

# Urban Political Economy Beyond the ‘Global City’

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**Summary.** This paper examines the relationship between urbanisation and globalisation beyond the so-called global cities that have been the focus of so much contemporary urban research. The paper argues that there is a problematic polarisation in urban studies between research on ‘global’ cities and work on presumably ‘non-global’ cities. The existing geographical literature on scale, place and uneven development offers a more complex and process-based view of contemporary urbanism. It allows the globalisation–urbanisation nexus to be studied in and through a diverse range of cities. This argument is developed via a case study of key moments in the economic development of Lexington, Kentucky, a city that, like most others, is forgotten or overlooked by global cities researchers.

## Introduction

In the 1990s, residents of Lexington, Kentucky, inhabited an urban landscape containing numerous sites reflecting the city’s historical connections to larger political-economic processes. Many of these sites offered striking, contradictory and often ironic evidence of the city’s relationships to national and global economies. For instance, driving north from the city’s downtown towards the edge of the urban area, one passed the entrance to a large, nondescript industrial building housing the headquarters and first manufacturing facilities of Lexmark International, a computer printer maker. For a resident with even the barest knowledge of the city’s recent past, however, this site would inspire thoughts not only of Lexmark as a new and rapidly growing locally based actor in the global computer printer market, but also of the plant’s former owner, International Business Machines (IBM). IBM de-

parted the city at the beginning of the 1990s, setting off a bout of uncertainty about the future viability and direction of Lexington’s economy. The low-slung, rather featureless building behind the gates and landscaped open space represented more than a major element of the local manufacturing economy. It conjured mixed feelings about the relationship between Lexington—a small city with a metropolitan population of 412 000—and the global economy. IBM had decided to sever its manufacturing ties with the city when its business priorities changed and, while Lexmark was headquartered in the city, the question remained: might the new company’s success lead it to reconsider its close ties to Lexington?

Driving from downtown in the opposite direction, out towards the city’s southern suburbs, one would encounter even more striking landscapes that also represented Lex-

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ington's changing and often relatively powerless connections to global circuits of capital. For instance, landscapes reflecting the city's historical role as a service and market centre for the surrounding tobacco-producing agricultural region were being rapidly reshaped or erased in the 1990s. Many former tobacco warehouses, where bales of cut tobacco were stored then sold at market to representatives of the large US tobacco companies, were lying empty, being torn down or being used for other purposes by businesses or by the University of Kentucky. This process of landscape change produced certain striking juxtapositions. For instance, a former tobacco warehouse on the city's Broadway was torn down in 1995 as the area surrounding it became increasingly populated by university students. As the student population increased, land in the area became attractive for service-sector businesses including retail outlets and bars. The site formerly occupied by the tobacco barn was quickly redeveloped as a shopping mall. In an ironic twist, one of the first businesses to open in this new development was the Tobacco Connection, a retail store selling *imported* tobacco products at discounted prices. Tobacco was once produced locally and primary processing was conducted in a plant operated by the R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company. By the 1990s, however, that processing operation had closed, many warehouses were demolished and Lexington was now tied in new ways to the global tobacco industry.

The profound and complex interactions between Lexington's landscape and economic processes articulated at higher scales—from the regional to the national and the global—provide a useful entry-point into a discussion of contemporary theorisations of what might be called, for want of a better term, the globalisation–urbanisation nexus. The city's experience as a location of branch plants for the computer printer and tobacco manufacturing industries clearly illustrates the way in which small and medium-sized cities in the developed world are implicated in the divisions of labour that stretch beyond localities and undergird the widespread pro-

duction systems of multinational corporations. Of course, not many cities are in a position to interact with the production processes of the global tobacco industry and relatively few are engaged in the production of computer peripherals. Lexington's experience does resonate strongly with the majority of other cities in the developed world in terms of the continued need to attract and maintain investment from corporations operating across wide geographical fields, however.

Despite the common processes interlinking the economic development experiences of cities as diverse in other ways as Lexington, Lincoln and Los Angeles in the US, a great deal of thinking about the globalisation–urbanisation nexus in contemporary academic and policy-making circles across the developed world has narrowed to a focus on a few 'global' or 'world' cities (Beaverstock *et al.*, 1999, 2000; Friedmann, 1986, 1995; Friedmann, and Wolff, 1982; Knox, 1997; Knox and Taylor, 1995; Marcuse and van Kempen, 2000; Sassen, 1991, 2002; Smith and Timberlake, 1995; Taylor, 1997, 2000, 2003; Warf and Erickson, 1996; Yeoh, 1999). While, to continue the US example, Los Angeles is often identified as one of these 'special places' (Dear and Flusty, 1998), Lexington (Kentucky), Lincoln (Nebraska) and a host of other cities whose populations daily experience the pressures and freedoms of their cities' interactions with wider political-economic processes are most definitely not grouped under the 'global city' rubric, as commonly conceived. From the perspective of global cities research, which generally adheres to a rigidly dualistic categorisation of the urban world as comprised of global and non-global cities, places like Lexington are easily overlooked. An *important caveat* here is that, while I argue that there is a general tendency to understand the world in rigidly dualistic terms in most global cities work, a number of those working in the field acknowledge the complex and overlapping character of urban social relations (for example, Sassen 1991) while others continue to develop new and innovative ways of theoris-

ing global cities that offer a path beyond dualism (Brenner, 1998a; Taylor, 2003; R. G. Smith, 2003a, 2003b). Nonetheless, as Robinson (2002, p. 535) puts it, the problem is that these are exceptions and that, in the majority of global cities research, "a limited range of cities still end up categorised in boxes or in diagrammatic maps, and assigned a place in relation to *a priori* analytical hierarchies". The implications of this narrowing of focus are profound and quite troubling for urban studies.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the interface between globalisation and urbanisation from the perspective of a smaller city that does not appear on the radar screen of global cities researchers. The point is not to identify how Lexington might fit into hierarchies of cities produced by contemporary global cities literatures, a term I use to encompass both the world cities literature inspired by world systems theory (for example, the papers in Knox and Taylor, 1995) and the more theoretically eclectic literatures that posit certain cities as exemplary cases of contemporary and future urbanism (for example, Dear and Flusty, 1998; Nijman, 2000). While this goal seems to have captured the imagination of many scholars (for example, Graizbord *et al.*, 2003; Trumbull, 2003; Wang, 2003), I am more interested in understanding the epistemological reasons why many aspects of urbanism are omitted from contemporary theorisations of global cities. I will argue that, if we are to move beyond problematic dualistic categorisations to understand the wide range of interrelationships and experiences that comprise the globalisation–urbanisation nexus, global cities researchers must integrate contemporary understandings of spatial scale and scalar processes into their analyses (for example, Marston, 2000).

In the next section, I juxtapose the global cities approach and contemporary approaches to scale in order both to highlight their differences and to provide an initial indication of their potential connections. The two main empirical sections of the paper illustrate how a scale perspective on a 'non-global city' can

shed light on the globalisation–urbanisation nexus. Key moments in Lexington's economic development are discussed in terms of a scalar and processual understanding of the production of place and the development of geographies of uneven development. The subsequent section returns to, and builds upon, the critique of global cities literatures and their polarising impact on urban studies in which 'global' and 'non-global' cities increasingly seem to be regarded as distinct analytical objects. The paper concludes by emphasising the potential of concepts of scale and multiplexity both for understanding relationships between cities (including overlooked or forgotten cities) and globalisation and for overcoming the problem of global–non-global polarisation in urban studies.

### **Approaching the Contemporary Globalisation–Urbanisation Nexus**

Since the 1970s, critical work in urban studies has entailed approaching cities and urban life as constituted by and constitutive of the circulation of capital and flows of power and knowledge (Castells, 1972/1977; Harvey, 1973, 1982, 1983, 1993; Katznelson, 1993; Saunders, 1986; Zukin, 1980).<sup>1</sup> The 1980s saw the emergence of a new, but not unrelated, 'globalised' object of study—the global or world city (Friedmann, 1986; Friedmann and Wolf, 1982; Sassen, 1991).

#### *Categorisation and a Globalised Object of Study*

As global cities literatures developed, they focused their attention on cities that could be seen as powerful organising nodes of the global economy. These places—New York, London and Tokyo being the most widely cited examples—were also argued to be similar in terms of their intense urbanisation and their sharp class divisions. Furthermore, the literatures argue that these cities could be arranged hierarchically in terms of their influence on global economic flows (Friedmann, 1995). Global cities literatures have had great influence on how urban studies

scholars conceptualise the relationship between urbanisation and globalisation. This dominance is in part based on certain epistemological assumptions and related representational practices. Specifically, these literatures identify global cities as archetypes, or paradigmatic examples, of processes that are shaping all urban areas. This strategy can be found in the work of the Globalisation and World Cities study group (Beaverstock *et al.*, 1999, 2000; Taylor, 2003) and, for instance, in the work of the Los Angeles school of urban studies (Dear and Flusty, 1998; Scott and Soja, 1996). This discursive practice is composed of two seemingly contradictory impulses: to describe global cities as 'cutting edge' places that are different from most other cities and to indulge in a problematic synecdoche in which the global cities' experiences are overgeneralised and taken to stand for the whole urban system (for a more detailed discussion, see McCann, 2002a).

The process of developing this theoretical object has led to a range of insights into the social, political and economic processes that constitute the globalisation–urbanisation nexus. In part due to the representational practices I have described, it has also provided an influential lexicon through and against which numerous scholars have sought to understand recent changes in cities around the world. It is important to note, however, that the global cities literatures' theoretical object is an epistemological construct or category that is produced and deployed in the context of on-going debates among communities of socially embedded users and interpreters (i.e. global cities researchers). Global cities literatures represent a very limited research focus; one concerned with the undoubtedly important activities of small groups of actors based in a few cities (or, more precisely, in a few neighbourhoods in these cities) engaged in the 'command-and-control' of certain aspects of the global economy. Thus, the understanding of the (urban) world produced by global cities literatures only sheds light on a small set of the interactions that comprise the globalisation–

urbanisation nexus. Nonetheless, the increasing hegemony of global cities literatures in urban studies—due in no small part to the remarkable productivity of many researchers working in this area—threatens to blind us to the various other aspects of contemporary urbanisation. As Jennifer Robinson puts it

A view of the world of cities emerges where millions of people and hundreds of cities are dropped off the map of much research in urban studies, to service one particular and very restricted view of significance or (ir)relevance to certain sections of the global economy (Robinson, 2002, p. 535).

A key argument in Robinson's critique is that a great deal of work on global cities employs rigid and limiting categories in its analysis. The reifying consequences of this form of categorical theorising are being rethought (for example, Marcuse and van Kempen, 2000; Simon, 1995). As Robinson notes, however, much of this recent rethinking—particularly the attempt to develop the notion of 'globalising cities'—does not fundamentally question global cities researchers' enthusiasm for categorisation, hierarchies and primarily global economic analysis. This critique suggests the need for a rethinking of the epistemological strategies upon which global cities research is based through an increased focus on processes that produce, shape and connect scales.

#### *The Urban Question as a Scale, Place, and Process Question*

Brenner touches on this point when he argues that

Many urban researchers have begun to conceptualise the current round of globalisation as a complex rearticulation of socioeconomic space upon multiple geographical scales. In short, the problematic of geographical scale—its territorial organisation, its social production, its political contestation and its historical reconfiguration—has been inserted into the

very heart of the urban question in the current era. If the urban question had previously assumed the form of debates on the functional specificity or scale-specificity of the urban within relatively stable supraurban territorial configurations, in the 1990s the urban question is increasingly being posed in the form of a *scale question* (Brenner, 2000, p. 366; original emphasis).

Posing the urban question as a scale question entails, as the vibrant social constructionist literature on scale makes clear, an attention to how place is conceptualised in terms of dynamic processes, rather than static categories (Agnew, 1997; Brenner, 1998b; Cox, 1998; Delaney and Leitner, 1997; Jonas, 1994; Herod, 1991; Smith, 1984/1990, 1992, 1993; Swyngedouw, 1997; and see Marston, 2000, for a comprehensive review).

One important contribution of this literature on place and scale is the understanding that scales, such as the global and the local, are strategic, contingent and politically powerful concretisations of fundamentally fluid social processes. Hence, they must be understood, not as separate, but as networked, nested or interpenetrating (to use some of the literature's more prevalent metaphors). Furthermore, scales are shaping of and shaped by political-economic processes—circuits of capital, among others (Harvey, 1982)—that intersect in unique ways in particular places. They also tie those different and disparate places together through a larger geography of uneven development (Massey, 1991, 1993a, 1993b; Smith, 1984/1990). As Massey puts it, the

interdependence [of all places] and uniqueness [of individual places] can be understood as two sides of the same coin, in which two fundamental geographical concepts—uneven development and the identity of place—can be held in tension with each other and can each contribute to the explanation of the other (Massey, 1993a, p. 145).

This relational understanding of place and scale stands in sharp contrast to the excep-

tionalism and dualistic thinking that has come to dominate global cities research, despite the efforts currently being made by some of its key figures. There is a Cartesianism at the heart of the vast majority of this work which holds global cities separate from 'non-global' or local cities and understands them as distinct objects of analysis. As a result the relational and process-based aspects of uneven geographical development tend to be obscured by a focus on a few places that are defined as powerful on the basis of a narrow set of economic criteria, such as the concentration of, and interaction between advanced producer services firms. Of course, one might argue that if we agree that the activities that take place in global cities do have a major impact on the organisation of global economic space, then it is important to understand the complex of global cities in which they are embedded as the fulcrum upon which the restless, 'see-saw' motion of uneven geographical development pivots. On the other hand, it seems quite dangerous, epistemologically and otherwise, to focus entirely on the economic fulcrum while largely overlooking the up-and-down fortunes of cities positioned in relation to it.

In light of this argument, I will turn to a discussion of the fluctuating fortunes of just such a city—Lexington, Kentucky—framing my narrative in terms of scale. In doing so, my purpose is not to argue that Lexington's specific experiences can be generalised to all other cities or even to all other small southern US cities. On the contrary, in line with Massey's understanding of place as characterised by both uniqueness and ties to more generalised processes, I suggest that the case study of Lexington is useful in the way that it sheds light on the workings of wider processes that constitute all places, while intersecting in unique ways in each individual place. This approach is informed by Burawoy's (1991) extended case method. For Burawoy, the extended case method focuses on relationships between the 'macro' and the 'micro'. It provides generalised relevance of the research *not* by treating "each case study as a potential exemplar of some general law

**Table 1.** Largest employers in Lexington, by numbers employed in 1995

Firm	Employment	Industry
University of Kentucky	11 300	Higher education
Lexmark International	4 000	Computer products manufacturing
Fayette County Public Schools	3 600	Public education
Lexington–Fayette Urban County Government	3 000	City government
Veterans Administration	2 000	Federal government (hospital)
Osram Sylvania	1 230	Lighting manufacturing
IBM	1 200	Computer networking
Square D	1 150	Electrical equipment manufacturing
The Trane Corporation	1 068	Climate control equipment manufacturing

Source: Lexington United, Inc. (1995, p. 6).

or principle that applies across space and time”, but by specifying “some *particular* feature of the social situation that requires explanation by reference to particular forces external to itself” (Burawoy, 1991, pp. 8–9; original emphasis).

### **A Brief Introduction to Lexington’s Economic Development**

Lexington’s changing relationship to larger-area economic processes was brought into sharp focus in the 1990s as some of the city’s most economically and symbolically important firms departed and, as I described above, marked changes in the urban built environment ensued. By the middle of the decade, when the city’s population numbered 232 000 and its metropolitan region included 412 000 people, the city had reached a key point in an economic development trajectory with its origins in the 1950s.<sup>2</sup> Prior to the Second World War, Lexington’s economy was dominated by agricultural service-sector employment as the city had long functioned as a service and market centre for a large rural hinterland. From the 1950s onwards, the city’s economy became increasingly centred on light manufacturing and, after the mid 1970s, on retail, non-agricultural services and government employment. By 1995, the changing character of the local economy meant that these three sectors accounted for 66.9 per cent of the city’s non-farm labour

force while agricultural services contributed less than 2 per cent to the total. The character of the local economy is evident in a list of its largest employers (Table 1).

In the mid 1990s, Lexington displayed many economic and political characteristics that would define it as an entrepreneurial city with business and political élites generally working in tandem to promote it as a place where investors would find educated workers and a favourable ‘business climate’. Despite this, the city continued to display characteristics of what Peck and Tickell (1994) referred to as an ‘after-Fordist’ disorder in which local élites were desperately casting around for a workable model for future economic development. Contemporary business and political élites’ unease over their ability to shape the future of the local economy in the 21st century must be understood historically. The seeds of uncertainty were sown by an earlier generation of local and state-level business leaders in the period 1954–59 who engaged in a concerted effort to attract light manufacturing industry, thus setting the city on a particular development path with specific links to national and global capital.

### **Re-imagining Lexington in Relation to the National and Global Economy, 1954–59**

At the local level, the Chamber of Commerce established the Lexington Industrial Foundation (LIF) in 1954 in a response to what

business leaders saw as a critical need for light industry in the city (*Lexington Herald*, 1954). The LIF, which consisted of representatives of the Chamber of Commerce, banks, existing industries, utilities and railroad companies, set about transforming Lexington from an agricultural service centre dominated by powerful landed élites into a light manufacturing city (Schein, 1994). Their dual strategy was to work to make the city 'visible' and welcoming to large national and international industries looking to locate in the South and, more concretely, to purchase land in the city, have it rezoned and make parcels available to manufacturers at "firm prices" (*Lexington Herald*, 1954, p. 1). This, they hoped, would counteract the tendency of land-owners to inflate the asking price of their land when they realised that industries were interested. In the period 1954–57, the LIF purchased 150 acres of land in the city and provided locations for the paper container manufacturer, Dixie Cup, and the Square D company, producer of electrical switches (*Lexington Herald-Leader*, 1956). Lexington's shift towards a manufacturing economy was symbolised most strongly, however, by the arrival of two other manufacturers—IBM and the R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company. These corporations did not locate on LIF land but were, nonetheless, courted by the Foundation (*Lexington Herald-Leader*, 1959c).

#### *IBM and the Rise of the Branch-plant Manufacturing Economy*

In the summer of 1956, IBM announced that it was relocating an electric typewriter manufacturing operation from Kingston, New York, to a flat, well-connected, 386 000-acre site on the north side of Lexington. The site had formerly been part of a state-run hospital that Kentucky's governor had earmarked as 'surplus land'. The state's Economic Development Commissioner, George W. Hubley, took the lead in attracting IBM to Lexington. In the days after the announcement, he revealed that Kentucky had been working with IBM directors for months to find an appropri-

ate site. Indeed, in an indication of the state's desperation for inward manufacturing investment in the early post-war period, Hubley told the *Lexington Herald* (1956c, p. 1) that "We [the Economic Development Cabinet] were at our wits' end to come up with a site that would meet the company's requirements". The site did suit IBM, but probably more significant in the decision was the size, quality, relative cheapness and non-union orientation of Kentucky's labour force. Furthermore, the skill levels of the workers had been developed by federal programmes during the Second World War. Specifically, tens of thousands of Kentuckians had gained experience necessary to work in manufacturing industries through their involvement in expanded domestic production for the war effort, experience in the armed forces and participation in the federal Vocational Training for War Production Workers programme (*Lexington Herald*, 1959). IBM's willingness to build plants in Kentucky after the federal government had trained potential employees emphasises the importance of state institutions in the development of regulatory systems (Boyer, 1990, p. 13). As Lipietz (1987, p. 35; original emphasis) notes, Fordist production methods, "presupposed *from the outset* that the labour-force possessed certain skills or at least a certain 'industrial culture'". After the war, the restricted manufacturing base of Kentucky and other southern states meant that many of these newly trained industrial workers migrated to northern cities such as Detroit in search of well-paying factory work. The out-migration and loss of skilled workers and tax-base encouraged Kentucky and other southern state governments to collaborate with local business organisations like the LIF to attract new manufacturing industries.

In Lexington, this strategy entailed the LIF, the Chamber of Commerce more generally and the activist state government re-imagining the city. Lexington's image had to be changed from that of a small southern town dominated by a landed élite resistant to change, to a city open for business with forward-thinking new leaders. In turn, the

success of the strategy quickly began to change the city's landscape as new suburbs were developed to accommodate the new workers moving to the city to take advantage of job opportunities in manufacturing industries. At the same time, the arrival of new workers—many of whom moved to Kentucky from New York and other northern states—had noticeable impacts on the city's society. The local newspaper celebrated these changes in a description of the city's growing suburbs

Mixed with the old-style slow-paced Blue Grass way of life is a new hustle and bustle characteristic of the factory world ... [newcomers'] northern accents clash with the southern speech of their neighbours, but no one seems to mind (*Lexington Herald-Leader*, 1959e, p. 24).

This rhetoric of industriousness and hospitable gentility, which is strikingly similar to the vision of the city promoted by business élites today, reinforced the new image of the city as did the 'coup' of attracting an IBM plant that was to manufacture a state-of-the-art electric typewriter. The re-imagining complemented the LIF's continued use of favourable land deals, an available labour force and convenient communications to attract still more manufacturing plants to the city.

*R. J. Reynolds, Lexington and the Global Tobacco Industry*

IBM's decision to locate the manufacture of one of its most sophisticated, innovative products in Lexington was certainly the major example of the small southern town's increased connections with national and global flows of industrial capital. The arrival of a second major corporation—the R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company—in the mid 1950s indicates that while 'high-tech' manufacturing was valued, the city's business and political leaders were also keen to expand upon Lexington's existing agricultural base

by integrating it with local manufacturing capabilities. Reynolds had this in mind when it chose Lexington as the location for a new primary processing plant for tobacco leaf that would potentially be developed into a value-adding cigarette manufacturing facility in the future.

Members of the LIF joined Spencer Hanes, a member of Reynolds' board on 29 March 1956 as he asked the City-County Planning and Zoning Commission to approve a change in zoning from agricultural to industrial for a tract of land just outside the city (*Lexington Herald*, 1956a). By mid April of that year, at the same time as IBM was being courted by the state-level economic development agency, the change was approved by the Fayette County Court. Reynolds bought the 283-acre piece of land for the purpose of storing tobacco and building a stemery—a facility used to separate tobacco leaves from their stems before loading them onto railroad cars for shipment to cigarette plants in North Carolina. Indicative of the county and city authorities' eagerness to facilitate Reynolds' investment was the revelation by the judge involved in approving the zoning change that county authorities had already decided to construct a new county road—to be funded by a two-cent gas tax and, possibly, by state highway funds—through the tract of land "in anticipation of the Reynolds development" (*Lexington Herald*, 1956b, p. 1).

Corporate decisions to locate or expand manufacturing plants are never solely predicated on the activities of local business élites, of course. Rather, they are shaped to a great extent by corporate strategy. R. J. Reynolds was attracted to Lexington because taxes on stored tobacco leaf were lenient (Tilley, 1985, p. 510). Furthermore, the recent introduction of the Winston and Salem brands of cigarettes in both cork- and filter-tipped varieties had been successful. The new brands complemented the already best-selling Camel brand. This success, the establishment of an industrial engineering department to develop new products, the building of new research facilities and the adoption of new advertising techniques, were all regarded by



management as indicators of further sales growth (Tilley, 1985). This expectation encouraged the company to expand and decentralise its leaf storage and processing facilities which, until that time, had been concentrated in Winston–Salem, North Carolina. Reynolds embarked on a building programme that resulted in the construction of a new cigarette manufacturing plant in Winston–Salem, two other storage and processing plants in North Carolina and their processing facility in Lexington. The city was chosen not only because of the Kentucky's lenient taxes on stored tobacco leaf, but also because Lexington was a major market centre in the burley belt—an agricultural region in the upper south where the flavourful burley variety of tobacco is produced (Tilley, 1985, p. 510).

Encouraged by the upturn in sales, Reynolds directors also formulated a new real estate acquisition strategy. Based on the notion that more land and facilities would be needed as the cigarette market grew in the future, Reynolds began to buy more land than they presently needed (Tilley, 1985 p. 495). Reynolds' involvement with Lexington is a case in point. In his presentation to the planning and zoning commission in March 1956, Spencer Hanes explained Reynolds' need for such a large tract of land by saying that it had long-range plans for the land and that “current business does not justify full use now ... but the company will need it in the future” (quoted in *Lexington Herald*, 1956a, p. 14). He went on to suggest that the company might construct an office building on the site. True to its new policy, Reynolds bought another 270 acres of land adjacent to the original site in 1960 and continued to expand its processing, storage and administration facilities. In this sense, Reynolds' presence in Lexington was more symbolically important than significant for the few hundred seasonal jobs it created. It offered hope of potential future growth and higher levels of value-added production tying the city ever closer to the booming global tobacco industry.

### *High Hopes: Global Visions and the Politics of Scale*

Despite the dangers of founding a local economy on an ability to attract and keep branch plants, Lexington's development in the next 30 years wavered little from this strategy. In the increasingly developed urban economy, local developers and others benefited from in-migration that produced a rapidly expanding suburban landscape and the local state benefited from a growing tax-base.<sup>3</sup> The benefits that did accrue to the local economy did not match the optimism of local leaders at the time, however. This optimism was reflected in the heady rhetoric surrounding the dedication of the IBM plant in the spring of 1959. At the time, the local newspaper was filled with state and local officials vying for the opportunity to praise the company's production standards, ‘corporate philosophy’, and contributions to the city (*Lexington Herald-Leader*, 1959a).

Loudest among the voices was University of Kentucky president, Frank G. Dickey. In a speech at the dedication of the new plant which epitomised many of the outward-looking ideals of the new business-oriented Lexington, Dickey expounded on the merits of IBM, on development and global democracy, and on the benefits of partnership between higher education and corporations. Dickey praised IBM as a company devoted to “education and economic development” and argued that

During the period of a rapidly growing economy since World War II, our industrial leaders have come to realise more and more that the interests of businesses and education are inseparable, that they are in truth partners and that it is a general rather than a limited or specialised partnership (quoted in *Lexington Herald-Leader*, 1959d, p. 21).

Positioning Kentucky's largest, state-funded university and the city of Lexington in line with what he perceived to be the economic and geo-political goals of IBM and the nation, Dickey went on to argue that a closer partnership between business and higher edu-

cation in the US could only prove beneficial to the “rapidly developing nations of the world”, since it would “answer many of their most basic and persistent problems”. So, for Dickey, IBM was a boon to Lexington in terms of inward investment civic engagement

Our pride in IBM stems from a number of reasons, touching on economics of the area [and] the contributions of individuals connected with the firm to our community affairs (quoted in *Lexington Herald*, 1959, p. 3).

He also saw it as beneficial since the company provided the city and the state with a global economic vision that emphasised knowledge and technical expertise as ways to profit from, and help to develop, localities around the world.

While this vision of Lexington’s global future might appear far-fetched, it does indicate a particular discursive strategy employed by Lexington’s élites at the time to frame the city’s economic development not so much in reference to its immediate rural surroundings but, rather, in reference to economic processes operating over much wider geographical fields. The contemporary literature on geographical scale (for example, Delaney and Leitner, 1997) would understand this strategy as an element of a politics of scale that entails the discursive construction of a particular understanding of the city’s place in the world. This understanding positioned Lexington as a new actor and basing-point for US-led global economic development and it could be used persuasively in the context of local politics to legitimate the continued pursuit of inward investment, to direct attention away from longstanding local class- and race-based inequalities, and to avoid the question of the potential pitfalls of a branch-plant-oriented local economic development strategy (Cox and Mair, 1988). Furthermore, it can be argued that this particular locally articulated politics of scale is crucial to the operation of economies operating at national and global scales since it helps to facilitate and legitimate inward investment. Attention to the politics of scale

evident in local élites’ attempts to forge a new economic development model for Lexington in the 1950s highlights the unique elements of the city’s development within a wider process of uneven geographical development that was, perhaps to a lesser extent than today, organised through or in reference to much larger and more powerful cities.

### **Change, Resignation and Uncertainty: Lexington in the 1990s**

In the previous section, I characterised the mid to late 1950s as a crucial moment in Lexington’s engagement with national and global economic flows. In the following paragraphs, I will discuss a second important moment in the city’s on-going interactions with global processes. The city’s experience in the period from the early to mid 1990s was fundamentally shaped by the actions of the LIF and its allies in the 1950s, which emphasises the path-dependent nature of a great deal of local economic development. At the same time, however, the 1990s can be seen as a distinct and critical juncture in Lexington’s often troubled and tenuous relationship with the global economy. Just as IBM and R. J. Reynolds featured prominently in the rise of Lexington’s branch-plant manufacturing model in the 1950s, both companies also dominated the city’s economic development discussions in the early 1990s.

#### *The Departure of IBM*

The announcement by IBM, in August 1990, that it would sell 80 per cent of its now-outdated Lexington typewriter operation to Clayton and Dubilier, a New York investment firm specialising in leveraged buy-outs, heightened worries about the future of Lexington’s economy (*Lexington Herald-Leader*, 1990d). These worries were already manifest in persistent rumours about the future of the IBM plant and the over 5000 workers it employed in 1990 (*Lexington Herald-Leader*, 1990b). The rumours stemmed from the US financial market’s unfavourable reaction to IBM’s performance in 1989. In that

year, the company reported a 74 per cent decline in earnings in the fourth quarter and a 35 per cent fall for the whole year. At the national level, IBM had initiated a programme to shed 10 000 workers. IBM's continued production of electric typewriters that were state-of-the-art in the 1950s made Lexington's ties to the contemporary computer-based world economy of the 1990s increasingly tenuous, despite the addition of computer keyboards and printers to the plant's output (*Lexington Herald-Leader*, 1990a). While the chairman of IBM's Information Products Division claimed in 1990 that the typewriter market was healthy (despite his own admission that there was low growth to no growth in world-wide sales), it was clear by the 1980s that typewriters were a technology of the past. It was also evident that IBM was intent on channelling resources to the production of mainframe and personal computers. By the late 1980s, IBM's Lexington plant had become a backwater and a prime candidate for closure in the company's attempts to stave off competition from smaller computer firms.

By July 1990, the rumours of closure had become talk of the sale of the plant to another office products manufacturer like Canon, Mitsubishi, Sony or Hewlett-Packard. Financial analysts praised the wisdom of eliminating IBM's typewriter division. IBM, for its part, claimed the rumours were groundless. Workers in Lexington began to think seriously about their futures in other IBM plants or in other careers. Similarly, local business owners and politicians contemplated Lexington's future if the company were to leave. IBM had paid \$276 255 in property taxes alone in 1988, employed 7107 people at its peak in 1979 (with 5350 on the payroll in 1990), annually contributed \$25 000 to the city's Arts and Cultural Council, provided 20 per cent of the local United Way's total budget (a contribution of \$1.2 million in 1989–90), and had been a frequent provider of technical assistance and equipment to the University of Kentucky (*Lexington Herald-Leader*, 1990c, p. A11).

The company's announcement, in August,

that it was selling the plant meant the loss of 1200 jobs, the biggest single cutback in the plant's history and a shock to those in Lexington, including the city's mayor, who had until that point refused to acknowledge the possibility of IBM's departure and the attendant problems of population decline and secondary business closures (*Lexington Herald-Leader*, 1990c). In the wake of the announcement, the mayor chose to "accentuate the positive, go on from here, not dwell too much on what's happened" (quoted in *Lexington Herald-Leader*, 1990f, p. A10). The president of the Chamber of Commerce had more specific concerns. Noting that many IBM employees expected to stay with the company and be relocated to other plants around the country, he said, "The thing we don't want [the employees] to do is leave town ... if there is anything to do to keep them here" (p. A10; ellipsis in original). In a meeting hours after the decision to sell the plant to Clayton and Dubilier was made public, representatives of the Chamber of Commerce, the Mayor, the president of the University of Kentucky and other business leaders created the Greater Lexington Job Development Program—a clearinghouse for those former IBM workers wishing to retire, to find new jobs or to start new businesses. This new body was to have a budget of \$100 000 and an office in the Chamber of Commerce building (*Lexington Herald-Leader*, 1990f, p. A10).

This rapidly arranged private–public fix is a symptom of the problematic nature of local economic development strategies with a 'cargo-cult' mentality of attracting mobile capital and expecting it to make itself indefinitely immobile (Cox and Mair, 1988). While the local leaders in the 1950s proclaimed themselves successful in their strategy of attracting outside investment to Lexington, the nature of this investment—in the form of a large multinational corporation with interests and responsibilities outside the city—was relatively insecure. Moreover, not only had IBM decided to focus on the company's core product line of mainframe computers and its burgeoning PC products, but

they had decided to enter into partnership with a Wall Street firm with no other local business or political ties.

### *The Closure of the Reynolds Plant*

The late summer of 1990 marked the end of Lexington's ties to IBM's manufacturing operations. In April 1991, the city also saw the end of its connections with R. J. Reynolds which had long been of symbolic importance and the source of hope for future development. While IBM's announcement had been relatively unexpected, Reynolds' decision had originally been announced in September 1986 (*Lexington Herald-Leader*, 1986). The company announced its plans one week after dedicating a new, \$1 billion, 2 million square foot cigarette plant just north of Winston-Salem, North Carolina. The closure of the Lexington plant was one of seven closings in Kentucky, Virginia and North Carolina that Reynolds enacted at the time. These actions were part of what Reynolds characterised as a streamlining operation. The promise of a cigarette manufacturing plant on the Reynolds site that had been a feature of discussions in the 1950s did not come to fruition, leaving the city as a site of primary tobacco processing rather than one where final product manufacturing took place. This, and the eventual departure of Reynolds in 1991, was a further sign of the fundamental weakness of, or at least the reduced feasibility of, the local economic development strategy developed by the LIF and its allies in the 1950s.

Again, this loss must be understood in terms of national and global corporate priorities that the locality had little ability to influence. In the period after 1959, US-grown tobacco's share of global supply has dropped by almost two-thirds (Bates, 1995). At the same time, countries like Brazil, Malawi, Zimbabwe and India had become major exporters of burley and flue-cured tobacco, the two main ingredients of cigarettes. The globalisation of tobacco production and consumption—coupled with the concentration of tobacco-related profit-making in

the hands of a few TNCs—was having profound effects on domestic US tobacco farmers and wholesalers by the beginning of the 1990s. For example, the amount of unmanufactured tobacco exported from the US grew markedly both in terms of quantity and value in the 1990s (US Department of Agriculture, 1997). This suggests that, while tobacco companies still rely somewhat on US farmers for tobacco, less value was being added to the product within US borders and it was, instead, being exported to other parts of the world to be converted into value-added products.

The effects of the global reorganisation of tobacco production and consumption were, by the 1990s, particularly evident in the central Kentucky Bluegrass region surrounding Lexington. By that time, Lexington and the state as a whole had a decreasing economic dependence on tobacco. The crop's contribution to Kentucky's GDP in 1992 was less than 1 per cent while farm output as a whole contributed 3.4 per cent. On the other hand, manufacturing contributed one-quarter of the entire GDP. Of tobacco farmers in the state, 55 per cent were part-time, often working in off-farm employment besides cultivating the crop (*Lexington Herald-Leader*, 1997, p. A1). For most farmers, the crop provided supplementary income that helped out at the end of the year and offered a chance for farmers to live a middle-class lifestyle.

### *From High Hopes to 'It Could Have Been Worse': Local Resignation and the Circulation of Capital*

If an approach based on contemporary understandings of geographical scale provides the opportunity to understand the way local urban élites are empowered to construct certain economic development models by invoking a certain understanding of their city's potential relationships to other scales, as Lexington's élites of the 1950s were, then the same epistemological framework can also highlight the ways in which cities' relationships to global economic processes can work to disempower local élites. This disempowering process

came into sharp focus in 1990s Lexington when Clayton and Dubilier emphasised that it did not intend to break up the IBM plant's assets for profit but, rather, to recoup its investment by continuing to produce printers and other office products in Lexington—with a reduced workforce and a new marketing division (*Lexington Herald-Leader*, 1990g). This announcement left local leaders with the cold comfort that “it could have been worse” (*Lexington Herald-Leader*, 1990f, p. A10)—a position that was a far cry from the heady optimism of the 1950s. The new company, later renamed Lexmark International Inc., took over IBM's operations in Lexington on 21 March 1991 and has gone on to specialise successfully in the production of popular computer printers and has opened production facilities in other parts of the US and in Europe and Latin America (*Money*, 1999). Its success, and the relatively unchanged appearance of the company's manufacturing facility to the north of downtown, has not erased the memory of IBM's departure, however. The confidence in Lexington's position within wider economies that was frequently expressed in reference to IBM's presence in the city in the immediate post-war period is unlikely to return.

While there has been little change in the built environment of the former IBM plant, the landscape of the former Reynolds facility has been markedly reshaped. Reynolds' departure left a large tract of suburban land available for reuse. It was seen as an opportunity to shape the future character of the city by both business leaders and local neighbourhood activists. While the former group envisioned the future of the land in terms of commercial development built adjacent to existing malls, the latter saw the largely undeveloped site as the last hope for green space in a rapidly developing part of the city. This spurred a protracted dispute over the future of the site. While the conflict can be seen as an example of local, urban or perhaps even neighbourhood politics, it was precipitated by the actions of a global corporation responding to changes in the geography of its global production and marketing priorities.

Furthermore, the dispute over the future of the site was so hard-fought because it was understood by local business élites to be a key aspect of a wider restructuring of Lexington's space economy and its future economic development model (McCann, 2002b). The land is currently being redeveloped for retail, service and housing uses—a far cry from the industrial buildings and tobacco storage sheds that marked the site for over three decades.

As Harvey notes in a passage that emphasises the need to understand local economic and landscape change as fundamentally tied to processes of investment and uneven development stretching across a range of scales

The tension between [the] fixity and mobility [of capital] erupts into generalised crises ... when the landscape shaped in relation to a certain phase of development ... becomes a barrier to further accumulation. The landscape must then be reshaped ... Old places have to be devalued, destroyed and redeveloped while new places are created. The cathedral town becomes a heritage centre; the mining community becomes a ghost town; the old industrialised centre is deindustrialised; speculative boom towns or gentrified neighbourhoods arise on the frontiers of capitalist development or out of the ashes of deindustrialised communities (Harvey, 1993, p. 7; see also 1982, p. 238).

Changes in the production and consumption of commodities such as tobacco and typewriters are, then, related to the production of urban geographies. While the decision-making complexes that control these global corporate decisions cannot be understood without reference to the workings of global city networks, the effects of their decisions must also be understood in the context of specific urban localities beyond the standard globalised urban frame if the character of cities' relationships to the global economy is to be understood in all its depth and complexity.

### **Discussion: From a Global to a Multiplex City and the Future of Urban Studies**

This paper seeks to contribute to the on-going debate over the relationships between cities and global processes or what I have referred to as the globalisation–urbanisation nexus. Specifically, I critically analyse the epistemological assumptions and representational practices of the global cities literatures that dominate most current thinking on this relationship. The paper responds to certain problematic aspects of the global cities perspective, particularly a tendency to theorise on the basis of rigid categories and an attendant neglect of the experience of many other ‘non-global’ cities. I point to the benefits of contemporary literatures on geographical scale for understanding the experience of the urban in the context of contemporary globalisation. This relational perspective sees scales, such as the global and the local, as powerful but historically contingent crystallisations of fluid social processes that transcend the boundaries of categories such as ‘global’ and ‘non-global’.

On the basis of this argument, I discuss key moments in the relationship between Lexington, Kentucky—a city that is ‘off the map’ of global cities literatures (Robinson, 2002)—and the global economy. The case study highlights the longstanding importance of global economic processes in the city’s local economic development. This is manifest in two ways, among others: proposed strategies for future growth and accepted visions of the city’s current and future role in the world are framed by past interactions with global corporations and changing relationships between higher levels of the state and local growth coalitions; and, the shaping and reshaping of the urban built environment through investment from beyond the city boundaries provides both the context and the stake for urban political negotiation as local interest-groups contest their differing views of how former industrial properties should be reused. These insights would not be surprising to those who study the politics of local economic development. Their purpose here,

however, is to emphasise the variety of ways in which the globalisation–urbanisation nexus might be manifest in cities that are generally overlooked by global cities literatures, to suggest that contemporary understandings of scale as a networked, interconnecting process allows these manifestations to be studied, and to argue that an overemphasis on the experience of a few ‘global’ cities in our attempts to understand cities in general has problematic implications for urban studies and urban theory.

#### *Beyond the Polarisation of Urban Studies or, Remembering Not to Forget*

The most troubling implication is a polarisation between scholars who frame their research on cities in terms of the global cities discourse of ‘command-and-control’ centres and ‘cutting edge’ cities on the one hand, and those who study cities that exist beyond the range of the globalised urban object of study, on the other. There are various aspects to this polarisation. For instance, Robinson’s critique of the global cities approach stems from her discomfort with the application of urban theory developed in the context of a few Western cities to a wide range of non-Western contexts. As she puts it

Understandings of city-ness have come to rest on the (usually unstated) experiences of a relatively small group of (mostly western) cities, and cities outside the West are assessed in terms of this pre-given standard of (world) city-ness, or urban economic dynamism (Robinson, 2002, pp. 531–532).

In my case, the critique of global cities literatures is based on an uneasiness with the growing tendency among many urban scholars to overlook a whole range of cities both within and without the Western world when theorising the globalisation–urbanisation nexus. Connecting our specific concerns is, I would suggest, an overarching conviction that urban theory will be impoverished if the range of cities whose experiences form the basis for theoretical statements continues to

be narrowed to just a few 'global cities' or if discussion of other cities is only seen to be useful if it is couched in terms of the categories produced by global cities literatures.

How then, might we reframe our understanding of cities' relationships to the global processes? One way would be to take seriously the role of representational practices in shaping how we know the world. As I suggested above, an important reason why global cities literatures have gained a certain level of hegemony in urban studies is due to their powerful representational strategies (McCann, 2002a). The powerful phrase, 'command-and-control', tied to an alluring and provocative language of extremes (Nast and Pile, 1998) and framed within a set of clearly defined analytical categories provides a firm epistemological basis for a great deal of research and writing. What language, then, might replace or modify this powerful representation of the urban world in ways that take account of the diversity of urban experience?

While, as I have already suggested, the literature on scale offers a great deal in this regard, the question of language and representation—how to crystallise multifaceted thinking on the complexities of scale in ways that provide a common basis for future discussion—is one that continues to be addressed. Scholars working on this topic have, on the one hand, noted that geographical scale itself can be understood as a representation—a mental map created to persuade others of a particular position, opinion or 'reality'—which is reified through routinised practice (Delaney and Leitner; 1997; McDowell, 2001). At the same time, they have developed a range of metaphors and neologisms—from networks to glocal cities to the idea of jumping scales—to indicate the complex, contradictory, interconnected, politically contested and socially activated processes that produce and are the product of scale. A common trait of all these representational practices is an attention to issues of process (although too often focused on the global scale and not attentive enough to micro-scale processes or to social reproduction

(Marston, 2000; McDowell, 2001; Miewald and McCann, 2004)). This focus resonates with longstanding concerns in geography with understanding place in the context of circulatory processes extending beyond locales (Harvey, 1982; Massey, 1991).

In this regard, I will suggest that a language already exists to assist in the retheorisation of the globalisation–urbanisation nexus. Proposing the concept of the 'multiplex city', Amin and Graham (1997, pp. 417–421) see the city as produced by complex and often contradictory interactions of diverse political economic and cultural networks (from the intrafirm connections of global producer services firms to the socio-spatial practices of the cleaners who maintain their offices (Allen and Pryke, 1994)). Others have developed similar understandings of cities as networked and simultaneously localised and distanced. For instance, Amin and Graham (1997, p. 418) note that Boden and Molotch (1994) emphasise the "thickness of co-present interaction" in cities, in the form of face-to-face and electronic communication. Similarly, Harvey (1996, pp. 259–260) employs the term "cogrience" to indicate "the way in which multiple processes flow together to construct a single consistent, coherent, though multifaceted time space system". Merrifield, for his part, emphasises the notion of co-presence as part of his dialectical understanding of space and place. He argues that

Within the very moment of place ... there lies a *copresence* of heterogeneous and conflictual processes, many of which are operative over a broader scale than the realm of place itself (Merrifield, 1993, p. 522; original emphasis).<sup>4</sup>

The understanding connecting these various terms is that the social processes constituting cities are 'bundled' into intense complexes of interaction, are simultaneously 'distanced' over wider geographical fields and can only be understood in reference to these inter-scalar connections. This perspective problematises the understanding of contemporary urban processes that relies on evidence pro-

vided by only a few cities. Certainly, focusing our attention on exemplary cases or on classificatory schemes that assign cities to 'global', 'non-global' or 'globalising' categories (Yeoh, 1999) has provided many useful insights. These categories must not, however, blind us to a more diverse range of contexts in which globalisation and urbanisation processes intersect in the context of wider geographies of uneven development.

The notions of multiplexity and co-presence briefly outlined here, then, provide a perspective on place that emphasises *both* the uniqueness *and* the interconnectedness of places—of all sizes and exhibiting various characteristics—as they are shaped and reshaped by global processes of uneven development. This is not to suggest that all places are the same. Many 'non-global' cities are unique in various ways but their relationships to wider political-economic processes should not be overlooked as we theorise the globalisation–urbanisation nexus and the complex geographies of uneven development within which it is situated.

## Notes

1. Harvey and Castells initiated this approach in the Anglophone literature. Discussions of urban issues were already under way in France, for instance. Both Harvey and Castells were reading Lefebvre's work at this time.
2. Statistics in this paragraph are drawn from the 1990 US Census.
3. Income tax revenue from the IBM site or the LIF property did not automatically accrue to the city. Since both tracts of land were beyond the city limits, the city government engaged in a two-year-long series of legal actions to gain control of the lands through annexation from the surrounding Fayette County (*Lexington Herald-Leader*, 1959f). This difficulty, although resolved to the city's satisfaction, highlighted the jurisdictional separation between the city and the county as a potential barrier to the agenda of the growth-oriented urban business and political élite. Expanding the city's manufacturing base necessitated control over large tracts of land, which were largely located in Fayette County. By the early 1970s, problems with the city–county division led city

élites to devise a spatial fix in which the city and county were merged, placing all land under the jurisdiction of a single 'Lexington–Fayette Urban County Government' (*Lexington Herald-Leader*, 1990e; Lyons, 1977). The year 1974, when the merger took place, is, then, a third key moment in Lexington's economic development.

4. Here I repeat the earlier *caveat*: some global cities research has envisioned the city as multiplex (for example, Sassen, 1991), but the vast majority of global cities literatures have settled into a comfortable dualistic and hierarchical vision of the urban world.

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