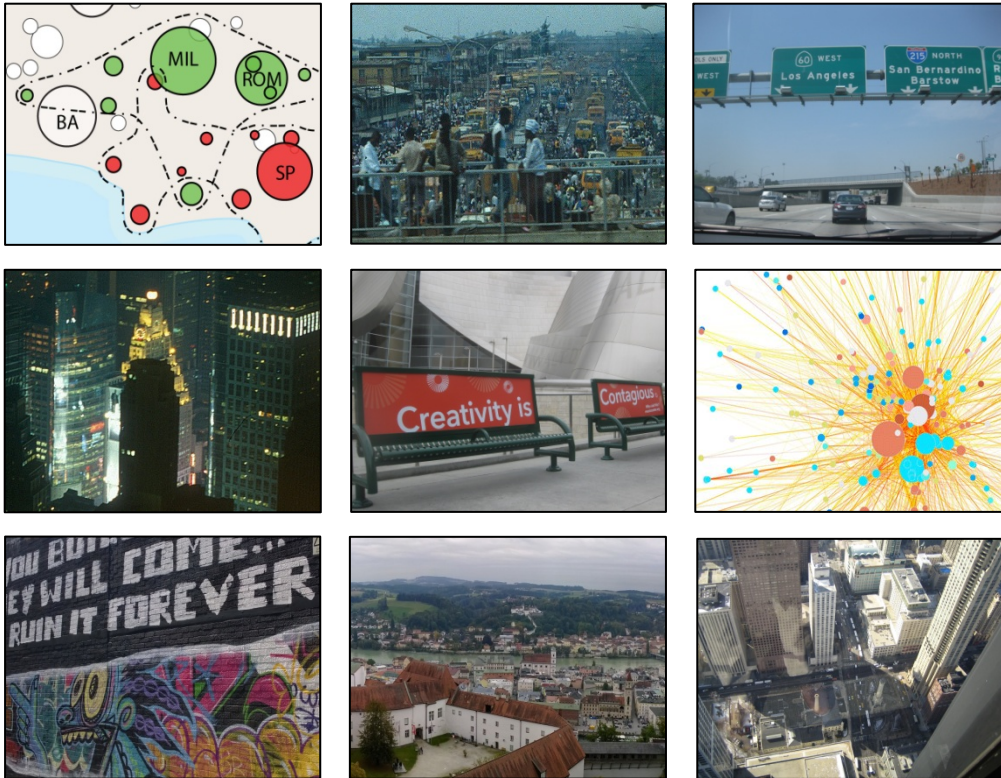


# DOING GLOBAL URBAN RESEARCH

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## INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

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Monday, 7 September – Wednesday, 9 September 2015

 @GaWC #globalurban

Organisers: John Harrison ([J.Harrison4@lboro.ac.uk](mailto:J.Harrison4@lboro.ac.uk))  
Michael Hoyler ([M.Hoyler@lboro.ac.uk](mailto:M.Hoyler@lboro.ac.uk))



# Programme

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## Monday, 7 September

08.15-09.00	<b>Registration</b>
09.00-09.30	<b>Welcome and Introductions</b> <i>Professor Robert Allison (Vice-Chancellor, Loughborough University)</i>
09.30-10.30	<b>Keynote 1:</b> <b>An experience of global urban research</b> <i>Peter J. Taylor (Northumbria University)</i>
10.30-11.00	Coffee break
11.00-1.00	<b>Workshop Session 1 :</b> <b>1a: Researching the World City Network</b> <i>Chair: Jana Kleibert (University of Amsterdam)</i>  Renovating urban systems theory <i>Michiel van Meeteren (Ghent University)</i>  Advancing the multi-scalar approach: detecting resource geopolitical sub-regional networks and globalizing centres <i>Kirsten Martinus (The University of Western Australia)</i>  Beyond 'Global Hollywood': (trans)national film production in alternative urban networks <i>Michael Hoyer and Allan Watson (Loughborough University / Staffordshire University)</i>  Face-to-face in the global metropolis: the temporary interplay of places and processes in service production <i>Anna Growe (University of Freiburg)</i>

	<p><b>1b: Globalizing African Cities</b></p> <p>Chair: <i>Katherine Gough (Loughborough University)</i></p> <p>The making of Africa’s largest port: transformation and sociality in Bagamoyo, Tanzania <i>Seth Schindler (University of Sheffield)</i></p> <p>Capitalizing on cities: entrepreneurial elites in African commercial capitals <i>Chambi Chachage (Harvard University)</i></p> <p>Spatial and social transformations in Ghana’s urban neighbourhoods: Insights from Accra and Sekondi-Takoradi <i>James Esson, Katherine Gough and Paul Yankson (Loughborough University / University of Ghana)</i></p> <p><b>1c: Comparative Urbanism</b></p> <p>Chair: <i>Tim Bunnell (National University of Singapore)</i></p> <p>Investigating inequality in creative cities: a global comparative approach <i>Ulrike Gerhard, David Giband, Ferenc Gyuris, Michael Hölscher and David Wilson (University of Heidelberg /University of Perpignan / Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest / University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign)</i></p> <p>Placing Asian cities within global urban analysis: thinking differently about theories, methodologies and meanings <i>Tracey Skelton (National University of Singapore)</i></p> <p>Comparative resilience and precarity in global cities <i>Geoff Deverteuil (Cardiff University)</i></p>
1.00-2.00	Lunch break
2.00-3.00	<p><b>Keynote 2:</b></p> <p><b>Constructing global suburbia, one critical theory at a time</b> <i>Roger Keil (York University, Toronto)</i></p>
3.00-5.00	<p><b>Workshop Session 2:</b></p> <p><b>2a: Global Experts</b></p> <p>Chair: <i>Karenjit Clare (Loughborough University)</i></p> <p>Making world city systems: Talent mobilities and the reproduction of global corporate networks <i>Jonathan Beaverstock (University of Bristol)</i></p> <p>Imagining ‘global’ work: place and gender in talent management <i>Sophie Cranston (Loughborough University)</i></p>

	<p>Global expertise, local convincing power: management consultants and urban policy <i>Anne Vogelpohl (University of Hamburg)</i></p> <p>Tracking the global intelligence corps in sustainable urban planning and design <i>Elizabeth Rapoport (University College London)</i></p> <p><b>2b: Housing</b></p> <p>Chair: <i>James Esson (Loughborough University)</i></p> <p>Material citizen: (il)legal building extensions in Cape Town, South Africa <i>Charlotte Lemanski (University of Cambridge)</i></p> <p>Doing longitudinal global urban research <i>Katherine Gough (Loughborough University)</i></p> <p>Building global cities? The political economy of ‘condo-ism’ in Vancouver and Manila <i>Jana Kleibert (University of Amsterdam)</i></p> <p>Speculative urbanisation and the politics of displacement <i>Hyun Bang Shin (London School of Economics and Political Science)</i></p> <p><b>2c: New Methodologies for Doing Global Urban Research</b></p> <p>Chair: <i>Kamna Patel (University College London)</i></p> <p>Developing methodologies for the study of urban energy landscapes: cases from Mozambique, India and China <i>Vanesa Castán Broto (University College London)</i></p> <p>Traffic in Bogota and the uses of a pragmatic approach to global urbanism <i>Laura Cesafsky (University of Minnesota)</i></p> <p>‘Indigenous rights to the city’: a comparison of decolonial urbanism in Bolivia and Ecuador <i>Philipp Horn (University of Manchester)</i></p>
5.00-5.30	Coffee break
5.30-6.30	<p><b>Keynote 3:</b></p> <p><b>Researching urban policies on the move: towards a research agenda</b> <i>Kevin Ward (University of Manchester)</i></p>
6.30-7.30	<b>Drinks Reception</b>

**Tuesday, 8 September**

9.00-10.00	<p><b>Keynote 4:</b></p> <p><b>Planetary urbanization: challenges and opportunities for urban research</b> <i>Christian Schmid (ETH Zurich)</i></p>
10.00-10.30	Coffee break
10.30-12.30	<p><b>Workshop Session 3:</b></p> <p><b>3a: Researching Policy Mobilities in situ</b> Chair: <i>Gianpaolo Baiocchi (New York University)</i></p> <p>Urban policymaking and planning strategies in times of crisis: bringing the experiences of Valencia and Mar del Plata into analytical conversation through comparisons <i>Alvaro Sanchez-Jimenez (University College London)</i></p> <p>Researching fixity/mobility of alternative transport policies: a methodological note on the mobile policy hinterworld of Brussels <i>Wojciech Kębłowski, David Bassens and Mathieu van Criekingen (Université libre de Bruxelles / Vrije Universiteit Brussel)</i></p> <p><b>3b: Doing Global Cities Research</b> Chair: <i>Oli Mould (Royal Holloway, University of London)</i></p> <p>Building global cities: theories in search of a (responsible) practice <i>Michele Acuto (University College London)</i></p> <p>The university as actor and context for global urbanization <i>Jean-Paul Addie (University College London)</i></p> <p>HereEast London: Two worlds – a series of dichotomies in the ‘global’ city <i>Karenjit Clare (Loughborough University)</i></p> <p><b>3c: Co-Producing Global Urban Research</b> Chair: <i>Vanesa Castán Broto (University College London)</i></p> <p>Grassroots urbanism: a critical exploration of community based organisations (CBOs) in Dhaka's <i>bustees</i> <i>Sally Cawood (University of Manchester)</i></p> <p>Competing discourses and co-producing knowledge: can we build a coherent informal settlements agenda in South Africa? <i>Liza Rose Cirolia (University of Cape Town)</i></p>

	<p>Doing global urban research in Nigeria <i>Robin Bloch and Nikos Papachristodoulou (Urban Planning, ICF International)</i></p>
12.30-1.30	Lunch break
1.30-3.30	<p><b>Workshop Session 4:</b></p> <p><b>4a: Policy Circulation</b> Chair: <i>Alvaro Sanchez-Jimenez (University College London)</i></p> <p>Reworking comparative urbanism across cities in the global north and global south <i>Cristina Temenos (Northeastern University)</i></p> <p>Urban democracy beyond borders: ambiguous devices, publics, and the ethnographic account <i>Gianpaolo Baiocchi (New York University)</i></p> <p>Historicizing the circulation of urban policies through career paths analysis: Barcelonian experts and their role in redeveloping Buenos Aires' Puerto Madero <i>Guillermo Jajamovich (University of Buenos Aires)</i></p> <p><b>4b: Creative Urbanism and Ethnography</b> Chair: <i>Michael Glass (University of Pittsburgh)</i></p> <p>The empirics of co-option: exploring the leading-edge of creative urbanism <i>Oli Mould (Royal Holloway, University of London)</i></p> <p>From urban icons to planetary algorithms: the visual economy of research of global urbanization <i>Saara Liinamaa (NSCAD University, Halifax)</i></p> <p>Measuring silences: temporality, ocular identity and structural progression in Gulf cities <i>David Kendall (Goldsmiths, University of London)</i></p> <p><b>4c: Feminist and Postcolonial Approaches</b> Chair: <i>Tracey Skelton (National University of Singapore)</i></p> <p>Addressing gendered insecurities in the urban global south through transnational feminist praxis <i>Linda Peake (York University, Toronto)</i></p>

	<p>Being a global urban researcher: the postcolonial challenges of navigating the 'field' and the academy <i>Kamna Patel and Romola Sanyal (University College London / London School of Economics and Political Science)</i></p> <p>The stories of cities <i>Shari Daya (University of Cape Town)</i></p>
3.30-4.00	Coffee break
4.00-5.00	<p><b>Keynote 5:</b></p> <p><b>Challenges and opportunities of an Africanist doing global urban research</b> <i>Susan Parnell (University of Cape Town)</i></p>
Evening	<b>Conference Dinner</b>

### Wednesday, 9 September

09.00-11.00	<p><b>Workshop Session 5:</b></p> <p><b>5a: Doing <i>Mega</i>-Urban Research</b></p> <p>Chair: <i>Jean-Paul Addie (University College London)</i></p> <p>Evaluating cross-border megaregions along the United States-Canada border <i>Michael Glass (University of Pittsburgh)</i></p> <p>Policy failure and speculative governance: land investment through failed Olympic bids <i>John Lauermann (Rhode Island School of Design)</i></p> <p>The event city: how large events are creating a new global urban form <i>Martin Müller and Christopher Gaffney (University of Zurich)</i></p> <p><b>5b: Cities, Finance &amp; Crisis</b></p> <p>Chair: <i>Geoff Deverteuil (Cardiff University)</i></p> <p>Doing global urban research in Southern European cities – a comparative analysis of crisis geographies in Athens and Madrid <i>Georgia Alexandri and Michael Janoschka (National Centre for Social Research (EKKE), Athens / Universidad Autónoma de Madrid)</i></p>
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	<p>Distressed-as-desirable assets: assembling post-crisis geographies of financialisation <i>Desiree Fields (University of Sheffield)</i></p> <p>Comparability, validity, and usefulness: thinking through the ‘alpha territoriality in London and Hong Kong’ project <i>Sin Yee Koh (Universiti Brunei Darussalam)</i></p> <p><b>5c: Debating Approaches to Global Urban Research</b></p> <p>Chair: <i>Allan Watson (Staffordshire University)</i></p> <p>Can the straw man speak? An analysis of the postcolonial critique on global cities research <i>Ben Derudder, Michiel van Meeteren and David Bassens (Ghent University / Vrije Universiteit Brussel)</i></p> <p>Collaborative, comparative ethnography in Asia: methodological experimentation for global urban studies <i>Tim Bunnell, Daniel Goh, Eric C. Thompson, Jamie Gillen, Elaine Ho, Kelvin Low, Peter Marolt, Michelle Miller, Rita Padawangi and Vineeta Sinha (National University of Singapore)</i></p> <p>Decolonizing urbanism? Towards an anti-colonial methodology <i>Carolyn Prouse (University of British Columbia)</i></p>
11.00-11.30	Coffee break
11.30-1.00	<p><b>Special Panel Session</b></p> <p>Panellists: <i>Michele Acuto (University College London), Tim Bunnell (National University of Singapore), Ben Derudder (Ghent University), Linda Peake (York University, Toronto), Cristina Temenos (Northeastern University)</i></p>
1.00-1.30	Lunch
1.30	<b>End of conference</b>



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# Abstracts

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## Building global cities: theories in search of a (responsible) practice

Michele Acuto, University College London, [m.acuto@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:m.acuto@ucl.ac.uk)

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Why should we, over twenty years after its boom (and nearly one hundred since its inception), still care about the “global city”? Certainly the test of a renewed concept’s worth comes in its application to the analysis of real problems. Has the “global city” helped address challenges and practicalities of global urbanism in the ‘newer’ generation of global(ising) cities? Have different ‘generations’ of global urban thinking had different ‘impacts’ on the actual practices of those policymakers seeking to ‘build’ a global city?

This paper draws on the major themes emerging from *Building Global Cities* (for Cornell University Press, forthcoming in 2015), which investigates the connections between global city theory and urbanist practice in two emerging metropolises – Sydney and Dubai. Seeking to go beyond global-ordinary divides, the paper draws on a “comparative gesture” (Robinson 2011) amidst the two to recover the dialogue of multiple generations of ‘global’ urbanism (in practice and theory) in the field, where the “global city” exists right next to ‘smart’ agendas, ‘provincial’ and ‘gentrification’ sensibilities and many other ways of seeing urbanism unfold.

The book is the result of four years of field and desk research on Sydney and Dubai. With over eighty interview with policy practitioners, academics and business, *Building Global Cities* focused on investigating how the global urbanism of the global city “hits the ground” (Sassen 2013) both in their theoretical and practical shapes, and to highlight the sparks that the connections between the two (as much as between different practical and theoretical approaches) might ignite. Interview and ethnographic material, as well as analysis of strategic urban plans, has been used to trace how policymakers in Sydney and Dubai have sought to ‘put in place’ the idea of the global city, and how different generations of global urban theory are represented in the field. Comparing these two experiences, and analyzing the relation between “global city” theory and its urban public policy practice, the book seeks to unpack the political strategies beyond these cities’ ascent to ‘global’ status, and the place of (various) global city theories in these “developmental pathways” (Olds and Yeung 2004).

Borrowing from this study, the paper for the workshop will focus more specifically on the encounter of different generations of global urban thinking theory and the global city ‘practice’. The paper seeks to offer a productive middle ground for the encounter of ‘global’ and ‘ordinary’ modes of urban analysis. By unpacking the construction of global Sydney and Dubai, the encounters of policy and academia and the responsibilities of the ‘city builders’ (in practice and theory), the paper advocates greater sensibility for the multiscalar politics that shape the emergence and continuity of global urbanism ‘on the ground’. ‘Global’ and ‘ordinary’ urbanism, it argues, are but two registers of how we could “see like a city” (Magnusson 2011) against ephemeral global city types now so common in media and academia. The global city scholar can offer a reflection that is systematic,

normative and well-informed, which steps beyond ‘cocktail talk’ about global cities, but is at same time humble enough to admit much of the expertise about global-city making is overall a quite applied policy affair we can participate in, not dominate, for the sake of reminding practitioners of challenges, limitations, and dangers of global urbanism.

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### The university as actor and context for global urbanization

*Jean-Paul Addie, University College London [j.addie@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:j.addie@ucl.ac.uk)*

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This contribution theorizes the ‘new urban university’ – as an urban actor, contradictory institutional space, and site of urban knowledge production that is at once in, but not necessarily of, the city – to think differently about policymaking an social practice in an era global urbanization. Drawing from an on-going qualitative study of universities’ spatial strategies in the London and New York global city-regions, I unpack the conceptual and practical issues of using higher education institutions as an object of global urban research. The analysis brings together a range of theoretical interests, including planetary urbanization, city-regionalism, post-suburbanization, policy mobilities, and critical higher education studies (e.g. Brenner, 2014; Harrison, 2010; Keil, 2013; Krause *et al.*, 2008; Peck and Theodore, 2010; Schafran, 2014); a methodological concern with comparative urbanism (Robinson, 2011; Ward, 2010); and an applied focus on urban policy formation and implementation (Cochrane and Ward, 2012; Rodgers *et al.*, 2014). I propose three core provocations to address the key themes of the workshop:

*1. Theoretical and empirical context:* The global impact of urbanization presents unprecedented opportunities and profound challenges for universities. It significantly impacts the expectations placed on universities and where in the world – and the city – they need to adapt their institutional infrastructures, pedagogical practices and ways of operating. Universities’ spatial strategies have changed alongside the broadening of their mandates but the impact of deepening and diversifying the relationship between ‘town’ and ‘gown’ are neither simple nor fully understood (Addie, Keil and Olds, 2014). The ‘implosion/explosion’ dynamics of global urbanization mean urban universities must be analyzed as being more than simply located ‘in the city’. The ‘new urban university’ is regionalizing and globalizing in dramatic, chaotic ways that offer a provocative means to understand the *problematique* of urban theory and research and radically re-conceptualize “the imprint and operationality of urban processes on the planetary landscape” (Brenner, 2014: 5). How is knowledge of the urban produced and valorized at the interface of the university and the city? How does knowledge transfer actually *takes place* in and across global city- regions and who can access and benefits from urban knowledge systems? What are the implications for university-led and -oriented urban policy at the global scale, and how can this inform new urban theory?

*2. Comparative methodology:* As London and New York are city-regions located in the Global North, the task of conducting global urban research requires addressing the risk of reinforcing the primacy of narratives and experiences drawn from established global centres of power. This contribution details the methodological and conceptual sensitivity to questions of scale and power employed through a strategic- relational urban comparative framework. I discuss how the project’s spatial ontology seeks to avoid the pitfalls of advocating for the replication of regional success stories in

other urban and institutional contexts by integrating the territorial and topological dynamics of university relations on a global scale, and reflect on the challenges of extending the comparative framework to city-regions in the Global South.

3. *Policy implications:* Even in this ‘urban age’ – where some argue there is no longer an outside to the urban (Brenner, 2014) – cities remain predominantly governed and serviced through policy instruments and techniques that are conducted in and through territorially bounded political units (Cochrane and Ward, 2012). What are the consequences of looking at urban actors with differing spatial imaginaries and practices, such as universities, for understanding policy-making under global urbanization? Despite the proliferation of new spatial strategies, universities often struggle to keep up with the depth and scale of on-going sociospatial transformations. Deepening academic and policy understandings of how knowledge transfer takes place under global urbanization speaks directly to best practices in creating and sustaining reflexive, resilient university-society networks for diverse communities in urban contexts. What capacities do universities have as urban leaders in a globalizing world? What happens when global visions meet local context and local dependency? How can universities better mobilize in, and for, extended city-regions? How can marginalized urban communities be more effectively engaged, and how can they inform universities’ spatial and strategic actions?

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#### **Doing global urban research in Southern European cities – A comparative analysis of crisis geographies in Athens and Madrid**

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The past seven years the multifaceted crises have deeply affected the economic, political and social structures in Southern European countries. Since then, academic interest and scientific discussion focus on the analysis of austerity policies and the resulting crisis geographies. However, there is little comparative research engaging with an epistemological standpoint which corresponds to the recent theoretical challenges in urban studies, including the debates related to policy mobility of austerity across Southern European cities.

Austerity urbanism, crisis policies and urban restructuring processes have been imposed in a manifold way. A deeper theoretical understanding is required which infiltrates recent debates on global urban studies, post-colonialism regarding travelling policies. At the same time, new forms of contestation emerge, underlying the importance of a societal shift away from neoliberal inspirations and experiments. Such grassroots reactions put forward new arguments against crisis urbanism and call for a bottom up solidarity agenda. New political dimensions and formulations discuss about hope, aim to bring justice and put forward an exodus from the crisis.

From this perspective, this paper drives attention to a theoretically-informed comparative discussion over two cities of crisis, Madrid and Athens that focuses on three key issues; (i) surveillance, fear and repression, (ii) urban crisis policies and pathways out of the crisis and (iii) new forms of contestation and grassroots movements and political change. Our basic research question focuses on the new

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geographies that emerge in both cities after the imposition of austerity politics. By adapting a comparative framework this paper seeks to introduce a research basis which helps us shed light on the new opportunities that emerge in epistemological and ontological terms. Our work is based on empirical qualitative research in both cities, and it draws both from reflexive approaches towards contemporary urban politics and active involvement in some of the urban struggles. We put forward that comparative research methods and practices should follow the rhythms of the new geographies of contestation which introduce the bases for alternative futures of socio-spatial justice.

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**Urban democracy beyond borders: ambiguous devices, publics, and the ethnographic account**

*Gianpaolo Baiocchi, New York University, [gb97@nyu.edu](mailto:gb97@nyu.edu)*

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One of the methodological and theoretical challenges facing urban studies today has to do the study of the circulation of policies, blueprints, and frameworks among interconnected actors and sites.

In this paper, I offer an extended ethnographic account of the travel of one policy instrument, participatory budgeting, from its original home among social movements in Brazil to its landing in the United States and Europe. Participatory Budgeting today, of course, is a well-known case of “fast policy transfer,” as developed by Peck and Theodore (2010) and others. To speak of Participatory Budgeting today is to speak of something that has been replicated in over 1500 cities worldwide since its original inception in Brazil in the 1980s. In this essay I wish to shift the discussion away from “the impact of PB in different contexts” (as has often been the case in policy studies), or even from the analysis of the aggregate picture (as has been the focus of the discussion of fast policy transfer) to a ethnographically-informed tracing of its trajectory between its first implementations to its global travel to its landing in the first sites in the United States (Chicago) and Europe (Córdoba, in Spain). The paper argues that what travels is a reduced version of the original model, one that black boxes the relationship of the participatory instrument to governmental decision-making, thus rendering it nearly free of social justice content. But nonetheless, participatory budgeting provokes frictions in the publics it assembles as it arrives – around citizen expertise, around legitimate interlocutors, and around popular sovereignty. While it is an ambiguous device that travels, it opens the possibilities for circumscribed, but utopian imaginings of participants.

The paper relies on science studies and the study of policy instruments (Lascoumes and Le Gales, 2007) for a fundamental insight: it is not enough to simply speak of “diffusion” while forgetting the way that the circulation and translation of an idea fundamentally transform it. In this case, the travel itself has made PB into an attractive and politically malleable device by reducing and simplifying it to a set of procedures for the democratization of demand-making. Though it is deployed as part of postpolitical strategies, its ambiguities can be productive of political moments. The paper makes a case for processual and ethnographic accounts of global circulations of urban blueprints that is attentive to both ambiguities and frictions. It explores the theoretical implications of such an approach as well as issues related to its feasibility.

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**Making world city systems: Talent mobilities and the reproduction of global corporate networks**

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Post-global financial crisis, there has been much debate focused on the role of talent in the resurgence of both national economies and world cities. ‘Winning the war for talent’ and addressing the ‘talent crunch’ has become an urgent priority for firms and world city-economies as they compete for finite highly-skilled labour resources on a truly global scale, squeezed particularly by rapid labour market demand in Asian world city economies. For firms, the recruitment, retention and deployment of talent has never been so crucial to be effective in the strategic management of the transnational organization, meeting the challenges of ‘managing across borders’, and building and securing client-customer and supplier relationships. For world cities, talent creates, sustains and drives the very fundamental building-blocks of competitive and complementary global urban networks. But, unlike a decade or so ago, these global urban networks are founded on multiple forms of corporeal mobilities like business travel, short-term assignments and virtual mobilities, which are the alternatives to traditional expatriation and international assignments. Accordingly, the main contribution of this paper is to argue that talent mobilities are fundamental ingredients in the formation and sustainability of both global corporate and urban networks. Empirical evidence will be derived from both primary and secondary sources to illustrate this main argument. Official data on international business travel will be analysed from a UK, China and US perspective, supported by case studies of talent mobilities (expatriation, international assignments and business travel) within transnational professional service firms in for example, accounting and legal services.

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**Doing urban research in Nigeria**

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The paper reports and reflects on the experience of the Urbanisation Research Nigeria initiative over its first two years. URN is a large scale, four-year (2013-2017) UK Department for International Development (DFID)-supported research programme conducted by a consortium led by ICF International, London, and including the Foundation for Development and Environmental Initiatives, Ibadan, the Development Planning Unit (DPU) at University College London, the Department of Urban and Regional Planning at Benue State University, Makurdi, and the Department of Architecture and the Built Environment at the University of the West of England, Bristol – as well as researchers from other Nigerian and international universities.

URN approaches research through four themes:

- Theme A: Urban change processes – developing a better understanding of the urbanisation process
- Theme B: Urban economic growth, infrastructure and livelihoods – examining Nigeria’s diverse urban economies

- Theme C: Well-being of urban citizens – exploring the material, relational and subjective dimensions of well-being
- Theme D: Urban land, planning, and governance – uncovering the processes of urban development and city building

URN was designed to produce and disseminate relevant, interesting and readable research outputs which contribute towards the evidence base for better urbanisation strategy, urban policy, and urban programming and management in Nigeria. The research programme was to be “theoretically-informed, empirically-grounded and policy-relevant” in addressing key social, economic and political concerns in the urban sector in Nigeria. Examples are the need to translate economic growth into durable poverty reduction in urban settings; the significance of improved urban and connective infrastructure for growth and employment; the broadening of the productive base of cities and towns, notably the improvement of urban manufacturing and the non-farm economy in smaller settlements; and the imperative to craft inclusive and democratic urban governance structures.

Produce research that is work that is both academically rigorous and relevant to urban policy and practice is a challenging task, in Nigeria as elsewhere. The term “policy relevance,” moreover, requires interrogation: researchers need to understand to which political actors and groups, institutions and agencies their work is relevant to (in relation to social and political dynamic), and what the potentials and limitations of influence are. The paper places emphasis on this dimension of doing – in this instance, Nigerian – research, within the broader context of large scale urban reform efforts in Nigeria specifically and sub-Saharan Africa generally, which need to be better known and engaged with by critical urban studies.

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**Collaborative, comparative ethnography in Asia: methodological experimentation for global urban studies**

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*Co-authors: Daniel Goh, Eric C. Thompson, Jamie Gillen, Elaine Ho, Kelvin Low, Peter Marolt, Michelle Miller, Rita Padawangi, Vineeta Sinha*

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The paper emerges from an ongoing research project on Aspirations, Urban Governance and the Remaking of Asian Cities. What our multi-disciplinary team of collaborators (anthropologists, geographers and sociologists) have in common is a background of conducting in-depth, mostly qualitative, research on or in cities in Asia, and the kind of linguistic and other area studies competencies necessary to do grounded ethnographic fieldwork in various parts of that diverse region. The project seeks to bring our in-depth knowledges of different parts of urban Asia into a comparative and relational frame – to try to generate collaborative ethnographic insights that would not emerge through any of us as lone researchers situating individual case studies in relation to existing (often EuroAmerican-centred) urban theory. We are working towards:

- Incorporation of Asia into “global” urban theory, rather than seeing Asia-based work as regionally-delimited “area studies”, devoid of wider scope.

- Grounded empirical work which treats a range of (16) Asian cities in their own terms (rather than through the ways that they relate to, or show evidence of, existing – usually EuroAmerican-derived – labels and categorization).
- New and a more diverse range of forms of relational urban analysis, looking at inter-urban constitutive connections in complex, multi-directional ways.

The last of those points intersects with prescriptions already made by various urban studies scholars, not least in the field of policy mobilities where the recent methodological mantra has been to “follow” things, to be more mobile and to do more ethnography. Our concerns are rather different – namely with a sense that many existing efforts to follow things and do multi-sited work (especially when conducted by lone researchers without area studies training) make for forms of “global” ethnography that are extremely “thin” and/or trace a very limited set of “global” people and practices across multiple cities (esp. in the domains of finance and policy). We argue that there is a need for collaboration among teams of scholars who together have the skills to conduct multi-sited relational comparative work, without having to sacrifice grounded ethnographic detail or attention to more-than-economic territorial specificity. We will reflect (critically) upon our own efforts at doing collaborative ethnography, including through the development of a nascent digital urban archive.

For us, Asia is both a site for global theory production and an institutional location for experimentation with methods that are suited to doing urban studies globally.

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**Developing methodologies for the study of urban energy landscapes: cases from Mozambique, India and China**

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In the last decade, urban studies scholars have highlighted the role of cities in achieving a low carbon society (e.g. Hodson and Marvin, 2011; Bulkeley et al, 2011; 2014; Cartwright et al, 2011). However, while there has been considerable attention to the governance of climate change in cities, we still lack an understanding of how carbon is embedded in the everyday lives of urban citizens, and, in particular, the multiple and dynamic socio-energetic relationships that shape the possibilities for a transition to low carbon cities. The concept of urban energy landscapes (UELs) focuses on the complexity of socio-energetic relations in urban settings, tracing both patterns of spatial differentiation and historical changes. UELs highlight 1) the variety of roles that energy plays in the lives of urban citizens, 2) the multiple ecologies and sources of energy provision, 3) the cultural functions that different elements of the energy system perform, 4) the heterogeneity of energy management practices and 5) the politics of domination and contestation that emerge around context-specific practices of energy provision and use.

This analysis requires a deeper theorisation of UELs and new methodologies to study them. The notion of UELs is grounded, on the one hand, on studies of energy landscapes that emphasise energy-related transformations of large areas (e.g. Pasqualetti, 2011) and, on the other, on socio-technical studies of urban infrastructure that emphasise its political character (e.g. Hommels, 2009;

Graham and Marvin, 2001). UELs are thus defined as the connective tissue that enables socio-energetic relations. UELs influence urban life but they largely remain invisible to everyday interactions. An analytical framework helps to understand UELs in relation to the different elements they sustains, namely: 1) socio-material flows of knowledge, institutions and energy resources; 2) regimes of practice that influence how energy is used and managed; and 3) concrete socio-technical artefacts that mediate socio-energetic relations.

At the workshop I will present a new methodology that applies the framework above to study UELs by looking at the flows, regimes and artefacts embedded in socio-energetic relations in urban settings. The methodology combines different methods. A phenomenological approach is adopted to study flows by 'following the energy' and interpreted UELs through walking the city. Discourse analysis is applied to study the regimes that determine energy practices, on the basis of qualitative interviewing. Participatory mapping of neighbourhoods is used to map the roles of different socio-energetic artefacts in everyday life. Each element reveals aspects of UELs by analysing backward linkages, how those components were integrated in that particular landscape, and forward linkages, how each component is perceived, appropriated and further used. This methodology has been developed in relation to three case studies in Maputo, Bangalore and Hong Kong. Building on the methodology above, each case demonstrates a diversity of socio-energetic relations in urban contexts: the role that energy plays in post-colonial transformations of the energy system in Maputo, Mozambique; how energy landscapes emerge in relation to inherited urban infrastructure legacies in Bangalore, India; how cultural practices around energy structure the urban energy landscape in Hong Kong. Read together, these case studies reveal that detailed studies of UELs are a powerful antidote against one-size-fits-all solutions for urban transitions to low carbon.

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**Grassroots urbanism: a critical exploration of community based organisations (CBOs) in Dhaka's *bustees***

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For the first time in history, we are living in a predominantly urban age. Rapid urbanisation in cities of the Global South, fuelled by economic opportunity, climate variability and conflict, is fundamentally re-shaping towns and cities across Africa, Asia and South America. Cityscapes across the world are increasingly entangled by flows of people, resources, knowledge and ideas. Following calls to learn from people in 'southern' cities through grounded theory (Watson, 2009; Robinson, 2011; Roy, 2011; Tawa Lama-Rewal and Zérah, 2011; Parnell and Robinson, 2012), I've put down the books and picked up my backpack, filled it with pens, notepads and thoughts of 'comparative', 'southern' and 'ordinary' urbanisms and flown to Bangladesh, where I will be conducting research for nine months (November 2014 to August 2015) in the *bustees* (slum settlements) of the capital, Dhaka.

With over 15 million people, Dhaka is like many other megacities, with informality ingrained in the very process of urbanisation (Roy, 2011), and inadequate provision of services fuelling low levels of satisfaction among the urban poor and middle classes alike (Islam and Khan, 2013). The city is home



to over five million slum dwellers (*bustee bashees*), living in over 5,000 informal settlements (Angeles *et al*, 2005). Whilst Dhaka is undergoing rapid economic development, millions still live without access to secure housing, decent work, clean water and sanitation. During fieldwork I want to explore the dynamics around service provision and grassroots institutions, specifically, Community Based Organisations (CBOs). Broadly speaking, CBOs are 'arrangements and associations formed and located within the local space, or immediate residential surroundings of the actors [or residents]' (Akin, 1990 in Shatkin, 2007: 4). Little is known about these organisations in Dhaka. I therefore want to unravel *who* forms CBOs and *why, what* their functions and obstacles are, and *how* they coordinate with other development 'actors' e.g. NGOs, urban poor federations, local officials, criminal gangs, utility companies, land owners and donor organisations. From preliminary interviews and observations, I've already found that the majority of CBOs are externally-led by NGOs and Donors, with implications for sustainability. It's also clear that shifting government legislation alters CBO- NGO relationships and that CBOs are by no means 'inherently progressive' or harmonious.

Using a participatory urban toolkit, I will conduct interviews, workshops, focus groups and observe CBO members in their daily activities and meetings in two informal settlements, with community profiling in a further four. I want to understand how seemingly 'local' actions relate to settlement-wide, city-wide, national and global networks of people, knowledge, resources and ideas. This brings me to a brief discussion of global federations and coalitions of CBOs, such as the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR) and Slum/Shack Dwellers International (SDI). It also exposes a darker story of land conflict and real estate ownership in Dhaka, in which slum dwellers are continually exploited. With an increasing number of *bustees* on private (as opposed to public) land, it is no longer a simple equation of 'state-citizen engagement', but a complex web of actors involved in conflict over urban space. Although the focus is on local organisations, I argue that the 'local' cannot be understood without broader awareness of the multi-scalar and multi-dimensional processes affecting access to services. In this sense, 'grassroots urbanism' contextualises every day collective strategies, norms and behaviours within interconnected processes of urbanisation, urban poverty, contested land use and urban in/formality in South Asia. To make policies matter, we have to listen to those living in adverse conditions and fighting everyday for access to basic services.

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### Traffic in Bogotá and the uses of a pragmatic approach to global urbanism

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The planetary urbanization literature suggests that cities no longer exist. This argument has its philosophical merits. But one need only to skim the Metro section of a city newspaper to see that the urban survives as a set of problems that imbricate everyday lives as they are carried out "in place." Inspired by the American pragmatist John Dewey, and drawing on my ongoing research on traffic politics in Bogotá, Colombia, the paper speculates on a global urban research agenda grounded in an appreciation of cities as factual problem spaces. The urban is a scale at which global dynamics such as uneven development and climate change are materialized. At the same time, the city is increasingly positioned as *the* strategic site for the remediation of social and ecological maladies. Global capitalist and environmental dynamics combine with the material fact of the city a

dense collectivity of people living together and sharing resources and space. What emerges is a common set of problems that, Dewey would say, have an objective existence: traffic, crime, social exclusion and segregation, pollution, basic service provision, job quality and availability. Pragmatism also forwards an intriguing and potentially useful theory of democracy as unfolding neither through rites of citizenship nor identity politics in civil society, but rather through the problem-solving efforts of actors commonly implicated in issues. The paper proposes that comparatively examining how these issues are uniquely manifested, problematized, and democratically governed across cities (or not) could form the basis of a theoretically generative and policy-relevant urban research agenda.

The proposal builds on Ong & Roy's *Worlding Cities* concept. Yet it downplays their focus on the global ambitions of urban experimentation, since it is the problems themselves that draw cities into analytical relation. In the paper, I illustrate the potential methodological and empirical advantages of a pragmatic approach to global urban research by drawing on my own experiences over 11 months of field research in Bogotá (supported by grants from the Fulbright U.S. Student Program and the National Science Foundation). These include:

1) *Policy relevance and attention to substantive problems*: Rather than impose a possibly- arcane research interest on a city, the research object is very public: citizens, media and institutions articulate and work on it. Issues are policy relevant, yet the researcher is not directly solving policy problems. Rather, she is doing urban theory through political issues.

2) *Easy to study and empirical, but also unpredictable*: The basic method is derived from Actor-Network Theory: Following complex political issues as heterogeneous entanglements whose boundaries and relevant participants are not given in advance. Relevant connections to other cities are a matter of empirical elaboration rather than an analytical presupposition.

3) *In-depth but targeted, filtering urban complexity*: Careful single-case research is useful because it helps prevent the facile conclusions that might emerge from hurried multi-site research. Funding sources and PhD timelines support single-case research structurally, but the importance of comparative research is widely attested. If we settled on a few specific issue to compare, researchers could be distributed across cities, and there might emerge a clearer sense of what exactly should be drawn into comparison and *why*.

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### Capitalizing on cities: entrepreneurial elites in African commercial capitals

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This paper attempts to account for the emergence of entrepreneurial elites in Africa. It argues that central to the rise of this class is the growth of the commercial city. Hence an historian has to engage with the intersection of urban, economic and business history to ascertain how cities and elites have shaped each other historically and spatially. The global economy, as a contradictory space of inclusivity and exclusivity, is the context upon which they have emerged hence historicizing it is also crucial. As a framework, it enables one to explain why the presence of African, relative to Asian and European, entrepreneurs was hardly pronounced in the global capitalist arena prior to the 20th century, although Africa and its Diaspora have also been instrumental in the expansion of capitalism

globally. Dar es Salaam, the commercial capital of Tanzania, and African entrepreneurial elites connected to it, are the central focus of research. Since, historically and contemporarily, there has been a circulation of elites in this urban space from other places, my analysis is necessarily comparative. It thus involves analyzing disconnections and connections between the Dar es Salaam elites with those in other cities in Africa, particularly Nairobi and Mombasa in Kenya; Lagos and Kano in Nigeria; Accra and Kumasi in Ghana. This also extends to other urban spaces in Tanzania, especially Arusha and Moshi; coastal towns of Tanga, Bagamoyo and Kilwa; and the isles of Zanzibar. In certain cases this also involves analyzing how key Euro-American cities, such as London, Berlin and New York; East Asian cities, such as Beijing, Kuala Lumpur and Mumbai; Middle Eastern cities, such as Dubai, Doha and Muscat, have intervened in this elitist global entrepreneurial interconnectivity. The paper employs a three-tier methodology: Econometric analysis of biographical data and growth indicators; network analysis of corporate interlocks and social classes; spatial analysis of urban space and economic mobility. Grounded in a global historical perspective, this methodology provides the means to trace, over a long period of time and across a wide space, the development and distribution of entrepreneurship networks. In doing so it helps tell the story of the emergence of entrepreneurial elites as a dynamic social class and analyze its internal contradictions.

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**Competing discourses and co-producing knowledge: can we build a coherent informal settlements agenda in South Africa?**

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With over sixty percent of the urban poor in Sub-Saharan Africa living in 'slums', the question of how people inhabit African cities is perpetually vexing. The variety of those interested in informal settlements, as a particular and common type of slum housing, is wide. Activists, governments, community groups, academics, artists, international funders, built environment professionals, entrepreneurs, and many more have all found the 'challenge of the slums' an important project and intriguing frontier.

This paper explores competing discourses on informal settlements in South Africa. Over the past four years the Sustainable Human Settlements Citylab researchers, based at the African Centre for Cities, have sought to 'co-produce' knowledge on informal settlements with policy makers, policy implementers, civil society groups, and development practitioners. The co-production process involved 'action research' whereby learning took place through grounded, practical, and reciprocal interactions.

In doing so, it became clear that there are four distinct discourses operating in the informal settlements debates. Technology and design discourses, institutional discourses, rights-based discourses, and political economy discourses all come to bear on the framing of the debate and the propositions for change. Within the upgrading sector, actors continually struggle to acknowledge the contributions of various discourses (and the associated organisations and individuals), diffusing efforts and creating a fragmented and incoherent informal settlements agenda.

In an effort to query the possibility of a coherent informal settlement agenda in South Africa, this paper unpacks these discourses, identifies the contributions and limitations of each discourse, and

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reflects on the co-production of knowledge process. The paper argues that co-production is difficult, posing challenges for participating actors. However, the co-production process – whereby fundamentally differing discourses can be put into critical conversation – offers scope for building a more coherent and integrated informal settlement agenda in South Africa.

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**HereEast London. Two worlds: a series of dichotomies in the ‘global’ city**

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The social cultural and economic ecology of a place is as fragile as any other ecology. A new digital/ creative quarter for east London, the former Press and Broadcast Centres for the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games has become Here East. This paper examines the role of place and spatial boundaries for the creative/ technology industries. It reveals the importance of geographical clustering for workers in this sector despite the potential of digital technologies. Creative firms are embedded in place, where the importance of urban aesthetics and social networks leads to tight geographic clustering. Furthermore, this research identifies the specific barriers to entering the creative/ technology industries that are faced by the local community in accessing creative employment. This illustrates how class is interwoven in demarcations between and connotations of public and private urban spaces.

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**Imagining ‘global’ work: place and gender in talent management**

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In this paper, I look at management discourses about talent management. The ‘War for Talent,’ a concept developed by management consultants McKinsey in the late 1990s refers to the so-called global shortage of highly skilled workers and the subsequent challenge that transnational organisations face to attract, develop and retain the workforce that they will require—this is seen to be where the future successes of organisations will lie. Operationalised as talent management, one of the ways in which a ‘talented’ employee is envisioned is through a ‘global mindset’—the ability to work easily across cultures. A global mindset is argued to be developed through an international assignment, which for the employee can be seen as a stepping stone to becoming a future global leader.

Drawing upon ethnographic research in global mobility and British skilled migrants, this paper focuses on the imaginative geographies of the ‘global’ in talent management, looking at how they unfold in the ‘local’ geographies of Singapore. In particular, it looks at two ways in which the ‘global’ is imagined—as an adventure and as an opportunity. Through this, it makes two arguments. First, that the global imaginary associated with talent management sits uneasily and ambivalently among the local geographies of Singapore, working to produce an imaginary of Singapore without Singaporeans. Second, that these imaginaries of the global are gendered, viewing a male heroic adventurer conquering the globe, with their spouse and family needing to be protected from the

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local. Therefore, the paper argues for a need to examine the tensions in the ways in which managerial discourses about global work play out in place.

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### The stories of cities

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This paper asks what kind of knowledge about the city is produced by contemporary stories – both fiction and non-fiction – set in the global South. In so doing, it explores a number of methodological questions about doing urban research as well as the theoretical questions of what we collectively imagine to be the animating dilemmas of the twenty-first century city. These questions are ripe for interrogation in a context where most urban theory emerges from and focuses on the global North, yet 90 percent of the growth in urban populations by 2050 is predicted to be concentrated in Africa and Asia (United Nations World Urbanization Prospects 2014), and the bulk of that in slums or informal settlements. Clearly, the answers to the question of how we think – and should think – about cities, need to be informed by responses from these continents.

The paper is structured in two parts. In the first, I explore the value of stories in producing knowledge about social realities under the sorts of conditions of complexity and uncertainty that characterise contemporary cities in the global South. While readers, novelists, journalists, and literary critics have long known the power of stories to inform and to move people (both emotionally and to move them to action), social theorists are somewhat late to the party. Now, however, social scientists' recognition of the worth of 'literary ethnography' is growing, and it seems timely to engage in a careful examination of how stories may deepen our understanding of urban worlds that are increasingly connected, yet ever more uncertain.

I use the second section of the paper to think about how stories set in cities in India and South Africa, specifically, may enable us to gain purchase on some of the problems raised by the complexities of global urbanism as they take shape in lived experiences of poverty and exclusion. Bringing together literary methodologies with contemporary urban theory, I suggest that taking such sets of texts seriously as ethnographic sites in themselves, enables global comparative work that is otherwise difficult (financially, logistically, imaginatively) to achieve. Like any source of data, collections of stories are limited and partial. However, exploring patterns and disjunctures across a range of imaginative texts about a city and, crucially, comparing these with texts about other cities elsewhere, yields insights into the breadth and depth of global urban politics and experiences, and speaks back to dominant urban theories of what matters at the social and spatial peripheries of the city.

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### Can the straw man speak? An analysis of the postcolonial critique on global cities research

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The purpose of this contribution is to critically examine the portraying of 'global cities research' in postcolonial writings on global urban research. Our major contention is that the latter literature does not really engage with the former, but rather tends to assemble it into a homogenous 'Straw Man Other' that conceals its ontological, epistemological, and methodological diversity and subsequently misrepresents its main objectives. In particular, we seek to (1) analyze how the 'Straw Man Other' is created; (2) conjecture about why it is created and has subsequently failed to attract critical responses; and (3) explore a possible way out of this problematic 'Othering' by advocating the idea of engaged pluralism.

The vantage point of our argument is the observation that some strands of the research on postcolonial urbanism explicitly position themselves vis-à-vis 'the global cities literature'. Although this 'positioning' takes very different forms, and we acknowledge the inevitable simplifications involved in summarizing the major tenets of any line of research, we contend that in this particular case the 'global cities research agenda' is commonly recast into something it is not: a homogenous and hegemonic paradigm that seeks to establish a universal city model that is in desperate need of recalibration. We argue that these claims do not hold water, and do so through a formal specification of a straw man fallacy: a fallacy that is committed when one – willingly or not – misrepresents a (perceived) opponent's position in a way that imputes to it implausible commitments, and then refutes the misrepresentation instead of the (perceived) opponent's actual view.

The two key moments in this particular Straw Man-formation are (1) the homogenization and (2) subsequent misrepresentation of the global cities literature. First, global cities research is pursued by a highly diverse group of researchers that take on very different meta-theoretical positions, and approach the subject matter from very different angles. Although some authors and some positions have clearly been more influential than others at different points in time, there is no such thing as a singular 'global city theory' or 'a global city paradigm'. Second, equating some of the possible abuses (boosterist neo-liberal policies) of some of the 'products' (global city rankings) with the literature at large is deceiving at best. Indeed, this particular reading exaggerates the performativity of global cities research in urban policy-making and underestimates the critical reflexivity of the researchers involved. Taken together, we interpret some of the rather hollow references to global cities research as being part of an instrumental rhetorical strategy that helps establishing a political comfort zone by differentiating one's own research from an (allegedly) politically problematic and hegemonic 'Other'. Paradoxically, this strategy inadvertently hampers the critical engagement that is necessary to overcome the legitimate concerns brought forward by postcolonial theorists regarding performativity of knowledge and the crowding out of alternative discourses, places, and people that receive insufficient attention in scholarly work.

Given that both 'global cities researchers' and their postcolonial critics share a critically reflexive approach towards their research, we propose to use this as a starting point for new forms of intellectual engagement. To this end, we explore a possible way out of the unnecessary processes of 'Othering' described here by drawing on the idea of 'engaged pluralism' advocated by Barnes and Sheppard (2010). This would entail turning research on globalized urbanization into an anti-monist and anti-reductionist research agenda that recognizes and connects a diverse range of circulating epistemologies.

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### Comparative resilience and precarity in global cities

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Resilience has become an increasingly popular term, but also one marked by conceptual and empirical confusion. In essence, it captures a particular threat to a relatively stable system teamed with the capacity to bounce back to some degree of stability and previous identity after the shock, and in bouncing back, perhaps showing some adaptability and capacity for innovation. Precarity usually derives from a lack of access to the welfare state combined with precarious working arrangements, and is especially concentrated in global cities, where demand for their degraded labor runs high.

The proposal focuses on two recent comparative projects – the first on the spatial resilience of third-sector clusters in inner-city London, Los Angeles and Sydney, and the second on economic precarity among migrants in Hong Kong and London – to showcase key empirical, methodological and conceptual issues of applying these concepts at the scale of the global urban. Empirically, I investigate well-known global city-regions while very much focused on ordinary, if not marginal, actors within ‘backwater’ inner-city neighborhoods. Methodologically, my comparative approach takes inspiration from Nijman’s (2007) contention that all cities are unique, but that it is at least as interesting to compare unlike cities to find similarities than to compare very similar cities to find similarities (e.g. comparing London with New York). In comparing Hong Kong, London, Los Angeles and Sydney, I apply several key methodological insights from the burgeoning literature on comparative urbanism, including using comparison as a strategy to provide a rare, street-level opportunity to compare cross-national realities for the voluntary sector and economically precarious migrants. Conceptually, I see resilience and precarity as crosscutting phenomena, two sides of the same coin; by bringing in the comparative approach, I thicken empirical descriptions and analyses while also conceptually sharpening notions of resilience and precarity.

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### Spatial and social transformations in Ghana’s urban neighbourhoods: Insights from Accra and Sekondi-Takoradi

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The nature of city dynamics in sub-Saharan Africa is the subject of some dispute. During the past decade it has been commonplace for extremely high rates of urban growth to be predicted with accompanying scenarios of cities growing out of control with ever expanding slums, whilst at the same time claims have been made that certain cities are stagnating and even shrinking. In this paper we move beyond a demographic focus, aiming to contribute to discussions of city dynamics through exploring spatial and social transformations in Ghana’s urban neighbourhoods. In order to examine how these processes vary within and between cities, we draw on qualitative interviews conducted with individuals and groups of residents of differing wealth/income levels living in several contrasting neighbourhoods of diverse age and location in the cities of Accra and Sekondi-Takoradi. Through a focus on the mobility/immobility of urban residents, we examine who is moving/staying

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where within and beyond the cities, how mobility feeds into livelihood strategies, and how the multi-activity and multi-locality of livelihood strategies employed by urban residents are influencing the spatial organisation and social transformation of Accra and Sekondi-Takoradi. We argue that contrary to the policies and practices of actors engaged in urban governance, the city can best be envisaged as a mobile networked whole – messy, moving and morphing – rather than consisting of compartmentalised neighbourhoods.

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**Distressed-as-desirable assets: assembling post-crisis geographies of financialisation**

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In the wake of the global financial crisis, private equity funds have surged into landscapes of distressed property. Almost as quickly as these spaces were devalued by the spectacular bust of the global real estate bubble, they are being selectively re-valued and incorporated into new regimes of financial accumulation. In the United States, the consolidation of foreclosed properties under bank ownership and rising post-crisis rental demand has opened a pathway for private equity funds to institutionalize the single-family rental sector. As investors like Blackstone (the world's largest alternative investment firm) have restructured the single-family rental market by acquiring nearly 200,000 properties, they are also opening a pipeline for new financial products: the first rental securitization was completed in late 2013 and since then a dozen more have followed, transforming distressed properties into a desirable institutional asset class in the space of just a few years.

The speed and scale of this transformation demands a close examination of what made it possible, not least because it is a global phenomenon. Investors are eager to deploy the property management systems and operational technologies they rolled out in the U.S. Sunbelt to crisis-scarred landscapes across the Atlantic. In Spain, Blackstone, Goldman Sachs and other well-capitalized investors are becoming landlords by acquiring distressed properties from “bad bank” Sareb and social housing developments from fiscally-pressured local governments.

Along the lines of Tania Murray Li's recent intervention on the “resourceness” of land as a commodity for large-scale investment, this project employs an analytic of assemblage to examine the “materialities, relations, technologies, discourses and practices” that must be ‘pulled together and aligned’ in order for distressed assets to become desirable assets. Focusing primarily on the United States but with an eye toward strategies for global comparison with other nodes in post-crisis financialization (particularly Spain), the analysis relies on geographic data and assumptions about risk extracted from rating agency reports on rental securitizations, transcripts of Congressional field hearings on bulk sales of distressed properties, reports from financial analysis firms, and a wealth of business journalism.

Ostensibly, this analysis is concerned with what makes this assemblage of distressed-as-desirable assets possible and to begin understanding how it travels and mutates in other contexts. However the aim of this research extends further, to the politics of contestation that may be enfolded within an assemblage of distressed-as-desirable assets, and the potential for such a politics to surface and fracture this assemblage. Methodologically, this work makes a contribution by drawing on the artifacts financialization produces (e.g. ratings agency reports) as research material to shed light on



what is often an abstract and opaque process. The project highlights how financialization continues to (re)shape urban spaces in the aftermath of the global financial crisis. By bringing attention to the transnational operations of institutional investors in spaces of crisis, this work might also help establish an agenda for global urban studies capacious enough to include a range of interdisciplinary inquiry.

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**Investigating inequality in creative cities: a global comparative approach**

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The viral spread of neoliberalism has resulted during the last decades in the emergence of a new way of urban thinking and governance over the entire globe, hallmarked by advertising entrepreneurialism, market-driven governance, and copying urban policies of “successful” cities as universal cures for contemporary challenges of the city. As a central notion of this new way of seeing, “creativity” has made a remarkable career, opening the floor for a mushrooming of so-called creative cities, especially since the global financial crisis and consequent fiscal constraints. Despite the great number of studies on the issue, however, until now scant credit has been given to some crucial questions, on which we want to throw new light in our paper. First, instead of using a single notion of creativity with universal validity, we investigate the manifold meanings attached to the term in various locations. Special attention will be paid to the role of education as a mediator for urban (in-)equalities especially in the appraised creative cities. Second, we analyse the new forms of urban inequality creative city policies have brought into being in terms of class, race, gender, and other aspects. To fulfil these goals, we present so-far results of our international research team. Instead of concentrating on global urban centres, we focus on mid-size knowledge cities in various geographical settings but all attempting to become competitive in global sense, including “knowledge pearls” in highly urbanized regions, traditional university towns surrounded by rural districts, and former industrial centres after the “creative shift” from North America to Western and Central Europe and former Communist countries. Our investigation about this niche topic is based on empirical findings we have produced in cities such as Montpellier, Heidelberg, Urbana-Champaign, and Budapest, by revising conventional vocabularies and methodologies to fit them to a wide range of different local and national contexts, the parallel use of qualitative and quantitative data gained from interviews, statistical surveys, and analysis of policy texts, and taking a comparative approach. We see our potential contribution to *doing* global urban research in presenting some opportunities for a critical global urban theory and comparative methodologies, and setting near-future priorities for related studies.

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**Evaluating cross-border megaregions along the United States-Canada border**

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The megaregion is a conceptual device used to define polycentric urban regions that are proposed as the epicenters for current or future socioeconomic growth. Megaregions are a topic of global interest, with research occurring in Asian, European, and North American contexts. Within the United States, the Regional Plan Association (RPA) and other advocates are promoting the megaregion as a new scale for planning and governance. This is a reaction to shifting economic realities and to the often frustrating level of political fragmentation in the United States. Recent RPA research identifies ten American megaregions, two of which (Cascadia and the Great Lakes) adjoin significant urban regions across the Canadian border. However, little is said for how the megaregion would affect, or is affected by, this international border.

How then are we to evaluate the megaregion concept along the United States-Canada border, and what are the implications of this proposed space for regional planning and the practice of political sovereignty? In this paper, I draw on three complementary domains to address the conceptual and methodological challenges that arise when conducting analysis of cross-border regions in the North American context. First, work from regional studies addressing regional definition, management, and stakeholders. Second, research on political performativity that examines how geographical imaginaries such as the megaregion arise through material- discursive practices. And third, research on sovereignty and territoriality that reveals the role of the State in relation to national borders and cross-border relationships.

The paper is the first stage in a proposed multi-year project examining the two aforementioned North American megaregions. Despite being necessarily preliminary in nature, the paper provides a platform for what is intended to be a significant contribution to current debates on regional governance and the practices that sustain dominant and alternative geographical imaginaries in response to political and urban change.

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**Doing longitudinal global urban research**

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Most urban research is conducted within the framework of a specific research project, typically of around three years' duration. Consequently, time spent in the field collecting empirical data is limited and rarely spans more than 12 months. The data that are used to provide empirically-grounded accounts of a wide range of urban processes, and feed into conceptualisations of global urban complexity, thus provide only a snapshot of the urban at a specific point in time. Cities and their inhabitants are in a constant state of flux, which much urban research is unable to capture.

In a Latin American context, however, there are some notable exceptions. In *'Favela'*, Janice Perlman (2010) provides a fascinating account of how the fortunes of families living in Rio de Janeiro's favelas have evolved over a period of almost 40 years. And in a similar manner, Caroline Moser (2009) recounts the struggles of families, who initially built their homes in a mangrove swamp in the

Ecuadorian city of Guayaquil, to get out of poverty from the late 1970s to early 2000s. In a similar vein, I have been conducting a longitudinal study of housing and households in the city of Pereira, Colombia, collecting both quantitative and qualitative data over a thirty year period (1986-2015). Rather than track individuals/families and their evolving fortunes, I have been returning to the same houses in diverse low-income settlements to record how the 'self-help' houses and the families living in them have changed over time.

In my paper I draw on this unique data set to illustrate how adopting a longitudinal approach can generate a wealth of empirical data which adds real insight into our understanding of global urban complexity at a range of spatial and temporal scales. In particular, I show how the changing nature of urban settlements and their inhabitants are the consequence of the interaction of processes occurring both locally and in far-away places, and how these work out over time in different parts of the city. The paper thus provides perspectives unattainable from the single snapshots provided by most research projects and feeds into conceptualisations of mobility over the lifecourse and their importance for advancing comparative urban theory.

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**Face-to-face in the global metropolis: the temporary interplay of places and processes in service production**

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Cities as nodes in networks or spaces of places and flows have been discussed intensely during the last decades (Sassen 1991, Castells 1996, Taylor 2004). This paper wants to draw attention on the temporary interplay between places and flows.

As many stakeholders do not necessarily communicate and cooperate most with other economic actors at the same location and/or in the same city, but with partners that are located in a spatial distance, temporary spatial proximity (TSP) gains importance (Martin, Sunley 2003, Torre 2008). The basic criterion of TSP is that players are briefly physically in close spatial proximity and the interaction process is carried out personally. Therefore, TSP temporarily combines positive agglomeration effects (enabling face-to-face-contacts) and network elements (communication also with partners originally located in a distance) in production processes. Using the phenomenon of TSP, the theoretical part of the presentation discusses the intertwining of places and flows through a temporal perspective.

TSP can be understood as a strategically created situation that offers advantages of nodes and networks. Having said this, it is obvious that economic agents have to invest in a limited co-location, for example by funding business trips, guest visits or exhibitions that fill business networks with life. Based on empirical results of qualitative research (semi-structured interviews carried out in Germany with advertisers and business consultants) the questions of how phases of TSP are embedded in the entire production process and what aims should be achieved by the creation of TSP will be discussed in the presentation. Using the framework of Castells layers of flows, the results of the empirical analyses lead to the idea of micro-nodes (*specific locations*) within macro-nodes (*cities as places*). To what extent this idea enables a link between micro- and macro-analytical perspectives in doing global urban research can be discussed on the basis of empirical examples.

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**'Indigenous rights to the city': a comparison of decolonial urbanism in Bolivia and Ecuador**

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Recent research emphasises the need to study cities of the global 'South-East' (Robinson 2002; Roy 2011; Watson 2013) where urban geographies and planning dynamics differ from those in European and North American cities. As shown in studies on urban apartheid in South Africa (Harrison et al 2008), ethnocratic urbanism in Israel/ Palestine (Yiftachel 2006) or differentiated urban planning in Brazil (Holston 2007), state-led urban planning interventions in cities of the global 'South-East' often represent the cause for urban poverty, ethno-racial discrimination, social exclusion, uneven urban citizenship, and the reproduction of colonial urban spaces in post-colonial societies. In such a context, marginalised urban groups have to rely on their own practices to improve their living conditions and claim their 'right to the city' (Harvey 2008).

In the Latin American countries of Bolivia and Ecuador processes of indigenous urban insurgency led to the ousting of neoliberal governments in the early 2000s (Lazar 2008; van Cott 2008; Zibechi 2010). Subsequently, new left-wing governments were elected which openly responded to the demands of urban indigenous movements and incorporated 'indigenous rights to the city', which include amongst others rights for collective land ownership and autonomy, into new constitutions and development plans. These legal documents also promote the production of intercultural and decolonial urban spaces. This paper presents findings from recently completed 'global urban' PhD research on the implementation of new 'indigenous rights to the city' in La Paz, Bolivia and Quito, Ecuador. Theoretically, the paper departs from a singular focus on either state-based or community-based actors in urban planning. Instead, drawing on theories on comparative urbanism in cities of the global 'South-East' (McFarlane 2009; Robinson 2002; Roy 2009; Ward 2009) and on the theoretical work of Henri Lefebvre (1991), Michel de Certeau (1984) and James Scott (1985) the paper assesses the implementation of 'indigenous rights to the city' by focusing on the interactions between actors involved in urban planning and ordinary urban indigenous residents. Methodologically, the paper draws on ethnographic data and information derived from participatory urban appraisals, a relatively new action-oriented urban research method developed by Caroline Moser (2009), conducted with planners and urban indigenous residents in La Paz and Quito.

This paper addresses the following empirical findings and main arguments: Firstly, the findings suggest that there exists an ongoing discrepancy between legal discourses which promote 'indigenous rights to the city' and urban planning practices which often subordinate indigenous rights to Western individual rights. However, it is also argued that urban planning practice in La Paz and Quito was not monolithic as some actors in the municipalities' cultural and social planning units increasingly implemented planning regulations that sought to decolonise urban space. Secondly, the findings show that urban indigenous residents rarely realised insurgent practices taking place outside the realm of the state but, instead, made strategic use of existing opportunities provided by pro-indigenous actors operating within La Paz's and Quito's urban municipalities. Of particular interest are the findings related to urban indigenous people's efforts to negotiate access to collective land and the right to autonomy which would help them to (re)introduce the Andean 'ayllu' structure within cities. Thirdly, drawing on the positive practices identified in this South-South global urban research, the paper offers policy recommendations, applicable for postcolonial cities situated in the global 'South-East' and North, on the planning and design of more inclusive cities. This

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inclusiveness follows decolonial principles that are responsive to the demands and needs of historically marginalised groups such as indigenous peoples.

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**Beyond 'Global Hollywood': (trans)national film production in alternative urban networks**

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While the global film industry has received some attention from economic geographers, research to date has tended to focus on the internal nature and dynamics of established and newly-emerging urban film production clusters. This is especially the case for Hollywood, USA, which has dominated the global film industry in terms of international reach over the past century. Yet little attention has been given to the way in which film productions transcend the boundaries of individual clusters and link together urban centres of production in temporary project networks. In this paper, we consider the urban networks created through the temporary collaboration of film production firms in a range of other states. Stripping away the 'top layer' of Hollywood's commercially successful feature films, we undertake a social network analysis of the (trans)national project networks of film production firms in five countries across three continents – China, Germany, France, Brazil and Mexico – to provide a comparative analysis of networked urban geographies. Using the national as a lens through which to study the global, we critically consider the effects of state policy and territorial path dependency on the formation of city networks and thereby conceptually advance work on the multi-scalar geographies of globalisation.

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**Historicizing the circulation of urban policies through career paths analysis: Barcelonian experts and their role in redeveloping Buenos Aires' Puerto Madero.**

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The past decade has witnessed an upsurge in academic interest in the mobility, transferal, and flow of urban policy and planning models, ideas, and techniques (Harris and Moore, 2013). In this context, my proposal analyzes exchanges between various actors from Buenos Aires and Barcelona during a period of political and economic reform in Argentina (1989-1992). I analyze a specific urban policy circulation process between states, cities, and experts connected to an initial redevelopment project designed by Barcelonian urbanists, which sought to revitalize the industrial area of Puerto Madero (170 hectares), a formerly neglected portland in the heart of Buenos Aires.

In this proposal, I briefly highlight certain theoretical debates on the mobility of urban policies and models, taking into account both policy mobility and planning history literature and focusing on a period (the recent past) largely overlooked to date. Second, in order to contextualize these exchanges in the Puerto Madero case, I pinpoint their economic, political, and technical significance for both local and foreign experts. This allows me to emphasize different scales of exchange, and highlight the role of state (at its national and urban levels) in these processes while avoiding isolating these exchanges as purely technical. Third, I focus on the main conflicts that took place between

local actors in reaction to the Barcelonian proposals, and stress that circulation processes may include controversial moments as well as modifications necessitated by local contextual factors. Fourth, I analyze some political and technical career paths of local and foreign experts involved in those exchanges as a means of analyzing and historicizing the circulation process and highlighting the relational nature of 'exporters' and 'importers'. I show that the links between local and Barcelonian experts began before the proposal of the Strategic Plan for Puerto Madero, but within different political contexts. The analysis of career paths also allows me to highlight the role of individuals in transferring urban policies and plans, and to introduce a historical perspective in grappling with why and how local actors choose to 'learn' from the Barcelona experience in a context where other port redevelopment experiences and public-private partnerships were available, such as the London Docklands and the Inner Harbor of Baltimore, among others. Finally, I conclude the proposal by pointing to both the relevance of the state and individuals in urban policy circulation processes, stressing how career paths analysis is a suitable way for historicizing these processes and avoiding a presentist bias.

My approach is historical and narrative-based (Abbot, 2001), and the analysis is based on national and municipal documents, resolutions, decrees, declarations, laws and projects of law, urban projects and plans, architecture and urbanism journals, environmental information, newspapers articles, and interviews with key local and foreign actors. As I seek to analyze an urban policy circulation process highlighting the relevance of both personal contacts and broader relations between states and cities, it is necessary to anchor the primary and secondary sources as well as the stakeholders under analysis, including politicians, consultants, and experts from both Buenos Aires and Barcelona, as well as from Argentina and Spain. Also, career paths analysis of experts involved in these processes demands taking into account their educational, political, and technical route as well as the contacts they made. I also need to anchor the period under analysis by taking into account the career paths of both local and foreign experts. Thus, I need to go back to the 1970s to explore the conduits that created the conditions for the Puerto Madero project, as well as the relational nature of both 'importers' and 'exporters'.

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### **Researching fixity/mobility of alternative transport policies: a methodological note on the mobile policy hinterworld of Brussels**

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A key observation emerging from the literature on world and global cities is seemingly encompassing neoliberal character of their urban regimes. Despite an analytical focus on global connectivity of these nodes, a relatively understudied element aspect of world-city-formation is the internal socio-spatially unevenness in the provision of (basic) transport infrastructure and services that sustains the (day-to-day) mobility of citizens. Much of the extant literature on urban transport policies proper examines models inspired by a generically neoliberal, mainstream agenda of urban entrepreneurialism. Under this paradigm, transport strategies are usually perceived not just as a

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framework for moving people and goods, but also a tool for increasing urban competitiveness, and hence focus on selected, strategic urban territories and social groups.

The aim of our contribution is to propose a methodology for investigating the policy practices behind world-city-formation in the realm of urban transportation in Brussels. Conceptually, we operationalise the dynamics of territorial fixity and/or networked mobility of urban transport policy models. Our empirical attention is drawn to those transportation and mobility policies that show significant potential to constitute a socio-spatially even and egalitarian alternative to urban entrepreneurialism (e.g. zero-fare public transport systems, congestion charge/urban toll, Ciclovía). We identify and assess their potential vis-à-vis Henri Lefebvre's notion of "the right to the city" as a theoretical and analytical tool.

Building on theories of policy circulation-diffusion and studies on policy mobility- mutation, our approach incorporates qualitative methods focusing on actors and networks (im)mobilising policies (e.g. via semi-structured interviews), spaces and practices in which this process is anchored (e.g. via ethnographic observations), and narratives it employs (e.g. via literature/document analysis). Our intention is thus to examine precise policy models and socio-political contexts in which they operate, rather than to propose new ways of comparing different urban contexts per se.

This theoretical background is then applied to the empirical case of Brussels. As an analytical heuristic, we both scrutinise vertical modes of policy mobility in situ (e.g. the interface between European and Brussels policy circles), as well as follow the more horizontal policy networks as they stretch to connect Brussels to its mobile policy hinterworld (e.g. Bordeaux, Strasbourg, London). The Brussels case appears to harbour a striking paradox. While evidently well-connected in global policy networks because of its proximity to European institutions, transport-related policies in Brussels seemingly have a very fixed territorial framing and localised emergence. In terms of actual implementation, however, there is an increasing tendency for copy-pasting off-the-rack transport "best solutions" and "good policies" approached as technical instruments, without directly addressing the issues of social inequality, well-being, and transport poverty that affect large groups of urban society. The focus on mechanisms and scales of mobility of these transport "policy fixes" is thus hoped to contribute to a new understanding of local motivations and implications behind their implementation.

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### **Constructing global suburbia, one critical theory at a time**

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Suburban studies, as they are, have a reputation as a sub-region, a lesser domain of general urban studies. This can be laid at the feet less of those engaged in the study of urban peripheries than of those who have historically looked at the margins from the centre. In the long century during which we have now been involved in taking the studies of urbanization seriously, "the suburban" as a real event has figured prominently while it has led a life in the shadows in the mainstream of urban analysis. Critical urban studies in particular has shown no love for suburbanization which has been looked at as a deviation of sorts, a strategy of capital shifting, a Haussmann'ian plan to expel the proletariat from the centre, a process of cultural and ecological atrophication, etc. The sub-field

itself has often reacted with a defensive strategy, and has delivered myriad historico-empirical studies but has remained out of the core theoretical debates that have driven urban studies overall.

In this paper, I discuss the emerging results of a globally scaled research project that has attempted to bring the suburban out from under the weight of the centre. This has been an exercise that has involved a double movement of situating the study of suburbanization as a global concern and freeing it from its fetters of being a merely empirical terrain. Starting from Lefebvre's idea of an "immense explosion" of urban form and life, *suburbanization* is a specific process of peripheralization, while *suburbanisms* refer to the variegated ways of life that are associated with and often intensify the process. I will review the preliminary findings of a 7-year research program on global suburbanisms through the lens of governance, land and infrastructure. I will emphasize, in particular, how such a global perspective on suburbanization might have an impact on urban theory overall. And I will speak to the challenges in reach, method and materiality that we encountered on the way. I will end with some speculations on how critical urban theory and research have benefitted from prioritizing the peripheral, and how a dialectical approach has, in turn, helped transcend the urban and suburban divide in theory and practice.

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**Measuring silences: temporality, ocular identity and structural progression in Gulf cities**

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In urban studies there is growing acknowledgement that 'experience' is configured and shaped by 'temporality'. My research practice in the Gulf region has focused on how informal territorial appropriation allows individuals to claim a space as their own. As a result 'temporality' becomes an important structural component in forming and exploring ocular identity in Gulf cities. Amidst radical interventions at the macro-level new urban landscapes create views of the city imposed by specific architectural identities and synchronized municipal and autocratic political structures. Therefore these spaces organise and manage the spatial flow of inhabitants in cities. Nevertheless on the ground the cacophony of audio-visual experiences produces ongoing sensory surfaces and impulses. Within earshot underexposed moments emerge, punctuating monotonous journeys and auditory sensitizations that condition movement in abrasive climatic conditions. The practice of walking in sites designed for road travel offers autonomous opportunities to move freely and weave within infrastructural spaces intended to direct users to certain destinations. Subsequently allowing the users of architectural space to return to the same site, generating a provisional visual typology that symbolises passing time and a sense of familiarity with the expanding built environment. Furthermore improvised 'diversions' in space produced by the transnational and localised movement of people, could introduce a fresh spatial dynamic to city spaces that have outgrown their original purpose. Encouraging provisional sites to emerge as optical pauses, momentary fragments of cohesion punctuating inter-subjective experiences on foot. Consequently what scenes are revered in the city and what space do they occupy?

The experiential and referential connections between 'space' and 'place' are significant visible and sensory events in my research practice. Over time complex and prolonged audio-visual processes have evolved in the UAE and Qatar. Influenced by the co-presence of passing traffic, fused with



embodied experiences simulated by sensations and encounters, induced by the positive immersion in my surroundings during excursions into the city. The repetitive act of walking along city streets and roads, places and fosters spatial awareness of new visual identities in the metropolis. Such research forces a re-think of the ways 'scale' and 'location' can offer starting points to develop practical and theoretical frameworks, to explore fresh perspectives on how residents, migrant workers and tourists interact with architectural spaces in Gulf cities. In addition my presentation will explore the dichotomy of the 'seen' versus the 'unseen'. I will utilise audio-visual work-in-progress made in the UAE and Qatar that accepts 'temporality' as vital to structural progression. Thus producing opportunities to discuss how the unregulated social activities generated by economic migration and tourism could influence planning processes, spatial mobility, visual identities and notions of 'heritage' along the Arabian Peninsula.

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### **Building global cities? The political economy of 'condo-ism' in Vancouver and Manila**

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"Though they are a world apart, Vancouver and Manila have been forced to grow upward and become cities of glittering glass towers, home to condominiums that are increasingly unaffordable for the average resident" (Lindsay, 2014). This article links two Pacific cities, usually not mentioned in one sentence, through a common phenomenon of high-rise, high-end condominium development. Vancouver's and Metro Manila's condo tower-dominated skylines, in absence of headquarter offices, do not fit usual conceptualisations of 'global cities', though they are integrated in global circuits and flows of migrants, capital, and ideas, that coalesce around real estate development. Why is a luxury condominium construction boom occurring in two ostensibly dissimilar cities? Which factors can explain this? The aim of this research is to understand the political-economic forces of condominium development through a comparative and relational case study of Vancouver's and Manila's real estate sector, assess its drivers and outcomes.

Large-scale condominium development, a legal innovation of subdivided private ownership of apartment housing, can be seen as a new step in facilitating neoliberal urbanization. Rosen and Walks (forthcoming: 2) use the term *condo-ism* to denote "a particular mode of development rooted in a nexus of, on the one hand the economic interests of the private sector development industry and the state, and on the other new urbane yet privatized residential preferences, lifestyles, and consumption interests among consumers." Condo-ism encourages privatisation, commodification and transformation of housing from use value to exchange value, which raises important social questions, including the affordability of housing for citizens, absentee ownership, overseas speculative investments, and financial crisis resilience.

Up to date, only single case studies exist, mainly in a North American context (Rosen & Walks, 2013; forthcoming), although a similar boom of high-end condominium development is discernible in countries in the global South, such as the Philippines (Cardenas, 2014; Kleibert, forthcoming). Urban studies scholars have called for comparative studies across the North/South for a long time, but actual comparative studies are still lacking (Robinson, 2011; Peck, forthcoming). This research employs a comparative research design of developments in two cities, which enables a comparison

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of the same phenomenon across the urban environs situated in the global North and global South and across different institutional settings. Moreover, it goes beyond a comparative approach and traces the transnational linkages and entanglements of both cities.

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**Comparability, validity, and usefulness: thinking through the ‘alpha territoriality in London and Hong Kong’ project**

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Between February 2014 and May 2015, I was employed as a Postdoctoral Fellow for an ESRC/RGC HK funded project on the super-rich and their transnational real estate investments in Hong Kong and London. The project consists of two teams of six interdisciplinary researchers including myself: three in Hong Kong; and three in the UK. The aims of the project are threefold: firstly, to examine whether the residential territorialities of the super-rich in Hong Kong and London differ, and in what ways; secondly, to investigate the relationship(s) between the transnational real estate investments of the super-rich and the international character of their lifestyles in Hong Kong and London; and thirdly, to analyse the local effects of the daily lives of the super-rich and their transnational real estate investments in Hong Kong and London. Throughout the duration of the project, the joint project team had two face-to-face project meetings: a full day meeting in London in early July 2014; and a full day meeting followed by a two-day workshop with other speakers in Hong Kong in mid-January 2015.

In this paper, I reflect upon my experience with this comparative research project, specifically in reference to how comparative urban research is *supposedly* and *actually* done. I draw from my experiences to highlight and think through three interrelated methodological issues, which have important implications for urban scholars’ work in an increasingly complex world.

Firstly, to what extent was this project methodologically and theoretically ‘comparative’, when both teams pursued different foci as their separate empirical research developed in slightly different ways? This is not a question of research design and keeping to similar frames of references theoretically and methodologically, but it is more about *the actual research processes* and *the challenges and limitations of keeping to a pre-agreed plan of action* in transnational urban research. Thinking beyond this specific project, these problems would be further compounded with larger comparative projects involving many researchers in different locations globally – a growing trend in current global urban research.

This leads to the second issue: to what extent can we do ‘valid’ global urban research, when we might actually be comparing different things? To facilitate comparative analysis, we had to simplify different things in different urban contexts – in this case, ‘the super-rich’, which is differentially constructed, understood, and perceived in Hong Kong and London (e.g. local tycoons versus foreign oligarchs) – on equal terms. But at what cost, and to what loss of local contexts and complexities? Again, a larger project involving comparative research of many urban contexts will compound the problem. How do we ensure that our analyses acknowledge and appreciate local complexities, while not forgetting our broader search for universal explanations and theories? In sum, this is a question about *the tensions between the local and the global* in comparative global urban research.

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Finally, and most importantly, what is comparative urban research useful for, and for whom? It would appear that such analyses benefit academics first and foremost, with perhaps some useful contributions for policymakers at various geographical scales. However, what does comparative urban research offer to the every man who lives in his/her city? How does new knowledge production translate to the real stuff that affects actual lives? In sum, this is a political question about *the usefulness of academic knowledge vis-a-vis social change*.

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### **Policy failure and speculative governance: land investment through failed Olympic bids**

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Cities routinely experiment with development policy (Karvonen & van Heur 2014, Roy & Ong 2011) but the global impacts of these contingent, temporary projects are less clear. For example, while hosting a ‘mega-event’ like the Olympic Games is a significant driver of land investment in particular cities (Liao & Pitts 2009, Kassens-Noor 2012), less has been written about the broader geography of Olympic-led experiments: failed Olympic bids. Failed bids are significant drivers of global land investment, as cities use them to catalyze previously stalled projects or to invest speculatively (Lauerma 2014b). Conceptually, these bid experiments are linked to the global mobility of event planning models (Cook & Ward 2011, González 2011) promoted by consultants to goad speculative investment (Lauerma 2014a, Müller 2014). They are also linked to the agency of local states (Raco 2014), which globalize policy initiatives as a way to catalyze political support (Surborg et al 2008, Allan & Cochrane 2014). I ask why urban development experiments continue after their ‘failure’: why are a subset of land investments proposed in failed Olympic bids completed anyway?

I argue that much this post-failure investment can be traced to experimental governance strategies pursued by municipal states: cities most likely to engage in post-failure investment are those which proactively intervene in local economic development through state institutions. I demonstrate this using a comparative sample of bids to host the Summer and Winter Olympics over a 20 year period: in total 81 bids from 56 cities, from 1991 to 2013 (for events 2000-2020). I use a mixed-methods comparison which assesses cities’ choice of whether or not to invest after a failed bid, through two sets of indicators: bidding corporations’ institutional practices (comparing policy discourses with institutional characteristics through discriminant analysis) and their long-term spatial planning strategies (longitudinally assessing change in site planning as cities bid multiple times, using historical GIS). This paper contributes to the themes of the conference with (i) an empirical assessment of global urban complexity by exploring the broader geography of event-led investment, and with (ii) methodological discussion of how to assess global urban change by coupling comparative analysis (across cities as land governance practices are emulated and circulated) and longitudinal analysis (within cities as long term coalitions leverage failed policy experiments to invest speculatively).

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**Material citizen: (Il)legal building extensions in Cape Town, South Africa**

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Historical approaches to urban studies, whereby theories originating from case studies and scholars situated in the global North are applied universally, have been widely criticised and denounced. There have been calls for a new approach to geography (particularly within the urban sub-discipline) that does not prioritise the North, as the sole or primary site of theory production. Consequently, global South urban contexts are no longer naively visualised as tropical case studies in which to test urban theories generated elsewhere, but rather as the sites in which theories are created, developed and challenged. However, this remains an emerging field, hampered by methodological and epistemological limitations, and has largely been addressed through the 'comparative urbanism' movement (e.g. Robinson, McFarlane).

Devising theories that emanate from the South is complex and hard, particularly for academic geographers trained to conceptualise the world through a largely Northern lens (universities in both the North and South remain rooted in traditional approaches). One starting point is to analyse processes already occurring in the South as dynamic in their own right, not as passive recipients or static containers for trends from elsewhere, and to identify how these already existing practices challenge and reinvent practices and theories traditionally associated with the North. For example, downward raiding in a South African 'slum' provides new issues for gentrification theorists to consider (Lemanski 2014), while the implementation of neo-liberal policies in South Africa highlights a re-invention of this ubiquitous approach, suggesting that South Africa has something to teach the North in this respect (Morange and Wafer, 2011).

This highlights the need to develop a more 'chicken and egg' approach to the traditional division between theory and empiricism in contemporary geography. Moving beyond the ideal of 'theoretically informed empirical research' (the implicit mantra of much Anglo- American geography) to embrace the possibility that an empirical case can re-develop theory, and that it is no longer clear cut whether theory or empirics come first.

This contribution will discuss research that I am currently undertaking exploring the relationship between materiality and citizenship in a low-income but fully-serviced settlement in South Africa. While existing theories typically interpret active citizenship as a means to secure material products and services (e.g. Holston, 2008), this case study demonstrates how materiality can distort citizenship practices for the poor. Primary research in a state- subsidised settlement in Cape Town explores the ways in which the material receipt of housing (including title deeds and full services) alters recipients' citizenship expectations and practices. Furthermore, the research is dynamic in exploring how material alterations to the original housing product (i.e. (il)legal and/or (in)formal house extensions) intersect with beneficiaries' citizenship practices.

Existing research on materiality and citizenship has typically considered only the latter as dynamic, whereas in this case, both are perceived as dynamic traits. By exploring the changing materiality of state-subsidised housing this research reveals new insights for the theorisation of urban citizenship. In particular, how citizens' uses and experiences of materiality differ from the state's expectations,

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as well as the ways in which the changing materiality of housing affects people sense of citizenship identity and experience.

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**From urban icons to planetary algorithms: the visual economy of research on global urbanization**

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The central claim of this paper is that to better understand the contemporary and often contradictory terrain of global urban research as a foremost object of cross-disciplinary inquiry, the techniques and methods of representation—that is, the images of global urban research— require more critical scrutiny as an essential feature of our grappling with both an expansive category of research and the equally expansive processes of contemporary urbanization. To this end, I am arguing that we must return to the question of the relationship between research and its representation within urban studies, where a stronger recognition of the visual economy of global urban research is required: we must interrogate our understanding of the production of global visibility within urban research, from iconic photographs to satellite imaging to continental infrastructure maps. The high stakes of this investigation are clear. As Brenner (2013) recently argues, ‘a new cognitive map is urgently needed’ in order to adeptly address the reach of contemporary urbanization. This is an essential part of the project of building a critical urban studies for the twenty-first century. How to pursue such, however, remains less clear. As a response to an important yet under-theorized aspect within contemporary urban studies, the key contributions of my research are as follows: it provides a framework for analysing the contemporary visual economy of urban research in light of the multi-fold task of disentangling expansive urbanization; it highlights presumptions and assumptions concerning visibility, techniques of representation in research and urban complexity; and, it advocates for mixed- method collaborative research platforms that include theoretically informed perspectives on the production of global visibility within urban research itself.

My argument is advanced through three main sections, and brings together traditions in urban research, theories of visual culture, and discourses of visual research methods. First, I return to two lineages of visual representation in urban studies, where images have acted as a concept and guide to research through: a) metaphors of sight within scholarship; and, b) perspectives and techniques of representation, from icons, cityscapes and scenes to GIS, remote sensing and predictive computational modelling. Second, I introduce a framework for categorizing the production of urban research images based on an analysis of a cross- disciplinary set of over 50 academic articles and books produced within the last 5 years that address different aspects of global urbanization. Through this, a number of tensions emerge between proximity and distance, visibility and invisibility, mobility and fixity, place and space, past and present—longstanding tensions in urban research. However, how they are researched and recognized has changed, and this is where a stronger theory of visibility and global complexity is instructive. Third, I sketch out such a theory based on the following problematic: How do we develop mixed method models of urban complexity that can counter the abstraction of global urban processes that challenge the researcher’s technique of representation? My conclusion does not offer a fixed solution, but suggests key principles and points to some relevant contemporary examples.

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I am currently a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) Postdoctoral Fellow, and I enter into these dialogues as an emerging scholar with an original programme of research. As an urbanist with research expertise in art and visual culture, urban sociology and visual theory and research methods, my recent publications have argued for the contemporary emergence of the artist as urban researcher (*Cartographies of Place*, McGill-Queen's University Press), interrogated the premise of art's urban question (*Third Text*, 2014), and studied networks of experimental urban research organizations that draw on art and design methods of inquiry (forthcoming). An underlying premise of these research directions is that the margins of urban visual cultural practices and research can provide valuable insights into the mutually sustaining relationship between research and representation—insights worthy of attention from the more mainstream orientations of urban studies.

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**Advancing the multi-scalar approach: detecting resource geopolitical sub-regional networks and globalizing centres**

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Drawing on long-running discourse in world system theory, Friedmann suggested that capital accumulated in linkages formed through processes of urbanization and economic restructuring such that cities became basing points for capital. Further notions that cities acted as mediatory nodes facilitating information flows, and that global power and control was concentrated in certain cities, led to discussions regarding the role of corporates as globally connected articulators of resources, capital, and information. Relationships between headquarters and branch locations were operationalized as proxies for understanding urban connectiveness, allowing world cities research to examine more complex geographies of globalization, globalizing cities, patterns of regionalization, overlapping and nested scales.

This 'new metageography' opened up fresh opportunities to examine multiscale geographical embeddedness, placing relational perspectives on urbanism at the forefront of discourse on place, scale, space, and territory. Applying this to the Australian geographic context, this paper explores how global and national resource networks in materials, energy and agriculture extend and connect across space by comparing the bottom-up perspective of a national data set (Australian Securities Exchange) to that of the top-down perspective of a global one (Standard and Poors). This paper aims to understand the geographic and relational dimensions of these Australia inter-urban multiscale networks by applying firstly social network analysis and then community detection algorithms. The resultant resource sub-networks of the respective materials, energy and agriculture sectors reveal alternative geographies of globalising cities and sub-regional alliances that link at various global, regional and sub-regional geometries and scales. The resource sector brings with it strong political dimensions being critical across the entirety of our social and economic lives. As such, this paper interprets its overarching network in the context of regional and geopolitical security strategies and agendas.

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**The empirics of co-option: exploring the leading-edge of creative urbanism**

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Given the vast swaths of theoretical and empirical academic literature in recent year, there is little doubt that the processes of urbanisation are taking on increasingly neoliberal characteristics (see Herbert and Brown, 2006; Peck et al., 2013; McLeod and MacFarlane, 2014). Exemplified by the increasing securitization of urban space, the rise of property-led speculative land grabs and rapid, global policy mobility, contemporary urban change has fuelled not only academic critique, but also social and artistic critique from urban inhabitants. We see anti-gentrification protests (Buser et al., 2014), squatters resisting displacement (Vasudevan, 2014) and a myriad of creative subversive urbanism (Mould, 2015). However the nature of neoliberal urban development, or capitalism more broadly is such that it actively seeks out such resistance in order to appropriate it, co-opt it and ultimately profit from it (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005). So in resisting neoliberal urbanisation, people, groups, institutions and collectives have to constantly change and adapt, lest they become too institutionalised and rife for co-option by the neoliberal city.

This results in a cyclical process where capitalistic urbanisation is critiqued, but that critique then becomes part of that urbanisation process. Such a process has been theoretically developed, but it is clear that the empirical substantiation is sorely missing from the urban studies literature. Moreover, those who 'resist' appropriation by the neoliberal city (squatters, subcultures, artists etc.) are posited as having very different politics to those institutions whose very business is to co-opt such 'resistance' (such as advertising agencies, creative city policy advocates, urban branding experts and so on). This means that latter are seen rather opaquely, as the cold-faced, hard-nose capitalist appropriation machine. If however, research was conducted on the process of how these institutions seek out, rationalise and appropriate critique, then there could be a more inclusive understanding as to the justifications of why these processes occur where they do.

This paper therefore aims to challenge the existing dialectic research positioning, to ask if there is a way that the empirics of co-option can be articulated. The paper will draw on intense ethnographic work that has been undertaken within the 'Battle for the Undercroft' campaign which involved 'Love Live Southbank' (LLSB), which is a group of skateboarders actively resisting the potential appropriation of their skate spot by the South Bank Centre in London (SBC). Through a critical reflection on the political processes that the LLSB and the SBC engaged in, this paper will seek to conflate these two conflicting political positions as a means to empirically investigate the processes of the co-option by the neoliberalised city.

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**The event city: how large events are creating a new global urban form**

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Across the globe, large events have becoming defining features of modern urbanism. The Olympic Games and the Football World Cup are but the most transformative in a string of large events that have been hosted in cities from Rio to New Delhi and London to Johannesburg. This contribution

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argues that, with the now global reach of events, we are seeing the emergence of a distinct type of new global urban form – the ‘event city’. Events insert host cities into shared global circuits of capital and policies, and shared conditions of the production of space. Urban policies and plans in host cities are transformed and aligned as best practices circulate and mutate as they travel between host cities. For cities, hosting large events comes with a disruption of regular urban planning and development. Imposing a regime of exception, events puncture sovereign decision-making, subjecting cities to the exigencies of the event. On the theoretical side, this contribution brings the thought of Alain Badiou and Giorgio Agamben into conversation to conceptualise how events enter and seize urban processes. On the empirical side, it examines the processes and global mobilities through which event cities emerge and the impacts on the urban fabric, the urban landscape and urban politics. It will do so in a comparative fashion, drawing on interviews and fieldwork between 2009 and 2014 in Rio de Janeiro, Sochi and Vancouver – cities in which repeated large events have transformed urban development in the past three decades.

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### **Challenges and opportunities of an Africanist doing global urban research**

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Advancing global urbanism hinges on making Africa’s cities a more dominant part of the global urban narrative. The paper explores what it means to achieve intellectual and political traction in what are typical African research conditions: where human needs are great, information is poor, the conditions of governance are complex. Constructing a more legitimate research agenda for African cities necessitates theoretical clarity on the nature of cities and the specificity, or not, of African and southern urbanisms. Against such theoretical distillation I make the case that doing global research as an Africanist requires a repositioning of conventional modes of research, possibly invoking a notion of translational urban research praxis that captures more than the idea of applied research or even co-production and encompasses the integrating the research conception, design, execution, application and reflection - and conceiving of this set of activities as a singular research/practice process that is by its nature deeply political and locationally embedded. In this way African urbanism can be both usefully illuminated by global theories and methods and can simultaneously be constitutive of the reform of the ideas through which cities generally are understood.

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### **Being a global urban researcher: the postcolonial challenges of navigating the ‘field’ and the academy**

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This paper interrogates the politics of producing global urban knowledge using intersectionality as a tool of analysis. We take seriously the call to ‘confront the research challenges and opportunities presented by new geographies of urban theory’ and use it to pursue a theoretical and methodological contribution to the debates. Specifically, we intend to engage in a closer examination of the neoliberalisation of education and its relationship with the politics of knowledge



production particularly when considering contemporary global urban research. Comparative urban studies, including empirical studies of 'informality' and 'the everyday', and attempts to engender theories from the south, all encourage researchers based in predominately Euro-American universities to engage with the geographies of the South in an excavation of new and different types of knowledge. Yet, critical self-reflection on who is a global urban researcher has not kept pace with the production of global urban research. Our discussion engages with and pushes further debates on the postcolonial production of knowledge in the 'field' (Jazeel and McFarlane, 2010) and its consumption in the academy (Ahmed, 2012), by linking the geographies of knowledge production and consumption through the lenses of race, caste, nationality and gender. Where Jazeel and McFarlane write that responsible academic knowledge production demands that Euro-American academic communities that conduct research in the global South "tack[...] back and forth between disciplinary and field communities" (2010:111), we seek to push the conversation further by examining how the body complicates not only a binary of northern and southern researcher and research, but also the relationship between the field and the academy. Where Ahmed (2012) writes the academy (principally in the UK) has a complicated and unresolved relationship with institutional racism obfuscated by discourses of 'diversity', we seek to tie the challenges of producing postcolonial knowledge in field sites to the challenges uncovered in the sites where such knowledge is financed and consumed.

Drawing upon our position as women of colour in the Euro-American academy engaged in urban research in the global south (India, Lebanon and South Africa), and a methodology of critical reflexivity that links our bodies and experience to theories of knowledge production and consumption, we argue the political and social identities of race, caste, nationality and gender mediate the relationships between knowledge, the field, and the academy. From this finding we extrapolate important questions for the study of global urban research: who has the privilege of producing and consuming knowledge and how does the neoliberalisation of academic work, and its ever-expanding accumulation of knowledge, further entrench identity-based social and political hierarchies. Echoing Spivak, our paper draws out critical questions of excavating subaltern knowledge and the politics of speaking.

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### **Addressing gendered insecurities in the urban global south through transnational feminist praxis**

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The first decade of this century has seen the urbanisation of poverty - increasing levels of urbanisation through the growth of impoverished cities will constitute much of poverty reduction's geographical future - and increasing levels of insecurity and social and economic polarisation within cities. Despite institutionalised efforts to lift people out of poverty (MDGs, SDGs), it is insecurities - social, economic, physical and emotional - that characterize the everyday lives of the urban majority, the working poor. Urban theorists are scrambling to understand the implications of this quest for the urban in a time of insecurity in terms of how people belong, how they make their homes and secure livelihoods for themselves, their families and communities. Insecurities affect the ways in which people use and give meaning to urban space, ranging from the avoidance of certain areas and types of transportation, resulting in restricted mobilities, to the segregation of groups and influencing

hierarchies of status and influence. Despite long-term evidence that women's activities of care, production and social reproduction, are central to ensuring the security of urban communities and familial networks, little is known of the transformations taking place in their activities.

This paper addresses the methodological challenges of engaging in research on the gendered nature of urban insecurities through transnational feminist praxis. As Alexander and Mohanty write (1997:xx): "We literally have to think ourselves out of ... crises through collective praxis...". In this vein critical transnational feminist praxis has the additional potential to think through the connections between urban places and build comparative urban research agendas across borders, grounding analyses in local feminist praxis, reshaping urban theory to travel across difference. Such a dialogical and open-ended mode of knowledge production, open to ongoing critique and collective reflection of its limitations, fits well with calls for urban theory to be both provisional and revisable and for the reworking of urban theory through the development of new and creative methodologies for comparative work that punctures the geographical imaginary of global South and North while also ensuring that women do not fall away from urban theory.

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### **Decolonizing urbanism? Towards an anti-colonial methodology**

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Many of the recent 'turns' within the new geographies of theorization (Roy, 2009) are a response to Jenny Robinson's (2006) critique of the developmentalism and colonialism inherent to hegemonic urban theory. However, the new trajectories of urban theorizing often reproduce colonial and uneven relations of knowledge production, even as they attempt to subsume them. For instance, although assemblage approaches to the urban are rightly praised for trying to understand power diffusion through more-than-human networks, they often neglect ways in which Indigenous and other colonized peoples have always-already understood these relations as part of their own differing onto-epistemologies (Sundberg, 2013). Planetary urbanization has similarly been welcomed for interrogating/exposing the hegemony of urban processes, yet in proposing such a totalizing theory it risks reproducing and (re)performing the eurocentric single world of capitalism. And while comparative research has the potential to reframe and even build new concepts of the urban, the very idea of comparison itself is routed in Western epistemologies of an outside observer who can study and classify particular phenomena in an objective manner (Mignolo, 2013).

In this paper I argue that these and similar concerns can be addressed by developing a 'decolonizing urbanism' methodology. This methodology that I propose is premised on the ideas of Latin American scholars of modernity/coloniality and Indigenous theorists of settler colonialism, and is developed iteratively with my research on 'favela urbanization' programs in Rio de Janeiro's low-income communities. What I develop is not a new theory; a decolonization approach recognizes that there is no single coherent manner of explaining or interpreting the world. Indeed, the idea of a unifying theory reproduces eurocentric epistemologies of a single world system. What we need instead is an openness to multiple ways of thinking that both deconstruct the colonizing tendencies of knowledge production while reconstructing knowledge from the spaces of coloniality *at the same moment*. The former, deconstruction, acknowledges the hegemony of Western ways of viewing the world and

actively attends to the intersecting axes of race, gender, religion, spirituality, and ideas of the human that underpin the modern/colonial world system (Grosfoguel, 2007). The latter, reconstruction, theorizes with people from spaces of coloniality who (re)perform both Eurocentric forms of thought and indigenous ways of knowing the world, as part of what Walter Mignolo (2000) calls a 'border knowledge'.

In my own work, responding to a decolonization agenda has involved conceptualizing favelas as 'border spaces' that are the targets of infrastructural development programs. Using a decolonizing urbanism methodology, I attempt to understand the myriad facets of a new gondola transportation system, called a teleferico. I investigate the teleferico's new enactments of urban governance; its transformation of the space-time of favela mobility; and politicized resistances to the project. My arguments are only made possible through engaging with non-Eurocentric knowledges that are also always being (re)performed in favela communities, while attending to the multiple ways in which coloniality is being (re)produced through the new gondola. This is simultaneous deconstruction and reconstruction through a decolonizing urbanism methodology.

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### **Tracking the global intelligence corps in sustainable urban planning and design**

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As urban planning and design have become increasingly global activities, the international traffic in ideas and practitioners has received growing attention from scholars (e.g. Healey and Upton 2010, McCann & Ward 2011). However, most work to date has focused on the travels of particular ideas or models from one specific place to another. In my recently completed doctoral research, I took an alternative entry point into the study of travelling ideas. To study how ideas about how to plan and design sustainable urban places travel internationally, I focused on a group of actors, the so-called 'global intelligence corps' (GIC) (Olds, 2001). This is the industry of elite private sector consultants working the fields of sustainable urban planning, architecture, engineering and related disciplines. Between 2010 and 2012, I embedded myself into this industry, conducting over 50 interviews and doing extended periods of participant observation. The participant observation included observation of and engagement in everyday practice while sitting in and working from a multi-national engineering company's office, observation of planning workshops and meetings, and participation alongside members of the GIC in a one-week study tour of sustainable urban projects in Northern Europe.

My contribution to this conference would draw on this experience of doing global urban research through ethnographic-style observation of elite transnational actors involved in the production of urban environments. This approach, in which the 'case' being studied was an international industry rather than a territorially-defined location, is a departure from most work in comparative urban studies. Leaving behind territory and working instead in the 'space of flows' of travelling ideas, and with the actors involved in these travels, has a number of methodological and empirical implications that are highly relevant to the planned discussion on how to actually do global urban research. For example, my ability to access the GIC came as a result of my links with this industry—my research

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was partly sponsored by a GIC firm. This introduced challenges in terms of remaining objective, as well as how to sufficiently anonymise my research findings.

In addition to expanding on such issues, my presentation would reflect on the potential for this type of research to make important contributions to urban theory. In particular, I would like to highlight the value of research that attempts to follow, in real-time, the processes through which ideas travel. Building on my empirical observations about how ideas became incorporated into the accepted canon of sustainable urbanism and then peddled internationally, I developed a conceptualisation of travelling ideas as dynamic assemblages. This conceptualisation grew out of a research approach that encouraged a focus on the processes by which ideas travel and take hold in new environments, rather than broad structural drivers. Research explicitly focused on the people and processes involved in making the urban more 'global' is, in my experience, a valuable and underutilized method of doing global urban research.

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**Urban policymaking and planning strategies in times of crisis: bringing the experiences of Valencia and Mar del Plata into analytical conversation through comparisons**

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Attempts for understanding the multiple, diverse and complex experiences of an increasingly urban world have been on the rise since the beginning of the 21st century. An outpour of urban research featuring experimental approaches, analyses and a wide variety of empirical work, over the last decade, evidences the multiple efforts of scholars from across the social sciences. While Scott and Storper (2014) might view such attempts as being problematic for urban studies: an increasingly fragmented discipline that continuously goes in/out of focus, they might be seen as strategies to advance a research field which foundations are rooted to EuroAmerican intellectual traditions.

At the core of *doing* global urban research and the theoretical ambitions it entails, it remains the challenge of making "abstract" and/or "universal" sense of infinite specificities featured across individual cases from around the world and, particularly, of incorporating empirically-grounded knowledge generated in cities of the "global south" into theoretical conversations inherited from an urban tradition rooted to the western-centric/colonial practices of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For this purpose, not only "new geographies of theory" (Roy 2009) are required, but also "new geographies of theorising" (Robinson 2014). In addition to the need for new geographical grounds of analytical inspiration, we need new tactics and strategies to meet the challenges of understanding and theorising urban complexity in the 21st century, departing from the singularities, multiplicities and connections that characterise virtually every urban process/phenomena worldwide.

My PhD research deals with some of the challenges outlined above. It explores urban policymaking and planning processes in times of crisis and institutional transformation across Valencia (Spain) and Mar del Plata (Argentina) from a comparative and historical perspective. I trace how strategic planning initiatives were embraced in each city, in 1993 and 2001 respectively, considering 1) how such city-wide strategies differed from earlier forms of urban intervention in contexts undergoing democratisation and decentralisation since the 1980s and 2) the impact of significant episodes of crisis on their formulation, unfolding and prospects. In the comparative analysis of these urban

experiences, I consider both the specificities (historical trajectories, institutional cultures) and multiplicities (global influences, shared initiatives) of each individual case.

In this presentation, I firstly present some reflections on my practical experience at actually *doing* global urban research: drawing on my 12-month fieldwork experience in both cities and the methods used for gathering data from a mixture of private, state and academic actors. Secondly, I elaborate on the strategy of selecting “comparators” (Jacobs 2012): of establishing the grounds of comparability not only by thinking about Valencia and Mar del Plata but also elsewhere. Finally, I introduce preliminary interpretations concerning the relationship between empirical observations and wider theories or concepts by drawing on the analysis of the urban policymaking and planning experiences of Valencia and Mar del Plata: showing how these geographically distant cities can be brought closely together into analytical conversation as well as demonstrating that while these cities might indeed illustrate elements of wider – and already theorised – urban processes (urban crisis, neoliberal and austerity urbanism, strategic planning: best practice), some of their singular experiences and trajectories might serve as starting points for the production and successive “launching” (Robinson 2014) of alternative analytics and insights about diverse aspects of the urban – which, in turn, might be of relevance for understanding other cases.

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### **The making of Africa’s largest port: transformation and sociality in Bagamoyo, Tanzania**

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Approximately 40 miles north of Dar es Salaam the sleepy coastal town of Bagamoyo is set to be dramatically transformed. Chinese investors are transforming this ‘ordinary city’ of 30,000 inhabitants into a ‘21st century metropolis’ and Africa’s largest port at a cost of \$10 billion (Robinson 2002; Roy 2009). This paper builds on previous research (Schindler 2014) in which I argued that the transformation of territory is becoming the primary objective of municipal governments in many Southern cities. I demonstrate that the transformation of Bagamoyo is informed by a strategy that seeks to ‘hardwire’ the city into global production networks (GPNs). I then present empirical evidence that examines the antagonisms and alliances in Bagamoyo that unfold on an everyday basis surrounding access to resources. The results indicate that ‘hardwiring’ cities directly into GPNs may have the potential to foster inclusive urbanism.

A significant amount of scholarship on urban and regional development examines how cities and regions seek to ‘strategically couple’ with buyer-driven GPNs whose contours were determined by lead-firms in the global North (Coe et al. 2004). Many cities and regions sought to couple with GPNs by establishing particular institutions and improving infrastructure in an effort to attract investors. However, many of the special economic zones, office and technology parks that were built failed to generate economic activity. Policy makers are beginning to rethink this strategy, and there appears to be a shift underway.

Rather than create the conditions that can foster investment, policy now leverages investment to directly connect cities with GPNs from the outset. Plans to transform Bagamoyo into Africa’s largest port are testament to this shift in urban development policy. Tanzanian authorities are pursuing a national development strategy that rests on integrating Bagamoyo into Sino-centric GPNs. To this

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end Chinese investment is transforming Bagamoyo into a node that will serve to mediate the flow of natural resources from the interior of southern Africa to China. The transformation of Bagamoyo into a '21st century metropolis' raises many questions with regard to everyday life, and I present original research on 'resource sociality' in Bagamoyo. I focus on the alliances and antagonisms among Bagamoyo residents, which unfold on an everyday basis surrounding access to resources. Resources such as water, electricity and land are the focal point of social relations in Bagamoyo, and I show how these relations shape residents' subjectivities. Furthermore, Bagamoyo residents understand their 'place' in the city as a dynamic constellation of resources.

This research (1) provides an in-depth example of the pursuit of territorial transformation, and (2) informs our understanding of social relations and everyday life in a city whose authorities are committed to the transformation of the city. I conclude with cautious optimism regarding the extent to which cities that are 'hardwired' into GPNs may be more inclusive than other 21st century metropolises. In comparison to many other cities a high percentage of people are employed in the formal economy, and municipal authorities are able to invest in urban infrastructure at a comparatively 'early' phase of urban transformation.

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### **Planetary urbanization: challenges and opportunities for urban research**

*Christian Schmid, ETH Zurich, [schmid@arch.ethz.ch](mailto:schmid@arch.ethz.ch)*

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In the last decades, urbanization has become a planetary phenomenon. Urban areas expand and interweave, and novel forms of urbanization emerge. In this process, new urban configurations are constantly evolving. Therefore, an adequate understanding of planetary urbanization must derive its empirical and theoretical inspirations from the multitude of urban experiences across the various divides that shape our contemporary world. Urbanization has to be considered an open process, determined as much by existing urban patterns as well as by constant innovation and inventiveness.

This talk will report on the ongoing collaborative work with Neil Brenner on planetary urbanization. Building upon reflexive approaches to critical social theory and our own research on planetary urbanization, we argue for a radical rethinking of inherited epistemological assumptions regarding the urban and urbanization. In this conceptualization, the emphasis on urban settlement types is superseded by an investigation of variegated urbanization processes. This poses important new challenges and opportunities for urban research.

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### **Speculative urbanisation and the politics of displacement**

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This paper visits the experiences of East Asian speculative urbanisation to critically discuss how the politics of displacement can be theorised. In East Asia, fixed asset investment including real estate has been the cornerstone of economic development in times of state-led speculative urbanisation. The post-industrial cities in the West have been theorised as witnessing the channelling of capital from the primary circuit of industrial production to the secondary circuit of the built environment in

order to address over-accumulation crisis (Henri Lefebvre and David Harvey), but in East Asia, its condensed and speculative urbanisation experience has shown a more supplementary interaction between the two circuits.

The region's speculative urbanisation under the authoritarian developmental states has accompanied mega-displacement, intense commodification of urban space and speculative real estate markets. State domination underscores the behaviour of the region's developmental states, which pursue selective welfare intervention and state-orchestrated urban development at the expense of weak civil society. The construction of consent by the state and real estate interests (including construction firms, individual speculators and other professional organisations that assist urban redevelopment projects) through enacting the 'culture of property' (Ley and Teo 2014; Shin and Kim forthcoming) propels local residents (especially property owners) in redevelopment neighbourhoods to agree to displacement and demolition of their neighbourhoods in return for marginal gains.

By adopting a Gramscian perspective, I argue that displacement is legitimised through consent ('the cultural hegemony of property') as well as effected by coercion (domination). Consent and coercion are often exercised concurrently and in a more nuanced way when the use of force and coercion originates from private individuals and when the state responds to justify their actions in the name of protecting private individuals' lawful rights. It is important to go beyond the production of cultural conventions and ideologies, and understand how the state effects displacement through both consent and coercion to drive accumulation and realise gentrification, that is the class re-making of urbanising space.

To advance my arguments, I make use of both historical and ethnographic data gathered from years-long field research in South Korea and mainland China. The ethnographic data include field observation and interviews with displacees and activists, while the historical data include newspaper archives, government publications and a range of surviving pamphlets produced by protesters in Seoul during their fight against eviction from the 1970s.

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**Placing *Asian* cities within *global* urban analysis: thinking differently about theories, methodologies and meanings**

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My contribution to this international conference, focusing on 'doing global research', will be based upon a major three year research project located in Asia and conducted by urban scholars residing in the region. It is from this position and positionality that I will 'speak' *from* Asian urban contexts, and *of* Asian urban processes in order to engage with 'global urban analysis'. Hence I wish to place this Asian-based urban project and some of its findings in dialogue with 'global urban analysis'.

Our project, *Asian Cities: Liveability, Sustainability, Social Diversity and Spaces of Encounter*, was funded by the Global Asia Institute of the National University of Singapore. Research was conducted between 2010 and 2013. We were also supported by a NUS Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences conference and research grant for a project entitled: *Asian Urban Liveability in Practice: Researching,*

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*Collaborating, Publishing* (March 2013- August 2014). I was the principle investigator for both grants. The *Asian Urban Liveability in Practice* award allowed us to do some extension research work from the GAI project and also hold a workshop where the city-based researchers we collaborated with in the four cities under analysis were able to share their experiences of working on the project, perspectives on liveability and, most importantly, meet with other project researchers from each of the other countries. I will draw details from both projects for the presentation.

In applying for both these grants we, myself and a research team of six colleagues, were working to think differently about urban theory, methodologies and meanings. We engaged with the theoretical concept of 'ordinary cities' and expanded this in meaning to the locale of 'ordinary neighbourhoods' where we conducted research. We worked hard to gain a grounded empirical data set that used a combination of quantitative, qualitative and observational methodological approaches and was designed to be collaborative and comparative. Our research was conducted in the Asian cities of Busan (South Korea), Hyderabad (India), Kunming (China) and Singapore. In each urban neighbourhood we interrogated the meanings and complexities of urban dwelling through explorations of residents', planners', politicians' and other urban actors' perspectives and experiences of *liveability, sustainability, diversity and spaces of encounter*. To date few urban studies analyses pull these four theoretical strands together, and certainly have not yet done this in relation to Asian cities.

In my presentation I will outline the projects and explore how we succeeded (and failed) in thinking differently about the urban theorisations, methodologies and meanings of one of the key concepts for our research, that of *liveability*, in our four Asian cities.

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### **An experience of global urban research**

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This presentation will interrogate the notion of 'global urban research' by questioning each word in terms of its geographical credence. The latter involves considering how the relation between spaces-of-places and spaces-of-flows are negotiated. Global/globalization as (making) transnational is contrasted with international as mosaic. Urban/urbanization as (making) place is contrasted with cities as networks. Research as answering questions is contrasted with curiosity to question answers. These differences underpin my research subject: cities in corporate globalization. I will illustrate how these contrasts have played out in my contributions to GaWC researches focusing on the difficulties of empirical studies at the local and global scales in the traditional world of state-istics.

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### **Reworking comparative urbanism across cities in the global north and global south**

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Since Robinson (2011) and Ward's (2010) call for renewed comparative studies of cities there have been many gestures towards this approach, yet few have succeeded in demonstrating a novel way of doing such work. This contribution attempts such a new comparative urban project through an



empirically grounded comparison of *an object*, harm reduction drug policy, across cities in the Global North and the Global South rather than a comparison of the *cities* themselves; cities whose commensurability are in many ways impossible (Roy and Ong 2011). This approach allows discussion and analysis that extends across cities by seeking to understand the nuanced implementation of a drug policy model as it is mobilized across cities in Europe, North America, and the Caribbean. This work seeks to do so by examining the role of informational infrastructures (Temenos and McCann 2013) in policy mobilization and transnational advocacy networks in order to extrapolate the relationships between places that both reinforce colonial histories, yet also seek to subvert this positionality through sustained transnational advocacy. Studying the politics of a drug policy focused on the most marginalized people in urban environments allows a drawing out the structural relationships necessary to operationalize successful social movements advocating for policy reform in urban environments, which transform cities in varied and unexpected ways.

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### Renovating urban systems theory

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With notions such as planetary urbanization and global urban networks, urban theory has increasingly been cast on an ever-expanding canvas up to the point that it is no longer assumed to have 'an outside'. Although such a wide scope is sometimes necessary to encompass some of the social changes in a rapidly urbanizing world, it risks underestimating the relevance of variations in the degree of 'cityness', density, and functional integration that can be found within the global urban system. Therefore, making the planetary urbanism perspective compatible with (older) insights on sub-planetary theories of settlement geography is a worthwhile addition to our theoretical toolbox.

Research on urbanized regions builds, often unacknowledged, on an academic legacy of urban systems analysis that originates in the 1930s but flourished from the 1960s throughout the 1980s. Spatially informed logics based on the analysis of socio-spatial (sub)systems such as growth pole theory, central place analysis, the theory of cumulative causation and time geographical insights featured prominently in that literature. In this research tradition the national scale usually set the delimitation of the inside and outsides of the system, an assumption which is problematic in a globalizing age. However, this contribution to the 'doing global urban research' seminar will argue that many of these theoretical insights can be salvaged without resorting to methodological nationalism. Instead of abandoning the framework of urban systems theory, we need to renovate it: get rid of the obsolete and outdated parts while retaining the useful insights. This contribution, the culmination of four years of PhD research, builds on the academic legacy of urban systems theory and proposes a dynamic framework that can be used to understand and interpret contemporary urban systems while being sensitive to the planetary scale.

Starting with the work of Harris and Ullman in 1945 there is a long tradition in human geography to theorize settlement geography, and thus urban system development, as the interrelation of several relatively autonomous logics. The renovated urban systems theory builds on a variety of this tradition developed in the 'Amsterdam school of urban geography' in the 1980s. This variety conceptualizes a threefold interaction of central place systems, growth pole systems and an

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ecological approach based on Hägerstrand's time geography. These three urban subsystems work on different scales, from very 'local' to planetary, but have relatively well-defined thresholds that tend to keep the subsystems fixed to those scales. Additionally, the three subsystems co-evolve which implies that a change in the domain of one will have significant effects on the others in terms of differentiation of economies, communities and amenity levels. Together they provide a theoretical perspective to understand functionally the emergence of larger-scale urban formations such as megaregions and polycentric urban regions. The utility of the framework is illustrated by examples from several studies that have been conducted during the last four years on the dynamics of the Belgian urban system(s).

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**Global expertise, local convincing power: management consultants and urban policy**

*Anne Vogelpohl, University of Hamburg, [anne.vogelpohl@uni-hamburg.de](mailto:anne.vogelpohl@uni-hamburg.de)*

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Fiscal crises and corresponding austerity goals, powerful social urban movements and hence local governments' legitimation deficits as well as difficult industrialisation/de-industrialisation-processes have put a new actor on the urban agenda: Global management consultants advise local decision makers how to deal with these problems. Particularly their global expertise and extensive networks let them appear as appropriate assistants for steering growth-oriented urban development. The paper addresses the ways in which management experts turn urban policy blueprints into locally specific development programmes and shows how those mobilised policy programmes are implemented – and under which circumstances they are basically reshaped by local actors. It is based on a broad empirical study that examines the role of private management consultancies (like McKinsey & Co or Roland Berger Strategy Consultants) in six German cities' urban policy.

I will develop the paper's argument in three steps: First, I introduce different types of urban policy advice by management consultants with taking the six German cities as example. By applying comparative methods, this first step aims at clarifying differences and similarities between approaches, actors and topics of consulting in the urban realm. Second, I illustrate why urban decision makers particularly endorse management consultants. Finally, I examine the double-process of how the complexity of urban problems is reduced by the consultants and turned into a manageable task and how the simplified solutions get more complicated again when put into practice by several local actors. The second and third step are instructed by the documentary method which aims to systematically derive basic societal conditions from qualitative data. So this method helps to theorize qualitative empirical findings – in this case concerning the complex interplays of global expertise and urban development strategies.

Altogether, this combination of empirical analyses and theorizing aims at specifying the role of globally referenced reason for urban policy decisions.

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**Researching urban policies on the move: towards a research agenda**

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The last decade or so has seen a veritable explosion of work on policies on the move (Baker et al 2016). That is on revealing the work involved in the circulations and the travels of policy-making across a numbers of areas of policy. From creativity to economic, drugs to educational, environmental to transport, those social scientists interested in the ways in which policy gets made have turned their attention to empirically documenting and theoretically understanding how policies are initially rendered mobile, how they are moved from one location to another, morphing and transforming along the way, and what it means when they “arrive” (if they do). This emphasis on the relational and territorial geographies of policy-making has built upon more well-established ways of conceiving of the geographies of policy and it has sparked a renewed interest in the field (Peck 2011; Cochrane and Ward 2012; Temenos and McCann 2013). Yet what this might mean methodologically has only recently begun to be considered. This is about more than methods *qua* methods, although this is important. The methodological consequences of urban policy mobility studies are a work in progress. This keynote lecture will set out some of the challenges facing those working on these issues, highlighting some potentially fruitful ways forward.

# Participants

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