

The City as a Growth Machine:  
Critical Reflections Two Decades Later

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*and*  
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The two decades since the publication of Harvey Molotch's seminal paper, "The City as a Growth Machine" (Molotch 1976), have witnessed dramatic changes in the economic, social, and political fabric of the capitalist city. The rise of new labor processes and products, the emergence of the new service economy, the increasing integration of production and consumption networks at a global level, and changing cultural styles and modes of social regulation have fundamentally altered the city's spatial form and functional role. Where once the social life and politics of cities were territorially defined, today these spheres have been situated squarely in the new globality of production and exchange. But for urban theorists, identifying the tangible manifestations of these changes has proven far easier than explaining them. This has been especially the case for the city's very foundation, its processes of growth and development.

In all of this change a central idea in the understanding of the city has stood the test of time: Molotch's growth machine thesis. At the heart of the original thesis was a fundamental insight: Coalitions of land-based elites, tied to the economic possibilities of places, drive urban politics in their quest to expand the local economy and accumulate wealth (Molotch 1976). This deceptively simple insight into

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the logic of urban growth and politics was firmly rooted in the postwar North American context. The end of World War II ushered in three decades of almost untrammelled growth that transformed the urban system in the United States and effected a dramatic redistribution of national wealth and jobs through the urban hierarchy. By the mid-1970s, however, there were signs that this urban "growth machine" was faltering: new social and environmental movements were emerging to challenge the activities of land-based elites. And although growth had been the dominant ideology in most U.S. cities, the emergent "countercoalition" appeared to be redirecting the focus of urban politics away from growth and toward environmental issues and matters of social redistribution (Molotch 1976).

Reading "The City as a Growth Machine" more than twenty years later one obtains a sense that Molotch was deeply frustrated with conventional analyses of the day. These, he implied (Molotch 1976: 309), had failed miserably in attempting to address questions of power and social class hierarchy in a substantive and relevant fashion. Most of all, they had failed to take into account the day-to-day actions of urban elites, which he saw to be decisive in shaping land use patterns and the distribution of resources and jobs within and between localities. Most notably, community power studies, which arguably represented the most influential approach to the analysis of local politics at that time, had failed to relate their studies of elitism and pluralism to the power relations and resources underpinning the formation and development of urban places and systems. In Molotch's view—a view that he has recently restated (see Molotch 1993: 49)—the exchange of land is at the very essence of local politics, but most particularly "in places . . . where land and buildings are commodities, unfettered by cultural or state policy constraints."

Unique in its scope and ambition, the growth machine thesis set in motion a vital research agenda that now extends across disciplinary boundaries, and embraces the broad range of urban studies. Although new and influential approaches to urban politics—including, most recently, urban regime theory (Stone 1989, 1993)—have emerged to claim the intellectual high ground, many researchers continue to draw inspiration from the growth machine thesis. In part, this is because the basic issues that the thesis addressed—issues of growth, local economic development, and of who promotes these—remain central to the politics of cities and, indeed, of many places in the global economy. Indeed, urban boosterism and the desire to present cities in a positive light have become integral elements of the contemporary politics of local economic development (Boyle, 1997).

The keys to the success of the 1976 article were its clarity of presentation and provocative argument: it was and remains an academic *tour de force*. Of course, every novel approach has its critics—the growth machine thesis is no exception in this regard (see, e.g., Cox and Mair 1989a; Lake 1990). New concepts and empirical themes introduced into the analysis of urban politics during the last two decades have shed doubt on many of the claims of the thesis as laid out in the 1976 article and subsequent works, such as *Urban Fortunes*, the book Molotch co-

authored with John Logan 11 years after the publication of “The City as a Growth Machine” (Logan and Molotch 1987). However, to this date we have not come across a truly inter-disciplinary assessment of the growth machine thesis. In this volume, then, we intend to revisit Molotch’s thesis on the political economy of place and, with the help of leading scholars and researchers, chart potentially promising directions for further critical inquiry into the nature of urban politics and local economic development.

## THE CITY AS A GROWTH MACHINE

The intellectual grounding of the growth machine thesis is complex. At various stages of its development, the thesis has drawn inspiration and critical understanding from urban ecology, community power analysis, neo-Marxism, structuration theory, and even transcendental realism (see, in particular, Logan and Molotch 1987: chapt. 1; Molotch 1993). In perhaps its fullest explication, Logan and Molotch (1987: 12) “give primary attention to the strategies, schemes, and needs of human agents and their institutions at the local level.” This “agency-centered localism” (Jessop, Peck, and Tickell, this volume) accords causality to the interplay between capitalism, its historically situated places, and its culturally rooted populations. Logan and Molotch are eager to “steer a middle course” between voluntarism and structuralism, the micro and the macro, and the contextual and the compositional, recognizing in the process that “location is socially produced” (Harvey 1982: 374, cited in Logan and Molotch 1987: 12). Molotch (1993) has recently reasserted the importance of this agency-centered perspective to the growth machine thesis.

The growth machine concept centers growth as a fundamental imperative within the North American city. Accordingly, Molotch (1976: 309–10) wrote: “the political and economic essence of virtually any given locality, in the present American context, is *growth*. I further argue that the desire for growth provides the key operative motivation toward consensus for members of politically mobilized local elites, . . .” For Molotch, the agenda of urban elites is to secure the preconditions of growth. More often than not this involves organizing collectively to influence government, which controls the most valuable regulatory and fiscal resources available for growth, namely those pertaining to the control, exchange, and development of land parcels. Land-based interests therefore feature very centrally in the growth machine thesis (*ibid.*: 310).

In *Urban Fortunes*, the growth machine thesis is elaborated. At the heart of this is the “rentier” class—those centering around developers, realtors, and banks who have an interest in the exchange of land and property (Logan and Molotch 1987: chapt. 2). Rentiers are supported by a number of auxiliary players, including the media, universities, utilities, professional sports franchises, chambers of commerce, and the like. This is the amalgam interested in growth—diverse kinds of middle and upper income growth—that can increase the value of land and revenue

streams for growth machine members. But more than simply being interested in the material consequences of growth, rentiers want to ensure that the citizenry is receptive in the first instance to changes in their surroundings. With this in mind, the growth machine toils to generate solidarity among growth-receptive interests; to create, in other words, the “community ‘we feeling’” that Molotch (1976: 314) viewed to be so essential for uniting locals around the goal of growth.

But this fostering of community solidarity around growth projects is not always easy. In the highly commodified arena of urban place production, there is a potential conflict between the use of land and its exchange (Logan and Molotch 1987). Use values are rooted in the neighborhood as lived place; it is here that psychological attachments to place are strongest. Threats to neighborhood attachment and use values come from various kinds of land use and demographic change (Logan and Molotch 1987: chapt. 4). These, in turn, cause conflict between residents and rentiers. Both groups, not surprisingly, seek to harness the influence of local government—its legislative, fiscal, and legitimating powers—to protect and pursue their interests. This leads, most poignantly, to moves by residents to push for suburban incorporation, restrictive zoning, and growth control, or to attempts by rentiers to harness state and federal resources for urban redevelopment. Government, which has a revenue stake in land use, in turn tries to influence the distribution of resources within and between cities (Logan and Molotch 1987: chapt. 5). More often than not, government actions give rise to social, fiscal, and racial inequalities between neighborhoods within cities, or between suburbs and central cities.

Implicit in the growth machine thesis is a concept of geographical scale that sees neighborhoods and cities inserted into a hierarchy of territories corresponding more or less to each level of government. This territorial hierarchy offers a variety of “political opportunity structures” (Miller 1994) for promoting urban growth and land use change. Although growth coalitions will mobilize at whatever levels of government powers and resources are available, for the most part “the governmental level where action is needed is at least one level higher than the community from which the activism springs” (Molotch 1976: 311–12). For example, in the U.S. context city-based growth interests might attempt to secure the provision of water and sewerage on a metropolitan basis even as metropolitan growth interests coalesce to leverage economic development resources and changes in legislation at the state level (Jonas 1991). According to Molotch (1976), the extent of cooperation among rentiers and auxiliaries seems to relate in some fashion to the level of government at which such interests mobilize. Groups that might otherwise compete for resources within a locality collude when it comes to attracting growth to the locality. The outcome of this mobilization around government is a nesting of communities of growth elites at different geographical scales. In this manner, neighborhoods, cities, and regions compete with each other for scarce mobile resources, a process that is often encouraged by government subsidies (Molotch 1993).

An important corollary to this growth coalition formation process is that of coalition fragmentation. To use Molotch's (1976: 318) terms, what are the "liabilities of the growth machine" that either result in its failure to coalesce or lead to opposition to its activities? To start with, growth coalitions in different places must compete with each other to attract mobile capital to their respective localities. But interurban competition is a zero-sum game. In it, there will always be winners and losers because there are only so many jobs to redistribute within a national economy and only so much inward investment is occurring at any one point in time.

Furthermore, when growth coalitions do compete with rentiers in other cities for a share of the national economic pie, they invariably come into conflict with residents in their own cities. This is because, in order to establish the preconditions for economic growth, changes in the built environment are required, changes that can have negative effects on residential neighborhoods and the local quality of life. Freeway construction, road widening schemes, new taxes, and so forth impose costs and inconveniences on local residents and engender opposition. This opposition can be sufficient to slow growth down or prevent it altogether. Indeed, writing in 1976, Molotch hypothesized that an emerging "countercoalition" organized around environmental and redistributive concerns would eventually prove to be a potent force in urban politics—too potent even for the growth machine.

But although growth did become more controversial, the growth machine proved quite adept at circumventing the opposition, and often it achieved this by changing the geographical scale and scope of its activities. As local economies became more integrated into a global development system, this resulted in, at one level, rentiers conjoining with mobile (national and international) capital to thwart local resistance to "value free development" (Molotch and Logan 1984). Accordingly, the land development process became increasingly driven by developers whose material interests appeared to have more to do with the volatility of global financial markets than the outcome of local zoning decisions (see, e.g., Logan 1993). At another level, local developers simply avoided local growth control measures by building in other jurisdictions or finding loopholes in the law (Warner and Molotch 1995).

What now most impresses Molotch is the durability of the growth machine. Despite local opposition and mounting government regulation, "the growth machine system remains durable, sustained in manifold ways through the mutual reinforcement of political, cultural and economic dynamics" (Molotch 1993: 49). Yet if we are to accept that the growth machine has proven durable, it should also be the case that the growth machine thesis continues to resonate in the analysis of urban politics. In critically addressing this proposition, the contributors to this volume pay particular attention to what Molotch has called the "political, cultural and economic dynamics" that shape growth machine activities. First, we examine the role of ideology and discourse in urban growth and politics.

## URBAN GROWTH: IDEOLOGY AND DISCOURSE

An important but often overlooked aspect of Molotch's thesis was the claim that growth coalitions not only strive to create the material preconditions for growth but also to convince people of the importance of growth to their well-being. In this respect, ideologies and discourses of growth are a recognized part of growth machines, with perhaps the "key ideological prop [being] the claim that growth 'makes jobs'" (Molotch 1976: 320). Accordingly, growth machines promote city development in a fashion conducive to the goal of attracting investment and jobs. A variety of tactics and discourses are used, including the placement of advertisements in newspapers and business journals, the sponsorship of parades and festivals, and other efforts that raise the profile of the city to the outside world. These booster activities would, according to Molotch (1976), bring together otherwise antagonistic interests and foster within the locality a sense of community—"a territorial bond . . . [which is] . . . socially organized and sustained" (ibid.: 315). It is sustained in part because "growth activists are likely unique in their pre-established organizational prowess and consistency of significant social linkages" (Molotch 1993: 34). In short, Molotch viewed the propagation of specific ideologies and discourses, and most particularly those pertaining to "community," to be a prominent feature of growth machine politics.

But Molotch's discussion of discourse and ideology can be seen as superficial insofar as it ignores a much deeper process: the power of machine language to shape everyday social life that enables growth discourses to gain normalcy. Growth machines, in other words, speak not only of appropriate kinds of growth, but also about who should lead it, what their values should be, what the public's values should be, and who are the locality's potential civic and moral saviors. This approach to understanding discourses is, of course, one focus of the "new linguistic and representational turn" that has swept powerfully through the social sciences. This turn, simply stated, acknowledges the power of language and discourse to reproduce and rearrange an everyday life that accords opportunities and obstacles for effective political involvement. Whether a liberal growth machine, a conservative growth alliance, or a centrist growth coalition, their political agendas always become activated through constellations of representations about people, places, and processes that circulate through daily life. People come to understand the world of growth—its prospects, possibilities, who gains, who loses—through significations rather than by interacting with a "brute reality," debunking the notion of an always revealing preinterpreted reality (Barnes and Duncan 1993; McDowell 1995).

Yet language is not an unproblematic ideologizing element (Eagleton 1991; Short et al. 1993; Wilson 1995a). It is a contested terrain, a set of conceptual spaces for the taking, whose struggle for and control by interest groups is always unstable and transforming. Representations in discourses, then, are like vessels whose contents reflect human intent, striving, and purpose. It follows that lan-

guage exerts influence across the vast reaches and corners of social life but is always open for subversion and overhaul.

And the push to forge growth always has to work through prevailing sensibilities and visions of appropriateness. Take, for example, the city boosters whose actions Molotch has sought to understand. Their involvement extends to a complex pattern of intervention which insists upon articulating themes that seek to strike a responsive chord in mainstream thought. Their articulations are never isolated and above the fray but are always linked to the world of existent imaginings and dreams. In this sense, growth machine interventions—often subtle and nuanced—penetrate far corners of local life that tie growth stratagems to common-sense thought and taken-for-granted practice. Thus, power becomes wielded not through contextless articulations that foist power and a new way of seeing on an unsuspecting mainstream but through cultivating prevailing beliefs and values in an ongoing political intervention.

But these machines do not communicate simply by lining up pieces of language in the right order, bolting words together that represent fragments of reality. Rather, language is infused with politicized meanings and values whose usage simultaneously illuminates and blinds with the imposition of one gaze. In it is a politicized mix of manufactured presences, deliberate absences, contrived caricatures, subjective taxonomies. In this way, people come to be both edified and blinded by the seeing of issues, problems, and possibilities. As Barnes and Duncan (1993: 2) succinctly note, it is humans who decide how to represent things, not the things themselves, making these representations potential hothouses of contention that carry the realm of politics far beyond the conventional realms of programs, policies, and regulations.

This complex and potentially controversial process, not surprisingly, involves deploying such tropes as metaphors, sanitary codings, similes, and metonyms so as to maneuver and coerce (Wilson 1996). Language of any kind is never free of these animators of ideas, but the fact that they seamlessly operate and can exert a tremendous subjectivity on the making and imagining of politics renders them powerful political tools. Their power, of course, has not escaped the attention of growth machines, and these tropes have been used not only to build supporting “realities” but also to hinder and encourage political participation. Where there has been effective deployment of these to promote downtown gentrification, for example, a “reality” replete with a cast of villains, victims, saviors, and threats has been forwarded that has energized the seeing of the city in a certain way and privileged certain political participants over others.

Writing in Part I of this volume, Kevin Cox is particularly struck by passages in “The City as a Growth Machine” in which Molotch refers to the role of growth machines in fostering ideologies of community to support their political goals. But Cox is eager to draw a distinction between such ideologies, on the one hand, and territorial ideologies, on the other. Territorial ideologies seem to feature centrally in discourses associated with spatial restructuring and its attendant politics of eco-

conomic development. But Cox is also impressed by the extent to which the disintegration of local lifeworlds has fostered conditions for ideologies of local community. Here, Cox proposes the idea of a moral space economy—the ways in which localities undergoing spatial restructuring come to be defined as more or less “worthy” places.

John Short considers the different ways in which cities are represented in this era of hypermobile capital. He proposes the notion of regimes of representation. These regimes are discourses of meaning (ideas, words, concepts, and practices) associated with (in this context) the development and promotion of cities. He suggests that cities are currently represented in four, sometimes overlapping, ways: “world cities and wannabe world cities”; “look no more factories”; “the city for business”; and “capitalizing Culture” (see Lewis 1922). Short critically examines the ideas and practices associated with each of these regimes of representation and briefly considers alternative representations of the city.

As Mark Boyle suggests, a whole new vocabulary has emerged in the urban politics literature to support the widespread claim that a new era of local elite boosterism is upon us. The kinds of projects in which local elites are engaged, and the accompanying efforts to refashion collective consciousness in the city, are examples of what he calls Urban Propaganda Projects (UPPs). Boyle critically reviews two key theoretical approaches in the study of UPPs: the growth machine thesis as portrayed in *Urban Fortunes* (Logan and Molotch 1987); and the idea of local dependence as developed by the so-called Ohio School and linked to the mobilization of redemptive ideologies of locality (see, inter alia, Cox and Mair 1988). Boyle suggests that studies of local elite boosterism are conceptually weak insofar as they are not clearly located with respect to either of these two approaches. Moreover, due consideration is not always paid to the ways in which local citizens consume civic boosterism. Boyle outlines a framework for understanding the consumption of place promotion, noting the conditions which either inflame local opposition or lubricate UPPs.

Considered together, the chapters by Cox, Short, and Boyle suggest that a productive direction for future work in the growth machine tradition is the critical examination of ideology, discourse, and regimes of representation in the promotion of cities and local economic development. They also suggest, however, that there are some fundamental changes occurring in the ways in which cities are being represented and local economic development is being contested. These changes may be related to recent and ongoing transformations in the governance of cities and in the regulation of local economic development, transformations that are addressed in Part II of this volume.

## NEW DIMENSIONS OF URBAN POLITICS

The appearance of the growth machine thesis in 1976 was timely for several reasons, two of which are worth dwelling upon here. First, Molotch clearly con-



trived to release, and in part succeeded in releasing, the study of local power and politics from the sterile grip of community power analysis. Along with urban regime theorists (see, e.g., Stone 1993), he helped to reposition the old community power debate in relation to a wider and ever-changing political and economic context. At the same time, he changed the terms of the debate itself. This meant that the old question of “who rules cities?” was to be addressed in the context of the dynamic arena of national political and policy developments and, perhaps even more significantly, global economic change (see also Cox 1993; Horan 1991; Logan and Swanstrom 1990). Of course, the general thrust of local politics had changed little: in the opinion of many commentators, it was and is still a politics of urban *development* (see, e.g., Peterson 1981; Stone and Sanders 1987; Cummings 1988; Clarke and Gaile 1998). But what is “new” about this New Urban Politics (see Cox 1991) is the widespread acceptance that urban politics can no longer be analyzed in isolation from the larger political and economic forces that shape the development, restructuring, and redevelopment of urban spaces and places (see, e.g., Fainstein et al. 1983; Jonas 1992). In this respect, political conflicts and struggles in cities feed into a much broader set of “globalization/localization paradoxes” that increasingly appear to define the late modern/postmodern condition (Preteceille 1990; Harvey, 1989a).

At the same time, the political subjects of this New Urban Politics are, in a number of respects, quite different from those that had featured in previous studies of local politics. No longer is the focus exclusively on the (masculine) domain of urban business elites or that of pluralistic interest groups. Rather, what is gradually emerging are far more nuanced and multidimensional representations of interest groups and oppositional coalitions, and of their struggles, in large cities as well as smaller places (see, e.g., Beaugard, 1989; Brown 1995; Clavel 1986; Fitzgerald and Simmons 1991; Jonas 1995; Nyden and Wywel 1991; Ramsay 1996; Staeheli 1994). Thus an emerging issue is not simply why certain individuals and groups (e.g., poor working women, racialized groups, unions, etc.) have been marginalized from formal institutions and local politics but also why knowledge of those individuals and groups, and of their actions, has been excluded from academic texts (see Sibley 1995).

Second, the appearance of “The City as a Growth Machine” coincided with—or so it now appears—a fundamental shift in the organization of the North American model of economic growth. Although the contours of that shift were barely visible at the time, it has since been characterized as the “crisis of Fordism,” where Fordism in this context refers to the U.S. mass production/consumption economy and its attendant institutions, spatial patterns, policies and politics (Aglietta 1979; Jessop 1990a; Lipietz 1987; Florida and Jonas 1991; Lauria, 1997a). The important point to bear in mind here is the contextual nature of U.S. Fordism (as compared to economic growth models in other countries): it was quite literally built around the production and consumption of metropolitan space on an unparalleled scale (see, e.g., Harvey 1985; Florida and Jonas 1991; Scott and Soja 1996).

In the 1970s, serious doubts about the sustainability of the post-war growth model began to be expressed in a number of quarters and spheres of life. In U.S. cities, the crisis was manifested fiscally, although this itself had much to do with the changing balance of political power in Congress resulting from the unravelling of New Deal-era coalitions. With the demise of this comfy “social compact,” urban mayors could no longer be certain that the federal government would intervene in local fiscal crises. As various writers have suggested (see, e.g., Pecorella 1987; Piven and Friedland 1984; Shefter 1985), urban fiscal crises had significant ramifications for the ways in which cities were to be governed thereafter. Notably, the mobilization of business interests around the reform of urban finances contributed to diminished access for urban service consumers and voters to budgetary decision making. But perhaps even more significantly, as the postwar model of growth was called into question, those to whom it appeared to matter the most—i.e., the metropolitan growth coalitions—became more anxious about the prospects for further growth in the future. It was their activities rather than, say, those of urban service consumers and voters that Molotch was so keen to identify in his 1976 thesis.

As John Logan, Rachel Bridges Whaley, and Kyle Crowder suggest, Molotch’s contribution in 1976 marked a watershed in the literature because it was the first study that, having identified growth as the central concern in local politics, linked its pursuit to a particular agency, the growth coalition (later, the rentier class). Reviewing the voluminous (but mainly North American) urban politics literature, they find plenty of evidence for the hypothesis that growth coalitions dominate the local political arena. Furthermore, despite strong opposition and counterinitiatives, growth coalitions continue to influence local development policy, although the hard evidence for this second hypothesis is perhaps less convincing than that for the first. The authors suggest that there is a third or “hidden” hypothesis in the growth machine thesis: the main impact of growth coalition activity is *distributional* in nature. But to deal directly with this hypothesis requires looking at outcomes not directly related to growth, including the widening of inequality within the city and new patterns of racial segregation. They suggest that the analytical focus of the growth machine thesis must be broadened from the conflict between rentiers and residents to the impact of regional economic restructuring and national politics.

However, in addressing the issue of intraurban inequality, Melissa Gilbert is quite critical of the growth machine thesis, especially as it is set out in *Urban Fortunes*. The thesis, she argues, has little to say about the daily lives of poor women and has failed to develop a fuller contextualization of place-based power relations. Drawing upon empirical research of poor working women in Worcester, Massachusetts, Gilbert’s critique is built around four themes: poor women’s daily lives shaped by spatially constituted gender, “race,” and class relations; urban spaces produced and reproduced not simply by growth machines but also through people’s daily lives; the spatially contingent scale of daily life that is not reducible to the neighborhood or community level; and Logan and Molotch’s (1987) romanti-

cized treatment of community, leaving little analytical scope for progressive place-based politics. Gilbert outlines the contributions of feminist scholars to the reconceptualization of urban politics and praxis.

Allan Cochrane criticizes the urban politics literature for failing to address urban politics as a lived experience. His critique is targeted at those (mainly European) analyses that have treated urban politics as a “separate sphere,” separate, that is, from national politics. Such analyses have attempted via the concept of a dual state to draw a functional division of labor between central and local branches of the state. Cochrane intimates that the “reality” of urban politics is more complicated: matters of social reproduction cannot so easily be separated from those to do with local economic development; likewise, the local must be seen to be embedded in, rather than separate from, wider scales of spatiality. But he also cautions that attempts to identify (using the growth machine and related concepts) a separate local politics of business might have gone too far in the opposite direction. Cochrane argues that the recent focus on the politics of development has overlooked a corresponding politics of redistribution, i.e., the local welfare state. Drawing on a short example from Berlin, he proposes that the urban politics of the twenty-first century will simultaneously be a local politics and a global politics, a politics of consumption and a politics of production.

According to Mickey Lauria, a more conceptually robust approach to urban politics and governance could emerge from the conjoining of regulation theory and the New Urban Politics literature to produce a reconstructed urban regime theory. Regulation theory takes as its starting point the insight that the process of capital accumulation is inherently contradictory. A regime of accumulation (or a period of relatively steady economic growth) can only materialize through the development of a complementary mode of social regulation. An urban regime is potentially one element of such a mode of social regulation. However, Lauria feels that urban regime theory has not adequately specified how governing coalitions are transformed and/or become hegemonic, and hence has failed to address how particular growth paths may or may not stabilize. Drawing on case studies of race relations and local politics, Lauria identifies three sets of conditions that bring about urban regime transformations: instability in electoral coalitions at the local level; external party political influence; and fractional divisions of capital within the local governing coalition. In order for growth coalitions to (re)emerge in the current (post-Fordist) regime of accumulation, consensus-seeking state institutions must be established at the local level. To that end, Lauria hypothesizes a more active role for mobile capital in local politics than that predicted by the growth machine thesis.

The nexus of connections between the “local” and the “global” in urban politics provides a point of focus in the contribution by Bob Jessop, Jamie Peck, and Adam Tickell. Their chapter is grounded in the British context where globalization and neoliberal state policies have wrought dramatic transformations in the governance of major cities, such as Manchester. Manchester’s strategy to secure the Millennium Olympic Games was not simply “Made in Manchester” (by the

voluntaristic actions of the local business elite) but was in fact the result of a more complex interplay between local strategic capacities and national and international rules and regulations regarding how to submit an appropriate bid for the Games. Although the team that put together Manchester's ultimately unsuccessful bid used the language and tactics of the classic growth machine, the authors suggest that this particular example also demonstrates the limits of local strategic capacity. Accordingly, they find the voluntarism in urban regime and growth machine accounts of urban politics problematical. Drawing on theoretical strands in neo-Gramscian state theory and the regulationist literature, they develop an alternative approach that pays particular attention to the dialectic of strategy and structure at different yet interconnected scales of spatiality.

Several contributors to Part II indicate the importance of "bringing the state back into" the analysis of urban politics. Although Molotch did not ground his discussion of the urban growth machine in a theory of the (American) state, he did at least convey the sense that the national context was important in structuring local growth machinations. Differences in the national context and the effects of these differences on urban politics and local economic development are explored in greater detail in Part III of this book.

## THE URBAN GROWTH MACHINE IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

It is fair to say that opinion remains divided about the transferability of the growth machine thesis outside of a North American setting. Even Molotch has been careful to stress the contingent status of the growth machine; but in doing so he notes that "[T]he political and thus contingent nature of the growth machine system becomes more apparent by investigating contrasting ways that place is organized in other social contexts" (Molotch 1993: 38). This suggests to us that one very important function of comparative analysis is to assist in teasing out the conditions that activate growth machine-like activities or, conversely, prevent growth coalitions from coalescing in the first place, thereby allowing alternative and potentially progressive forms of local politics to flourish.

For Molotch, a crucial factor in determining whether "local" (i.e., national) conditions are conducive to the growth machine is the extent to which in any given context land is treated as a commodity. In the Italian situation, examined by Vicari and Molotch (1990), tenancy, rent control, historic preservation, and extensive public ownership more often than not preclude the transformation of urban space for the private gain of members of the growth coalition. In Japan, by comparison, the decisive factor in land use change is the capacity of centralized authorities and national corporate elites to influence local economic development (Molotch 1993). What appears to make the U.S. situation different to these others is the extent to which land use powers are decentralized and the national judicial-political system encourages private land development for private profit.

With the rise of interest in the growth machine thesis and related conceptualizations of urban politics, national and international comparisons of local economic development have become more widely available in the literature (see, e.g., Cummings 1988; DiGaetano and Klemanski 1993a, 1993b; Fainstein 1990, 1994; Fainstein et al. 1983; Harloe, Pickvance, and Urry 1990; Judd and Parkinson 1990a; Keating, 1991; Logan and Swanstrom 1990). Many of these comparative studies draw attention to international differences in urban politics and institutions, suggesting that the conditions for growth machine politics vary significantly from one country to another. Thus, although the national state as a political institution may be undergoing a process of "hollowing out" (Jessop 1993, 1994), the national scale remains strategically important, both as a focus of theoretical analysis and as an arena of political-economic change and struggle that influences urban growth trajectories.

The assumption underlying much research in the genre of comparative analysis is that generalizations about the nature of urban politics are more reliable if they are based on observations gleaned from two or more case studies. However, the reliability of empirical generalization as a basis for constructing a more conceptually rigorous approach to urban politics has recently been called into question by Kevin Cox (Cox 1991; but see Fainstein 1991). Although Cox's critique is in fact directed at urban regime theory, the ideas he develops about the difference between abstract and concrete research are more widely applicable. A crucial distinction to be made is that between a causal mechanism and its conditions of activation. The growth machine thesis could be seen to have isolated a causal mechanism or set of mechanisms deemed significant in the production of urban landscapes in the U.S. context. However, this is not to say that the same set of mechanisms or even their conditions of activation prevail in other national contexts. In such contexts, different conditions could activate growth-inducing mechanisms to produce different outcomes, or the mechanisms driving the urban development process might operate in fundamentally different ways.

Such variations in the effects of causal mechanisms and their conditions of activation make it extremely difficult to generalize about a process or outcome on the basis of observation alone (Bhaskar 1979; Sayer 1984). A more appropriate "test" of the transportability of the growth machine thesis is to investigate the extent to which its necessary preconditions are found to exist elsewhere. This would involve looking at, for example, the diverse ways in which urban land is regulated, produced, and transformed, how the process of local economic development actually operates in a given national context, or the extent to which state intervention redistributes jobs and income through the urban system. In this manner, comparative research can help to "geosensitize" (cf. Sayer 1989) the growth machine concept and even show where the concept has limited purchase on "reality."

Andrew Wood suggests that there are several weaknesses in the growth machine thesis that limit its usefulness as a comparative framework for the analysis of local economic development. One such weakness is the prominent role it

ascribes to local government. In researching local economic development networks operating in four metropolitan areas in Ohio, Wood found the role of local government in such networks severely restricted compared to that of private economic development organizations (chambers of commerce, utilities, etc.). Another weakness in the thesis concerns its awareness of a social division of labor. He argues that the social division of labor in the politics of local economic development is more deeply developed than that presented in the growth machine thesis. Given these conceptual shortcomings, Wood expresses doubts that the growth machine thesis can contribute any new knowledge to the comparative analysis of local economic development.

In reflecting upon on more than a decade of comparative research on British cities and urban politics, Keith Bassett sympathetically yet critically evaluates the contribution of the growth machine thesis. Bassett found the thesis helpful in studying economic development in Swindon (economic success with a growth coalition) and Bristol (success without a growth coalition), two cities located on the "M4 (motorway) corridor" linking London, South West England, and South Wales. Swindon's growth coalition, he argues, did not bear much resemblance to the "rentier" class as identified in Logan and Molotch (1987): Swindon's postwar economic policies were promoted by the local council, which had close ties to the local railway workshop unions. In Bristol, by way of comparison, the local economy was dominated by multinational firms, and economic success in the 1980s could not be attributed to the presence of any sort of spatial coalition (growth or otherwise). By the mid-1990s, however, circumstances in Bristol had dramatically changed. The Bristol economy entered into a period of decline and restructuring. Bassett observes a new era of business activism and partnership formation in the city, suggesting that the concept of a growth coalition is becoming more rather than less relevant. However, he currently finds urban regime theory and policy network analysis potentially more fruitful approaches to the study of urban politics in Britain.

Southern California, according to Stephanie Pincetl, continues to provide fertile soil for growth machine conceptualizations of urban politics, in particular of the role of landed interests as "structural speculators" (Logan and Molotch 1987: 30). She presents compelling evidence of how development interests tied to a very specific locality (in this case the Irvine Ranch and Rancho Santa Margarita companies in Orange County) can mobilize to create legislative and fiscal conditions conducive to future land development activity. In Orange County, large-scale development interests have promoted the use of Development Agreements to secure long-term development rights in the face of mounting pressures to control growth and protect endangered species. Pincetl argues that, by drawing upon their political contacts at the state and federal levels of government, southern California developers and local government agencies have been able to circumvent a local democratic process that might otherwise have encouraged opposition to their pro-growth agenda.

A very different perspective on state policy, land use planning, and urban development is offered by Andrew Kirby and Thabit Abu-Rass. Their chapter on

land development and settlement policy in Israel discusses a context in which the state plays a much stronger role in urban and regional development than appears to be the case in the United States. (Its silence on the issue of state intervention is viewed by the authors to be a critical weakness in the growth machine thesis.) Ideologically, Israel is defined as a Jewish state, and local authorities in Israel have established land use and settlement policies consistent with national settlement goals. In practice, these treat Arab and Jewish settlements separately and differently. Local authorities under Arab control have fewer urban development grants allocated to them by central ministries, taxes have been lost to neighboring Jewish local authorities, property has been confiscated without compensation, and the physical growth of Arab settlements has been restricted. In addition, the Israeli state has established procedures for the incorporation of new settlements that require little consultation with local residents. In the case of the Little Triangle region adjacent to the West Bank, many Arab residents have no territorial connections and are inadequately represented in local councils.

The chapters so far have examined a range of conditions *internal* to states that may or may not activate the powers of the growth coalition and localize inward investment. Conditions *external* to a state can have similar effects, or they can help to redistribute growth more equitably through the urban system. A case in point is European Union (EU) policy as presented by Helga Leitner and Eric Sheppard. EU policy, they suggest, can be divided into two broad categories. First, there are competitive policies that stimulate interurban competition and encourage the formation of local networks and partnerships. Second, there are structural policies that attempt to redress inequalities within the urban system. The authors argue that such EU policies and incentives have encouraged the development of cooperative networks between cities. In the context of a more flexible and deregulated global economy, such networks have allowed local partnerships to exercise some political leverage at non-local levels of the political system and are proving to be very important resources for urban centers in less developed regions of the EU.

It is clear from these contributions that the growth machine thesis continues to resonate in the comparative analysis of urban politics. An especially important development is the centering of comparative analysis of urban growth and politics around and in the institutions of the national state. Recent pronouncements on the "demise of the nation-state" notwithstanding, we anticipate that studies focusing on the national scale and highlighting differences in national contexts will become even more crucial for our overall understanding of urban politics and local economic development.

## GROWTH MACHINE LINKAGES

In the final chapter of this volume, Molotch asserts his position that the growth machine thesis has filled a gap in studies of urban politics and the social construction of place. He argues, if political economy has failed to grasp the city

building process, then community power analysis, in asking “who rules cities?,” has failed to look at “who makes cities.” And whilst urban regime theory has taught us to recognize diverse urban institutions and politics, it has not moved beyond the analysis of institutional form to inquire as to who actually holds power and what they do with it. In the growth machine thesis, place entrepreneurialism is the stuff of power brokerage in the city. For Molotch, the growth machine concept provides a down-link to daily urban existence, an up-link to the macroeconomy, and an across-link to other (non-U.S.) contexts.

Molotch argues the growth machine thesis is “as American as apple pie.” We should therefore consider critically the international translation of the growth machine system. U.S.-style urban entrepreneurialism is sweeping across the globe, and there is a danger that the globalization of what is an irreducibly cultural approach to urban development leads to an uncritical acceptance of its basic assumptions: local agencies now appear to accept urban competition as something inevitable and necessary, and perhaps they fail to see its roots in a particular cultural setting. Uncritical acceptance of what Molotch sees as an imperialistic vision of urban development imparts too great a rationality to the growth machine system; the growth machine does not always behave in a rational manner. As he indicates, two decades of research on the growth machine has taught us to see “what the enemy is—almost to the point of listing addresses.”

If pressed to draw our own conclusions from all of these contributions, we would suggest that the strength of the growth machine thesis lies in its ability to contextualize important aspects of the political economy of place development. We would certainly not claim that the growth machine concept is necessarily the most “practically adequate” (Sayer 1984) approach to the study of urban politics and local economic development at all times and in every place. Just as the original concept emerged from a particular reading of urban growth and politics at an important turning point in the postwar U.S. political economy, so it would also appear that the contributors to this volume have drawn upon their own research experiences in different national and local settings to develop their respective critiques of the growth machine thesis. Nor would we want to suggest that the three themes highlighted in this book—urban growth ideology and discourse, new dimensions of urban politics, and the growth machine in comparative perspective—exhaust the full range of possibilities. However, we anticipate that in developing these themes researchers will continue to draw inspiration from the growth machine thesis in part because so few have identified the nature of the task before us as clearly as Harvey Molotch.