

‘the American headquarters for black liberation’ (p. 70). Suzanne Wasserman reports on the corporatization and standardization of street fairs brought on by the city’s decision to regulate and tax them. Having become generic, the street fairs no longer express each neighborhood’s uniqueness.

Neil Smith and Deborah Cowan, Eric Darton, and Michael Sorkin are aggrieved. New York City, they argue, is being taken over by real-estate interests, suburban-style shopping malls, big box stores, a ‘suburban fetish for security’ (p. 39) and wealthy professionals with the ‘money and mores of the suburban classes’ (p. 33). Darton is outraged by the Time Warner Center, a mixed-use development of retail, residences, restaurants and a hotel near Central Park. He likens it to ‘real estate pornography’ (p. 50) and bemoans the displacement of public interest planning — which is often paternalistic — by ‘a kind of glossy globalist anomie in which greed [is] blandly accepted as the prime underlying motive behind all human acts’ (p. 45). Sorkin discovers ‘themed’ suburban retailing spreading like a virus throughout the city, although he is unsure whether it is suburbanization or globalization against which the city has to be defended.

For the editors, New York City has lost its authenticity and has become suburbanized: ‘more private, more predictable, and more homogenized’ (p. 20). Left behind is ‘the illusion of the urban experience’ (p. 20). More to the point, Michael Sorkin writes: ‘It isn’t that the city is becoming *physically* suburban, simply that it’s becoming the same as everywhere else’ (p. 121).

Yet too few of the authors transcend their sense of personal loss or moral outrage and grapple with the nature of cities and the dynamics that transform them from one generation to the next. Theoretically, much is lost. The suburban-city dichotomy is too glibly embraced — but note what Lippard says (p. 85); commodification, standardization and corporatization are conflated; moral judgments are unacknowledged; New York City’s uniqueness is unquestioned; and the personal and the social are blurred. Even the many photographs, and their captions, are designed to reinforce the editors’ belief that New York City is being overrun by a corrosive suburban sensibility. Not all of the authors err in these ways, of course. Overall, the book’s tone is argumentative and indignant.

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Ehrenhalt, A. (1995) *The lost city: the forgotten virtues of community in America*. Basic Books, New York.

Johns, M. (2003) *Moment of grace: the American city in the 1950s*. University of California Press, Berkeley, CA.

Peter North 2007: *Money and Liberation: The Micropolitics of Alternative Currency Movements*. Minneapolis, MN and London: University of Minnesota Press.

In *Money and Liberation*, Peter North investigates the question of whether creating alternative forms of currency can bring about greater economic justice and social inclusion. That is, how far, and under what circumstances, can monetary innovation serve liberatory politics? North’s book is one of only a few scholarly books that examine the recent alternative currency movements of the past two decades, and, perhaps, the only one to explore their significance through such a thorough combination of theoretical, historical and ethnographic research.

In the first two chapters, North reviews the contributions of Western economic, political and sociological thinkers to the general question of money’s liberatory potential. He begins by remarking how seldom money is taken as an object of political contestation in itself, as though money were a mere effect of economic activity and not a system of domination in its own right. After attempting to derive lessons from the major economic schools of money (the evolutionary school, commodity money theorists, credit

money theorists and quantity theorists) on how subaltern groups can recreate money, he turns then to the sociological analysis of Simmel, Zelizer, Gibson-Graham, Foucault, Deleuze and Guatarri, and others, to counter the view of money as a technical given or analytically subordinate aspect of capitalism and to consider, instead, money as a social construction, a structuring discourse and a site of micropolitical resistance.

In the next two chapters, North presents nineteenth- and twentieth-century examples of struggles for monetary reform, mainly in Western industrial countries. His historical cases include the utopian socialists, most prominently Robert Owen and the Owenite Exchange Bazaars; the populist post-Civil War struggles for democratically controlled paper 'fiat' money led by the Greenback Party in the US; the depression-era experiments with stamp scrip in Germany, Austria and Switzerland, modeled on the 'free money' ideas of Silvio Gesell; and the various faces of the Social Credit movement in the UK, Canada and New Zealand that were inspired by Major C.H. Douglas. These were disparate and short-lived historical movements, and comparisons among them do not come easily. Taken together, however, they do confirm North's thesis that interest in changing the money system can be at the center of radical politics and can mobilize large numbers.

North's readings of theory and social history set the stage for the next four chapters, in which he provides in-depth ethnographic analysis of modern experiences with alternative currencies in the UK, Hungary, New Zealand and Argentina. These case studies are richly contextualized through analysis of the circumstances in which the alternative monies were introduced (recession, post-socialist transition, neoliberal restructuring and catastrophic financial crisis) and through North's liberal quoting of the movements' leaders and participants. Practitioners' own analyses, in their own words, substantiate and embellish North's explanations of events and they also convey how strands of the movements are inflected through various philosophies, such as green localism, libertarianism, anti-globalization, communitarianism and community development, which are not always easily wed. Thus, North reveals the tensions at play in the movements and brings their dynamics to life.

North never romanticizes alternative currencies, nor does he dismiss them as doomed projects. On the contrary, despite the marginality or brevity of these struggles to create more democratic subnational currencies, he argues that, in the end, they demonstrate the potential for participatory, noncapitalist markets to emerge under the right circumstances. This conclusion is by no means overblown. North is restrained in his interpretations and provides sufficiently nuanced evidence to allow his readers to draw their own conclusions about the significance of alternative money movements and whether to view them as sources of hope.

A minor weakness of the book is that the sparse two-page index does not do justice to the intricacy of North's arguments and source material. North works hard to integrate theory, social history and case-study analyses. A fuller index would have allowed readers to gain more benefit from this work by being able to trace systematically the connections he draws between the chapters.

Considering how much North achieves in this book, it seems unfair to criticize its omissions, but if the book were to serve as a compendium of the major attempts at creating alternative currencies, it should include a chapter on North American projects, particularly the ongoing work of the E.F. Schumacher Society in Great Barrington, Massachusetts. The Schumacher Society was instrumental in the support of the many local scrip projects that were modeled on Ithaca HOURS in the 1990s. More recently, after years of preparation, the Schumacher Society has initiated a new currency, a discount scrip called BerkShares. Since September 2006, 1.72 million BerkShares have been issued by local banks in the Southern Berkshire region. These American cases differ from the other four cases North documents in how they seek to foster regional economic sovereignty and their success in gaining the participation of local business enterprises. Despite this omission, *Money and Liberation* is a valuable contribution to research of alternative currency and the scholarship of money more generally. The rapid

popularization of critiques of official currencies, through blockbuster internet movies such as 'Money as Debt' and 'Zeitgeist', and the ongoing creation of new models of local currency such as BerkShares, ensures that money will continue to be politicized and reinvented and that North's book will have lasting relevance.

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Peter Ache, Hans Thor Andersen, Thomas Maloutas, Mike Raco and Tuna Tasan-Kok (eds.) 2008: *Cities between Competitiveness and Cohesion: Discourses, Realities and Implementation*. The Geojournal Library 93, Dordrecht: Springer.

This book is an excellent addition to Springer's series, 'The Geojournal Library', as it goes beyond the usual disparate approach and tries to provide a multidisciplinary contribution to the understanding of the complex interactions between 'competitiveness and cohesion' at the regional and urban level. The book outlines the contrasting perspectives on contemporary global restructuring and growing economic competition, which force cities and regions to redefine their policy objectives.

Since the Lisbon and Nice summits in 2000, competitiveness and cohesion are in the foreground of urban and regional policy debate in the EU member states. The relevant question seems to be whether competitiveness and cohesion can coexist. The EU strongly believes that they can, but, according to the researchers' view, economic development and cohesion do not necessarily go hand in hand. More competitiveness may lead to economic success, but the link with better living conditions for every citizen and with more cohesion in the city is not so certain.

This interest in competitiveness at the city and regional level results from observations of their differing performances. Some regions and cities grow faster than others and increase their relative shares in the national or world economy at the expense of others (Boschma, 2004). They tend to attract a higher share of international investment, new enterprises and creative people (Florida, 2002). Therefore, competitiveness has become a way of discussing the relative performance of geographical units in generating income and employment, and in augmenting their share in the global economy by increasing their productivity, research and development and innovation in the increasingly competitive and deregulated global economy.

But competitiveness includes much more than simple economic parameters. The qualification and mobility of the labour force, or long-term balance and stability within the society, may also influence global competitiveness. A stable society can mobilize resources and investments in a proactive manner without losing its internal cohesion. Member states of the EU have managed to maintain this difficult balance between competitiveness and economic efficiency, on the one hand, and social cohesion, on the other. As several examples from Scandinavia and Western Europe confirm, contrary to the neoliberal discourse, a highly developed welfare state financed by collective taxes appears not to be a threat to competitiveness or long-term economic growth. Rather, it seems that economic competitiveness can benefit from social stability and cohesion.

When looked at from an abstract level, the question of the interrelation between competition and cohesion cannot be answered. In this respect, the book is particularly valuable, since it brings together practices and realities relating to the reconciliation of competition and cohesion from 12 European countries. The cases span different spatial scales — national, regional and city level. The authors look at different territorial levels and different settings, including institutions, actors and policies, and their role in a competition–cohesion complex.

The 15 chapters included in the book are organized into five main sections, each of which examines the competitiveness–cohesion discourse from a different angle.