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BOOK REVIEW**NEIL BRENNER, “NEW URBAN SPACES: URBAN THEORY AND THE SCALE QUESTION”, OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, NEW YORK 2019, 461 PP.**

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Due to the turbulent and, as it seems, not fully controlled transformations of social, economic and political realities, any attempts of scientific reflection on the functioning of cities and functional urban areas are exposed to the risk of error, not only at the level of the research organization itself (i.e. choice of research methods), but also, and perhaps above all, at the theoretical level. It turns out that the developed concepts and models do not always – and not in all conditions – respond to the challenges of the present day defined through the prism of a tangle of cause-and-effect relationships that are difficult to classify. Apart from the detailed references to specific examples – which, as proven by practice, are not difficult to find – it is worth to mention here, for example, the consequences of the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus, which “affect” many areas of urban policy and, consequently, make the contemporary city re-analyze the tasks that are or should be carried out. It is impossible to disagree with the statement that, due to certain objective conditions, the city is not able to counteract the destructive effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on its own (see: OECD 2020). The effectiveness and efficiency of urban policy in this case is a derivative of the ability to agree on the priorities and mechanisms of multi-sectoral cooperation, which obviously goes beyond the typically city-centric orientation. Thus, the aforementioned cooperation covers, apart from the intuitively recognized local level, the regional, national, international and transnational levels (cf. McCann 2016).

The book *New Urban Spaces: Urban Theory and the Scale Question* by Neil Brenner, published in 2019 by Oxford University Press, fits into such a broad and increasingly important trend of scientific reflection upon urbanity. It will probably not be an exaggeration to say that it is Neil Brenner who is one of its most important scholars of urbanism and, at the same time, the popularizer of the question that asks “How much urbanity is in the city”?

It can be assumed that the reviewed publication is another work by Neil Brenner that can be at least welcomed by the researchers of territorial self-government, regardless of what scientific discipline they represent and, consequently, what theoretical orientation they support. This is determined by a few elements, ranging from difficult to ignore and extremely topical issues (for example, deconstruction of the spatial and organizational order of the contemporary state), to the valuable and documented achievements of the author and ending with numerous questions that are provoked by the activity of practition-

ers, both federal and local government actors as well as social and private (commercial) entities. In keeping with the “classic” canons related to the preparation of book reviews, it is worth to introduce here, at least briefly, the profile of the author of *New Urban Spaces*, assuming that this profile characteristics may constitute a starting point for proper considerations.

Neil Brenner is a professor at the University of Chicago. Previously, he worked as Professor of Urban Theory at Harvard’s Graduate School of Design and as Professor of Sociology and Metropolitan Studies at New York University. Brenner is an author of many valuable and widely commented works¹ that exert considerable influence on the current discussion on urbanism in its institutional and non-institutional forms. Works worth mentioning here are *Critique of Urbanization: Selected Essays* (Bauwelt Fundamente, 2016), *Implosions/Explosions: Towards a Study of Planetary Urbanization* (Jovis, 2014), *Cities for People, not for Profit: Critical Urban Theory and the Right to the City* (with co-editors: Peter Marcuse and Margit Mayer, Routledge 2011) and *Spaces of Neoliberalism. Urban Restructuring in North America and Western Europe* (co-author: Nik Theodore, Blackwell, 2003). Perhaps the most important of all Brenner’s works is *New State Spaces: Urban Governance and the Rescaling of Statehood* (Oxford University Press, 2004) which has been reissued several times (2004, 2008, 2009, 2011, 2015, 2019). The explanatory potential of Brenner’s research is also evidenced by the fact that he is a senior member of the editorial boards of at least several prestigious scientific journals, including *Urban Studies*, *Cambridge Journal of Regions*, *Economy and Society* and *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*.

The reviewed work of *New Urban Spaces* is a summary of the current scientific “path” that Brenner follows with great consistency and with great “sensitivity”. It is difficult to disagree with the statement in which the book’s contents are presented reflect the author’s broad, multidisciplinary education (MA in philosophy and MA in geography, doctorate in political science); they are grounded in the achievements of urban thought, sociological concepts and political science. In this sense, *New Urban Spaces* should be treated as an interdisciplinary and multi-threaded interpretation of urban theory that is far from standard attempts to classify and assign it.

In the first chapter (*Openings: The Urban Question as a Scale Question?*), Brenner emphasizes that his book “(...) is devoted to a systematic explanation of the board *promlema-tique* associated with the reflexive of scalar narratives, scalar categories, and scale-attuned methods in the field of critical urban studies since the early 1990s (...)” (p. 7). The nearly thirty-year time range is not accidental in this case. It is worth remembering that it was in the first half of the 1990s that Brenner’s research on the process of territorial deconstruction of the modern state – determined by the phenomena of globalization, Europeanization and regionalization – began. Both the arrangement of individual chapters (of which there are ten) and the way of presenting the content (which can be described as “cascading”, cf. p. 23) determine that the main goal of the work is fully achieved. Referring to his previous findings, Brenner makes a synthetic presentation of the current state of research on the phenomenon of rescaling², while at the same time emphasizing those problems and

1 It is worth mentioning that the number of citations of Brenner’s works is almost 40,000 (as of October 10, 2020, according to Google Scholar).

2 Among the works referring to the rescaling concept, it is worth pointing to those that are embedded in the analysis of empirical material (see: Sturzaker, Nurse 2020; Lackowska 2014; Gualini 2006; cf. Zimmermann, Getimis 2017).

topics that constitute the subject of a particularly lively debate held not just by the members of the Academy (see: Nielsen, Simonsen 2003).

This does not mean, obviously, that the author does not attempt to revise the positions dominant in the literature. On the contrary, Brenner simultaneously makes a critical analysis of his previous findings and looks for a new theoretical framework for the widely understood activity of cities and the actors operating at the urban level.

While chapters two and three discuss the already extensive achievements of urban theorists (including David Harvey, Henri Lefebvre and Manuel Castells), chapter four presents the current state of the debate on global city formation through a perspective of reflexive scalars. Chapter five (*Cities and Political Geographies of the 'New' Economy*) comments on the strategies designed and implemented by cities to constitute a kind of "flywheel" for their development. In the sixth chapter, entirely dedicated to the so-called *New Regionalism*, Brenner realises that his typical way of formulating sectoral policies not only strengthens but also exacerbates the current urban crisis. The seventh chapter is an attempt to "approximate" the *growth machine* concept of John Logan and Harvey Motloch) to the concept of rescaling. The analysis of the situation in the United States serves the purpose of achieving this ambitious goal. Chapter eight (*A Thousand Layers: Geographies of Uneven Development*) is an extensive introduction to the topics presented in the last two key chapters of the work.

The importance of chapters nine and ten turns out to be all the greater as they present new approaches to defining and classifying urbanism in its numerous institutional and non-institutional manifestations. By attempting to create an alternative version of urban theory, and even a metatheory, Brenner outlines the patterns and pathways of urbanization, while at the same time convincing readers that the old assumptions underlying the studies and analyses lose their importance in a situation where urbanism manifests itself not only in various forms, but also, importantly, at many levels. What is more, the dynamics of this manifestation turns out to be so high that it naturally forces the "abandonment" of the current local-oriented perspective in favor of creating a "flexible" categorical grid that goes beyond intuitively recognizable scales.

It should be emphasized that the content of the book is presented clearly. The meticulously prepared subject index and the comprehensive list of the literature used in the book is particularly useful, especially for the reader exploring the subject matter. The drawings and diagrams conceived as a graphic interpretation of the discussed, often complex and 'overlapping', phenomena, processes and dependencies are also add value.

Remembering that *New Urban Spaces* synthesizes and organizes the current state of knowledge on the processes of urbanization and territorial autonomy, it is worth noting that certain readers may find insufficient answers to questions concerning the limits of rescaling contemporary cities. However, it is difficult to disagree with the statement that the dynamics of changes in the social, economic and political realities (and it is not about the last years, but rather the last months or even weeks) does not allow for the formulation of any final, and therefore universal, solutions. In this sense, the reviewed work opens the field for further research based on the analysis of the collected sources and empirical material, which may not only verify, but also in some way supplement the cognitively valuable conclusions and observations put forward by Brenner.

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