthly stipend (about $33) in exchange for participating in health and education programs and obtaining government identification documents. Mothers of eligible families (women with children younger than 14 or pregnant women) are paid directly. Women who receive these payments are required to attend weekly training sessions that focus on basic reading and writing and are introduced to other programs that focus on empowerment, equality, and legal aid. A primary goal of these time-consuming training sessions is to hold Peruvian men responsible for household work and to change their attitudes toward the gendered division of labor. Women in the program have reported some success in this endeavor, with both men and women reporting that changes were taking hold. According to one man interviewed, “Before only men were the boss…Now it is different, we are changing … Previously, my wife did what I said, she didn’t give her opinion. Now she does, one can tell, and we reach a solution. Women’s opinions were less important. Now she gives her opinion regarding how to progress in life.” According to a woman, “We now have reached an agreement, we go alone to the bank. [Previously] men did not understand, they got annoyed even when we attended meetings. We were afraid and even had to miss meetings.” Another woman: “Out of jealousy, sometimes they asked us, ‘Why do you go? You leave your house unattended.’ … Now they don’t.” Juntos, with its strong impact on gender relations in Peru, is creating more links for women to integrate themselves into mainstream society.

And women themselves have fought to gain back the streets, develop safety audits, and fight for their rights to the city. Over the last two decades, movements have proliferated throughout the world—in Latin America, Africa, Asia-Pacific, Europe, and North America. We now have two decades of research and grassroots action on safer cities for women. One strong emergent approach is that of the rights to the city and a right to safety in the city. Immigrant women in New York City have organized a domestic workers union, a first in the city and perhaps in the country. Marta Fonseca and Sara Ortiz Escalante describe how women are making urban spaces inclusive by developing a series of urban diagnoses: gender audits of everyday life, walks
through a city to reclaim women’s history in that city, and deploying women wearing shirts with the sign “public women” in places of vulnerability. Their key starting point: “Neutral and universal planning does not exist. What this neutrality does is ignore diversity in our society based on gender, origin, social class, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, etc.” Perhaps one of the most impressive grassroots initiatives is Mother Centers, which aim to build social infrastructure in communities that have suffered economic dislocation. The initiative started in a few localities and has now spread to the world, with more than 800 centers (box 3.5).

**Box 5. Mother Centers International Network for Empowerment**

The Mother Centers International Network for Empowerment grew out of social research by the German Youth Institute in Munich in the early 1980s. Staff members discovered that preventative policies that enabled families to access community assets were much more effective than intervening after families fail. To facilitate this, they opened family-oriented, grassroots community centers (Mother Centers) to recreate family and community networks that had been damaged by socioeconomic dislocation. The main tenet of the organization is participation: everyone has something to contribute to the community, and the centers exist to facilitate that interaction. Many social service providers project the message that individuals seeking help have some kind of deficit (“You have a problem. Come to us, the experts, for help”), but at Mother Centers, everyone is a participant and a contributor, and the message is that they are needed (“You are good at at least one thing. Come to the Mother Center and contribute to the community”).

The fall of totalitarian governments in Eastern Europe created a huge demand for community infrastructure and social services that had disappeared in a sea of unemployment, violence, upheaval, and decay. Mothers at home with children faced severe isolation—not just from goods and services but also from human contact and social networks. The Mother Center initiative spread quickly through peer visits and exchanges in the post-socialist world and helped restore the contact points that are the foundation of coherent society.

The Mother Centers movement has continued to expand through grassroots peer exchanges and individual initiative. Today, there are more than 850 centers worldwide (not only in the United States, Germany, and the former socialist regimes of the European Union but also in countries like Rwanda and Cameroon). The centers are self-managed public spaces in neighborhoods that offer peer networks and drop-in childcare, facilitate access to community and employment resources, and expand children’s positive social space. They revolve around a drop-in coffee shop or other shared space where childcare is provided. And they offer adult education classes and services, such as hair cutting, secondhand shops, sewing classes, computer training, and job retraining. When possible, women are paid hourly for services, providing them with much-needed income and a sense of ownership and empowerment. Centers usually reach between 50 and 1,000 families per neighborhood. They supplement the usual social safety net—and in some cases replace it.

**Cities and political subjectivity: when powerlessness becomes complex**

Cities are key sites for making new norms and identities. Max Weber’s *The City* identifies a city’s ideal-typical features, the conditions that compel residents and leaders to craft innovative responses and adaptations to challenges—in short, to push the urban population into action. For Weber, the cities of the Late Middle Ages had these conditions: ideally a set of social structures that encourage individuality and innovation and hence are an instrument for change. But Weber did not find these qualities in the industrial cities of his time; he found that large factories and
corporate bureaucracies were dominating cities, robbing citizens of the ability to shape at least some of their cities’ features.

Another key idea in Weber’s work is that these transformations could instill larger foundational transformations beyond the city, offering the possibility of understanding changes that could—under certain conditions—eventually encompass all of society. Weber shows us how, in many cities, these changes led to what today might be called governance systems and citizenship. Political, economic, legal, and cultural struggles centered in cities can become the catalysts for new transurban developments in many institutional domains—markets, participatory governance, rights for members of the urban community regardless of lineage, judicial recourse, and cultures of engagement and deliberation.

Cities again emerged as strategic sites when the global era began, a trend counter-intuitive but now extensively documented. Global cities have sprung up across the world and emerged as strategic sites for innovation and transformation in multiple institutional domains. This process has not been painless. Key components of economic globalization and digitization concentrated in global cities produced dislocations and destabilizations of institutional orders in and beyond cities. Further, some of the key legal, regulatory, and normative frames for handling urban conditions are now part of national framings—much of what is called urban development policy is also national economic policy. The high concentration of these new dynamics in global cities forces both the powerful and the disadvantaged to craft new responses and innovations, albeit for very different types of survival.

By contrast, from the 1930s to the 1970s, when mass manufacturing dominated, cities had lost strategic functions and were not sites for creative institutional innovations. The large factory—at the heart of mass manufacturing and mass consumption—and the government were at the time the strategic sites of major institutional innovations. My own reading of the Fordist city corresponds to Weber’s in that the strategic scale under Fordism is the national scale—cities lose significance. But I part company with Weber in that the large Fordist factory and the mines became key sites for the making of a modern working class and a syndicalist project; it is not always the city that is the site for making new norms and identities.

With globalization and digitization—and all that they entail—global cities do emerge as strategic sites for making norms and identities. Some norms and identities, such as those of global managerial elites, project extreme power. Others, notably those of immigrant neighborhoods, project innovation under extreme duress. While the strategic transformations are concentrated sharply in global cities, many also develop (besides being diffused) in smaller or less global cities.

Weber’s observation about urban residents, rather than merely leading classes, is also pertinent for today’s global cities. Conditions in these cities are not only creating new power structures but also opening the door for new types of actors long without a political voice. The localization of
strategic components of globalization in these cities allows the disadvantaged to develop new ways of contesting global corporate power. And the growing numbers and diversity of the disadvantaged affords them a greater presence in these cities, in a way they could not on a plantation, for instance.

It is critical to uncover the differences between powerlessness and invisibility within this process of enabling the disadvantaged to contest global power and to gain presence in their engagement with power, indeed, also in their interactions with each other. Today, the localization of the most powerful global actors in global cities creates objective conditions for engaging power at a local scale. This makes powerlessness complex, even if it does not necessarily generate empowerment. Highly localized struggles are actually a form of global engagement, a horizontal, multisited recurrence of similar demands in cities the world over. Examples include the struggles against gentrification’s encroachments on minority and disadvantaged neighborhoods, as well as modest middle-class neighborhoods; the related struggles for the rights of the homeless, whose numbers increased in many cities starting in the 1980s; and demonstrations against police violence, often connected to gentrification and displacement. These struggles are different from the ghetto uprisings of the 1960s, which were short, intense eruptions damaging mostly the ghettos themselves.

Two conditions make some of today’s cities strategic sites, and both capture major transformations that are destabilizing older systems of organizing territory and politics. One is the rescaling of strategic territories that articulate the new politico-economic system and hence at least some features of power. The other is the partial unbundling or at least weakening of the country as the container of social processes, due to the variety of dynamics encompassed in globalization and digitization. The consequences of these two conditions are many; what matters here is that cities emerge as strategic sites for major economic processes and for new types of political actors. Even poor immobile individuals and marginalized communities can become part of a global space for making demands for justice, recognition, and voice.

The political practices in today’s global city differ from what might have arisen in Weber’s medieval city. In the medieval city, a set of practices allowed the burghers to set up systems for owning property and protecting it against more powerful actors, such as the king and the church, and to build defenses against despots. Today’s political practices, I would argue, have to do with the presence of those without power and with a politics that claims rights to the city rather than protection of property. What the two situations share is the notion that through these practices new forms of political subjectivity—that is, citizenship—are being established and that the city is a key site for this type of political work. The city is, in turn, partly built on these dynamics. Far more so than a peaceful and harmonious suburb, the contested city is where the civic is getting built. After centuries of the ascendance of the national state and the scaling of key economic dynamics at the national level, the city today is once again a scale for strategic economic and political dynamics.
Cities as frontier spaces: the hard work of keeping them open

One key condition for the city to survive as a space of complexity and diversity—and not merely as a high-density concrete jungle—is reducing conflict, whether originating in racism, government wars on terror, or the devastation of climate change.¹⁴

Can the urbanity of city residents and city spaces—rather than ethnicity, religion, or phenotype—mark a city? Bringing out the urban subject in city residents has historically been one force in thwarting urban conflicts. But that mark does not simply fall from the sky. It often stems from hard work and learning from failures. One question is whether it can also stem from the need for new solidarities in cities that confront major challenges, such as racism, sexual violence, and environmental crises. These challenges might force a critical mass of city residents into joint responses and, from there, into a stronger urban subject and identity rather than an individual or group (for example, ethnic or religious) subject and identity.

One historical window into this type of urban capability is immigration. What must be emphasized here is the hard work of making open cities and of repositioning the immigrant and the citizen as urban subjects that mostly transcend nationality. In a city’s daily routines, the key ruling factors for both immigrants and citizens are work, family, school, public transportation, and so on. Perhaps the sharpest difference in a city is between the rich and the poor, both of which include immigrants and citizens alike.¹⁵ When the law and the police enter the picture, the differences between immigrant status and citizen status become key factors. But most of daily life in the city is not ruled by this distinction.

Here I address this issue from the perspective of the capacity of urban space to make norms and subjects that can escape the constraints of dominant power logics, such as nationality, the war on terror, and racism. Historical European immigrant integration through the making of the European open city is one window into this complex and historically variable question.

In my reading, the history of Europe and the Western Hemisphere shows that the challenges of incorporating the outsider often became the push to develop a stronger civic and urban experience of membership, rather than a civic based on religion, class, and ethnicity. At times, immigrant inclusion became the occasion for expanding the rights of the already included, notably citizens. Responding to claims by the excluded has over time expanded the rights of citizens, a subject I develop at length elsewhere.¹⁶ And very often, restricting the rights of immigrants also restricted those of citizens; one recent example is the U.S. Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996, an immigration law that took away rights from immigrants and, far less noticed, citizens.¹⁷

Anti-immigrant sentiment, long a critical dynamic in Europe, has until recently been mostly overlooked in most accounts of European history, given self-understanding as a continent of emigration.¹⁸ Anti-immigrant sentiment and attacks occurred in each major immigration wave in all major European countries. No labor-receiving country has a clean record—not Switzerland,
with its long admirable history of international neutrality, and not France, the most open to immigration, refugees, and exiles. For instance, French workers killed Italian workers in the 1800s, accusing them of being the wrong type of Catholic.

There have always been, as there are today, individuals, groups, organizations, and politicians who believe in making society more inclusive. History suggests that those fighting for immigrant inclusion have succeeded in the long run, even if only partially. The transformation from disdain for foreigners to acceptance is also the result of constraints in a large city; for instance, in a sound, reasonably fast public transport system, it is not feasible to check the status of all users. A basic rule needs to be met: pay your ticket and you’re on. That is the making of the civic as a material condition. Anyone who meets the basic rule—pay the ticket—can use public transport, regardless of whether they are citizens or immigrants, former prisoners, tax evaders, or generally nice people.

Europe has a little known several-century history of internal cross-border labor migration. This history hovers in the shadows of official European history, dominated by the image of Europe as a continent of emigration, never of immigration. Yet in the 1700s, when Amsterdam built its polders and cleared its bogs, it brought in northern Germans to help; when the French developed their vineyards, they brought in Spaniards. Workers from the Alps were brought in to help develop Milan and Turin, as were the Irish when London needed help building water and sewerage infrastructure. In the 1800s, when Haussmann rebuilt central Paris, he brought in Germans and Belgians; when Sweden decided the monarchy needed some new palaces, it brought in Italian stoneworkers; when Switzerland built its Gotthard Tunnel, it brought in Italians; and when Germany built its railroads and steel mills, it brought in Italians and Poles.

During these flows of intra-European migration, immigrant workers were initially seen as outsiders—as undesirables, as threats to the community, as people who could never belong. The immigrants were mostly from the same broad cultural group, religious group, and phenotype as receiving societies. Yet they were considered impossible to assimilate. The French saw Belgian and Italian immigrant workers as the wrong type of Catholic; the Dutch saw German immigrant workers as the wrong type of Protestant. These telling facts suggest that it is incorrect to argue, as is so often done, that it is more difficult today to integrate immigrants because of their different religions, cultures, and phenotypes. When these features were similar, anti-immigrant sentiment was as strong as it is today, and it often led to violence.

Yet after two or three generations, many immigrants found their way into the community fabric. They often maintained their distinctiveness, while still being members of the complex, highly heterogeneous social order of any developed city.19

Today, the argument against immigration is focused on race, religion, and culture, and this focus might seem rational—cultural and religious distance is why integration is difficult. But in sifting through the evidence, we find only new contents for an old passion: the racializing of the
outsider as the Other. Today, the Other is stereotyped by differences of race, religion, and culture. These arguments mirror those of the past, when migrants were broadly of the same religious, racial, and cultural group. Migration hinges on a move between two worlds, even if within a single region or country, such as that of East Germans moving to West Germany after 1989, where they were often viewed as a different ethnic group with undesirable traits. What is today’s equivalent challenge, one that can help us look beyond our differences and make what would correspond to that traditional European civic tradition built through incorporating at least a share of the foreigners in their midst?

**Conclusion: where we stand**

The major challenges that confront cities—and society in general—have increasingly strong feedback loops that disassemble the old civic urban order. But these challenges also have the potential to spur the development of new types of civic cultures—broad platforms for urban action and collaboration across groups. Fighting climate change might well force citizens and immigrants to work together, regardless of religion, culture, or phenotype. Similarly, fighting the abuses of state power in the war on terror can create coalitions that bring together residents who once would never have collaborated. Now that there are greater threats to civil rights—and even basic survival—amid sharp inequalities and climate change, we might well see novel solidarities emerge.

Zooming into the city level, with the evidence I examined, including the cases described in this paper, one conclusion jumps out. Cities that succeed in their interventions show us that the old model of “integrating them” does not work; what seems to work best is a different starting point: “we are all in here—we all are the city. There is no ‘them.’” Integration policies that work begin with building on current integration efforts that have succeeded (even if integration has been poor). The work of integrating across divides in a city then becomes the work of improving existing integration nodes (schools, workplaces, neighborhood subeconomies, housing, cultural districts) and expanding the number of points of integration to achieve better distributed urban economies, housing, and transport. The aspiration is multinodal cities on all three vectors.
Notes

1 See also Gratz’s (2010) chapter on manufacturing in New York City linked to top-level design sectors—for example, making classic style furniture replicas to be sold through the Museum of Modern Art. Another example is American Apparel, a fashion store that made a point of manufacturing in inner Los Angeles and became hugely successful, though it eventually suffered setbacks.

2 Fitzgerald 2009.

3 This usage of the term “slum” needs to be distinguished from the exclusively negative conventional understandings, whether in literature or in UN Habitat practice. The recovery of the term comes from leadership in some of the world’s major slums. “Slum” here is a knowing word choice. It is not the category of the observer, but the category of the actor inside the slum. I develop some of this in Sassen (2011a). See also Sassen (2011b).

4 Sassen 2011a.

5 Sassen 2010.

6 Falu and Segovia 2007.

7 Viswanath and Mehrotra 2008.

8 See, for example, Witzman and others (2012).

9 Fosado 2009.

10 Public Women: Gender Inclusive Planning Experiences in Catalonia (colectivopunto6@gmail.com).

11 Sassen 2012.

12 Emphasis on this multiplication of partial assemblage contrasts with its treatment in much of the globalization literature, which tends to assume the binary of the global versus the national. In this literature, the national is understood as a unit. I emphasize that the global can also be inside the national—that is, the global city. The globalization literature also tends to focus on the powerful global institutions that have played a critical role in implementing the global corporate economy and have reduced the power of the state. By contrast, I also emphasize that some components of the state have gained power because they have to implement policies necessary for a global corporate economy. This is another reason for valuing the more encompassing normative order that a city can (though does not necessarily) generate.

13 See Sassen (2008), chs. 6 and 8.

14 See, for example, Marcuse (2002).

15 See, for example, Smith and Favell (2006).

16 Sassen 1999.

17 See Sassen (2008), ch. 6; see also chs. 4 and 5 for a diversity of other domains besides immigration.

18 This section is based on research in two previous works: Sassen (1999, 2007).

19 Elsewhere I have documented the acts of violence, the hatreds we Europeans felt against those whom we today consider “one of us.” See Sassen (1999); for a more general discussion, see Appadurai (2006).

Box 1
2. Hong Kong Immigration Department 2012.

Box 2
4. Afghanistan Ministry of Education.

Box 3

Box 4
1. SIGI 2012.
2. SIGI 2012.
3. Holmes and others 2012.
4. Holmes and others 2012.
5. Holmes and others 2012, 4.

Box 5
2. MINE 2012.
5. MINE 2012.
7. MINE 2012.
References


