

# **UCLA**

## **Critical Planning**

### **Title**

Keys to the City: How Economics, Institutions, Social Interaction, and Politics Shape Development by Michael Storper

### **Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/33m516rc>

### **Journal**

Critical Planning, 21(1)

### **Author**

Hale, Marcia

### **Publication Date**

2014

### **DOI**

10.5070/CP8211024799

### **Copyright Information**

Copyright 2014 by the author(s). All rights reserved unless otherwise indicated. Contact the author(s) for any necessary permissions. Learn more at <https://escholarship.org/terms>

Peer reviewed

---

## BOOK REVIEW

# Keys to the City:

## How Economics, Institutions, Social Interaction, and Politics Shape Development by Michael Storper

**Marcia Rosalie Hale, Doctoral Candidate**  
University of California, Los Angeles

In his book *Keys to the City: How Economics, Institutions, Social Interaction, and Politics Shape Development*, Michael Storper explains why cities grow. The growth of city-regions is important to policymakers, urban planners, and industry leaders, among others, who have an interest in developing metropolitan areas that are competitive in national and international economies. However, early on in the book, Storper contextualizes his work within a social justice framework, asserting that at its foundation, *Keys to the City* is about change, and “change and its causes are what matter most to human welfare” (4).

Before concluding the book through a justice analysis, Storper moves the reader through four analytical contexts for explaining metropolitan growth. These four “keys” to understanding why city-regions grow are economic, institutional, innovational, and political. What makes these four contexts all the more interesting is the triad of perspectives employed, including economics, economic geography, and economic sociology.

Throughout the book, Storper makes claims that re-position central arguments within each of these fields. For example, he takes on a core debate within urban economics that asks whether people follow jobs or jobs follow people into city-regions. The first key to the city Storper offers is that regional growth is led by the development of firms and industries, rather than by firms following people.

Of course, related questions about where firms develop are addressed at length, answered by the other keys. For instance, institutions are redefined as social networks, rather than formal governments or organizations. Storper contends that it is social networks, rather than formal institutions, that generate solutions to economic transition problems by facilitating new organizational forms. The human dimension of regional growth is further illuminated by the need for face-to-face contact for social evaluations, maintaining relationships, and making deals.

However, planning scholars concerned with social justice will be most stimulated by the thread of concern for inequality and justice that runs through these pages. In the final chapter, Storper addresses the topic head on, asserting that economics is “inherently concerned

---

with justice,” and is a perpetual balancing act between justice and efficiency (204). And development over time poses deep challenges to this balancing act, for organizing the many complexities involved in a city-region to reflect a balance between justice and efficiency today does not guarantee or even necessarily involve planning for the maintenance of that balance tomorrow.

While Storper provides an overview of leading theories of justice, he ultimately lands in the space of social choice as the best answer to the problem of creating city-regions with sustainable justice. Essentially, this means cultivating societies that have the ability to make better choices, which in turn boils down to providing better information, framing better questions, and facilitating more nuanced social engagement, specifically national dialogues that focus on justice and the urban system. Here the book practices what it preaches by concluding with a report to policymakers. This brief section breaks down the incredible complexity of the book into language that is accessible to those outside of the technical or scholarly field. In doing this, Storper invites scholars into a new paradigm, in which our role is not necessarily to generate solutions, but to provide better questions to the public, so that society can engage in a continuous conversation, the very existence of which is a map for social equality. ■

## REFERENCES

Storper, Michael. *Keys to the City: How Economics, Institutions, Social Interaction, and Politics Shape Development* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013. 288 pp. ISBN: 978-0-691143-11-0.