

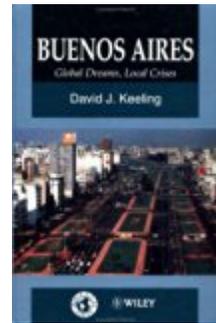
H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

David J. Keeling. *Buenos Aires: Global Dreams, Local Crises*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1996. xvi + 256 pp. \$71.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-471-94935-0.

Reviewed by Yovanna Y. Pineda (University of California, Los Angeles)

Published on H-Urban (January, 1998)



Globalization of Buenos Aires

(Comments from the author follow the review.)

In *Buenos Aires: Global Dreams, Local Crises*, David Keeling discusses the spatial dynamics of Buenos Aires and the city's role in the world economy. Previous historical urban studies on Buenos Aires, such as *Buenos Aires: Plaza to Suburb, 1870-1910* by James Scobie (1974) and *The Spatial Evolution of Greater Buenos Aires, Argentina, 1870-1930* by Charles Sargent (1974) focused primarily on the historical development of the city without considering the last two decades or the impact of globalization in Buenos Aires. Keeling focuses on the changes in Buenos Aires during the period from the 1970s through 1990s. He argues that the international globalization process has strongly impacted the politics and economy of the metropolitan area. He considers how globalization strategies under the presidency of Menem, which include free-market policies, regional economic alliances, and privatization of industry and services, have affected the city's spatial dynamics. The work is a geographic-historical study and is replete with maps, tables, and figures that demonstrate the spatial changes and growth of the city from the colonial period to the present time.

Keeling relies primarily on secondary sources for descriptive information, and quantitative data also come from secondary sources and serve primarily to illustrate trends and relationships, but fail to provide definitive conclusions. The author's most important sources are the maps which document everything from spatial changes, barrios, municipalities, and landscapes, to population density, and transportation and airline systems.

The maps suggest that the Buenos Aires region is the most important area of Argentina. His maps and tables are adequately thorough in covering an overview of several aspects of a world city. Instead of specializing on one aspect of the city, Keeling chose to cover a broader outlook.

Similar to previous scholars, Keeling distinguishes Buenos Aires as the influential political, economic, and social center of the entire nation. In chapter two, Keeling discusses the urban growth and change of Buenos Aires from 1580 to 1990. This chapter was largely influenced by the works of previous scholars including Sargent (1974), Scobie (1974), *City Guide of Buenos Aires* by Kathleen Wheaton (1990), *Buenos Aires: Historia Urbana del Area Metropolitana* by Margarita Gutman and Jorge Hardoy (1990), and "Region Metropolitana Buenos Aires: Estructuración, problemática y aspecto de cambio" by Manuel Luduena (1993). Keeling shows the growth of the city by employing maps that mark the transportation network. He traces the growth of the railroad and tramway network from 1854 to 1912, and indicates a correlation between the growth of the transportation system and the stimulation of economic development. The maps demonstrate how the transportation network dramatically propelled the growth of the federal district boundaries. Moreover, during the period 1854 to 1912, urbanization and population density in areas surrounding the federal district also increased tremendously.

Chapter three defines the contemporary boundaries of the metropolitan area. Keeling focuses on discussing

the metropolitan axis which includes the inner ring and the 23 counties that form the city's outer ring. The boundaries of the metropolitan axis were outlined by the Department of Planning and Development (SEPLADE). In this chapter, the author divides the metropolitan axis into four major urban sections: the four primary corridors of the outer ring; the greater La Plata region and the growing section of the middle ring; the 47 barrios of the federal district within the inner city periphery; and the Plaza de Mayo, the "heart" of the city. This chapter is largely descriptive as he discusses general information and the distinguishing features of the four major sectors of the greater Buenos Aires. Keeling is also interested in the dichotomy between rich and poor. He examines the mix of country clubs, the middle class suburbs, industrial centers, and the "villas de emergencia" or shantytowns that define the 19 sections of the inner ring.

In chapters four and five, Keeling discusses how politicians have coped with the problems of urban poverty, and urban planning and housing. Keeling discusses the unsuccessful plan to move the capital to the interior to the Patagonian city of Viedma. The author argues that the effects of globalization encouraged politicians to develop an interest in maintaining the city's world status and restoring the former beauty of the city. In 1991, the government created a restoration and rehabilitation program, the City Port Project. Bureaucrats believed by that such a plan would reverse the deteriorating condition of the city. The project intended to restore buildings constructed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Urban planners and politicians also wanted to accommodate urban growth by building more housing for the poor and reducing the number of unattractive "villas de emergencia." The "villas de emergencia" had been steadily increasing since the economic crises of the 1970s. In chapter five, Keeling describes the increased migration into the city during the 1970s and 1980s and how this contributed to the problem of urban poverty and housing shortages. Along with migration, high unemployment rates in industrial jobs due to downsizing by divested state companies left many migrants unemployed and impoverished.

Similar to the discussion in chapter two, Keeling maintains in the sixth chapter that the systems of transportation and communication function as the foundations upon which the processes of urbanization exist. He explains how the growing congestion in the federal district forced the government to pass the Traffic Emergency Law in May 1994 to reduce amount of traffic coming into the center. However, a major characteristic of

a world city is not simply the traffic congestion, but primarily the ability of the physical infrastructure to facilitate global interaction. Keeling discusses both the global connectivity of Buenos Aires with other major cities of the globe, and the infrastructure of the metropolitan center and the nation. He argues how intercontinental airline links such as direct flights to other continents have become a metaphor for success.

In chapter seven, Keeling discusses the myriad environmental problems such as air, water, and noise pollution, and the environmental health problems due to poor sanitation. Chapter eight explains the importance for a world city to maintain a rich assortment of social and cultural infrastructure. The author denotes some of the primary forms of entertainment in Buenos Aires such as sports and outdoor life, theater, museums, popular entertainment, tourist landscapes, parks, and the nightlife of Buenos Aires. Overall, Keeling describes a worldly and advanced city with an assortment of problems and aspirations. Students of the city of Buenos Aires and the general audience stand to gain significant knowledge from this work.

++++++

Dr Keeling replies:

Thanks for the opportunity to response to the review of my recent book on Buenos Aires. One of the key problems for this type of research is that comparative data are not yet available because of the temporal context. The purpose of the study was to provide an analysis of the impacts of globalization policies on a world city. Argentina embraced neoliberal policies only in 1990, so too little time has elapsed for the development of meaningful empirical data that could provide definitive evidence of direction of change. Rather, the study attempts to provide a benchmark against which to measure future change. No primary data existed that could offer definitive evidence, therefore conclusions are not offered, only suggestions for possible future directions of change.

A further mission of the study was to place Buenos Aires' geohistorical context firmly within the world city paradigm and to tease out where the city stood along the local-global continuum of social-economic interaction. Although some of the background material had to be descriptive in nature, the study offers plenty of analysis of the spatial dynamics of interaction and change. Finally, a key purpose of the study was to bring the geography of Buenos Aires to the fore. Understanding the spatial dynamics of a megacity such as Buenos Aires is

critical if planners, policy makers, business people, and governments are to offer workable solutions to the myriad problems faced by a city of this magnitude.

Copyright (c) 1998 by H-Net, all rights reserved. This work may be copied for non-profit educational use if proper credit is given to the author and the list. For other permission, please contact H-Net@h-net.msu.edu.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-urban>

Citation: Yovanna Y. Pineda. Review of Keeling, David J., *Buenos Aires: Global Dreams, Local Crises*. H-Urban, H-Net Reviews. January, 1998.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=1641>

Copyright © 1998 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu.