



Global Urbanisms, Regional Specificities

16 – 17 May 2016

IAS Common Ground, South Wing, Wilkins Building, UCL (www.ucl.ac.uk/maps)

There is a very active debate in urban studies at the moment, exploring the limits of universalist theorisations of the urban while at the same time seeking to engage with the globalisation of urban processes. Drawing on many different strands of theoretical inspiration, urban scholars are concerned to build wider knowledges about the urban across the very great diversity of urban outcomes around the world. It is a time of some theoretical ferment in the field, and the UCL Urban Laboratory has hosted a series of events to address these themes; it is evident that there are many UCL urban scholars contributing to these debates.

There is a close synergy between these concerns and those raised by UCL's Institute of Advanced Studies, which provides a home to the collective 'area studies' research groupings at UCL but seeks to open the historical configurations of region and place to question under the rubric Area Studies Re-Mapped or 'Area Studies without Borders'. We felt that there was a strong shared interest in building theoretical insights from the rich experiences of specific regions and distinctive cities, while being alert to how these experiences are shaped by wider processes of globalisation. Conceptualisations, then, need to navigate these trajectories of connection and differentiation.

Organised by Jenny Robinson and Tamar Garb, with funding from the UCL Urban Laboratory and UCL Institute of Advanced Studies.

For event details and further information, please contact Jordan Rowe
jordan.rowe@ucl.ac.uk.

Programme

Monday 16 May 2016

09.30 - 10.30: Registration and coffee/tea

10.30 - 11.00: Welcome and Opening Remarks

- Jennifer Robinson (co-Director, UCL Urban Lab)
- Tamar Garb (Director, UCL Institute of Advanced Studies)

11.00 – 13.00: Different Globalisations

- Mike Raco, Daniel Durrant and Nicola Livingstone: *'Profiting from failure?': Investor narratives and imaginations of London's changing property markets*
- Michael Gentile: *Manufacturing difference, disconnecting a region: post-socialism as a barrier to thought*
- Catalina Ortiz: *Medellin in motion: Governmental technologies of city-model making* [via Skype]

13.00 – 14.00: Lunch (provided)

14.00 – 16.00: Thinking the urban from somewhere

- Andrew Harris: *The metonymic urbanism of 21st Century Mumbai*
- Ben Campkin: *Regional urbanism, international circuits: Ellen Hellmann's urban anthropologies of Johannesburg and their implications for global urbanism today*
- Kisanphol Wattanawanyoo: *The Practice of Mobile Market as the Making of Bangkok Everyday Urbanism*

16.00 – 17.00: Break

17.00 – 20.00: [PUBLIC SESSION] Regional Perspectives on Planetary Urbanisation

- Pushpa Arabindoo: *Provincialising planetary urbanisation: A view from Chennai*
- Tariq Jazeel: *Urban Theory with an outside: planetary urbanization, ideology, and the difference of Area Studies*
- Debby Potts: *Thinking through planetary urbanism as a regional geographer: perspectives from history and livelihood studies in rural and urban Africa*
- Response: Christian Schmid: *Comparative Investigations of Planetary Urbanisation*

20.30: Conference Dinner

Tuesday 17 May 2016

09.00 – 09.30: Coffee/tea

09.30 – 11.00: Globalisation and the production of urban difference

- Clare Melhuish: *“The real modernity that is here”*: understanding the role of digital visualisations in the production of a negotiated, cosmopolitan urban imaginary at Msheireb Downtown, Doha
- Susan Moore: *New Urbanism’s ‘double movement’*
- Nicholas Jewell: *Eastern Promises: Shopping in the Socialist City*

11.30 – 13.00: Global Circulations of Architecture in Africa

- Edward Denison: *Beyond ‘the West’ – from Modernism to Multiple Modernities: Lessons from China and Africa*
- Lukasz Stanek: *Competing Solidarities in Post-Independence Ghana: Accra’s International Trade Fair as an Urban Project*
- Afonso Dias Ramos: *On the Kinaxixi Square in Luanda, Angola*

13.00 – 14.00: Lunch

A chance to explore Bloomsbury – suggestions for places to find lunch nearby will be circulated

14.00 – 15.30: Thinking with/across Difference

- Jonathan Rock: *Towards Comparing Urban Difference: Learning from Stockholm and Jerusalem*
- Michal Murawski: *Radical Centres? The Political Morphology of Monumentality in Warsaw and Johannesburg*
- Michele Acuto: *The science in/of comparative gestures: interdisciplinary entanglements in Dubai, Sydney and Singapore*

16.00 – 17.30: Comparative Imaginations

- Colin McFarlane: *Global urbanism in a world of fragments*
- Jean-Paul Addie: *Abstraction, Levels of Generality, and the ‘Ecological Dominance’ of the Urban*
- Jennifer Robinson: *London as a theory destination: comparative urbanism in practice*

18.00 – 20.00: [PUBLIC SESSION] Thinking (the urban) with the Global South

- AbdouMaliq Simone: *Afterlives of the South: Whatever happened to the black city?*
- Fulong Wu: *Emerging Chinese Cities: Implications for Global Urban Studies*
- Miguel Kanai: *A more cosmopolitan urban (global) field? Reflections based on bibliometric evidence*

Discussant - Adriana Allen

20.00: Drinks

Abstracts

Monday 16 May

Session 1.1 - Different Globalisations

‘Profiting from failure?’: Investor narratives and imaginations of London’s changing property markets

Mike Raco, Dan Durrant, and Nicola Livingstone
Bartlett School of Planning, UCL

London has been faced with growing development pressures over recent decades as its outputs and population have expanded. The built environment has become a highly attractive location for investment in residential and commercial property, urban infrastructure and a range of productive enterprises. These developments have occurred alongside the transformation of the city’s governance systems including wider processes of privatisation and deregulation/re-regulation and fiscal innovations. They have also been accompanied by new or increased patterns of socio-spatial segregation. And yet the governance relationships that underpin these processes remain relatively little understood. They are marked by economic, political and geographical spill-overs and by gaps and lacunae, all of which require further comparative scrutiny. The aim of this presentation is report back on the first stages of an on-going comparative research project named WHIG (what is governed), that is examining the ways in which global investors imagine and construct narratives about global cities. It will assess the ways in which comparative imaginations of investment landscapes are being mobilised and deployed in London and the work that these mobilisations play in justifying investment practices and policy arrangements. The paper will reflect on the implications of investments for the production and management of the urban built environment and the types of global-local relationships that are now emerging.

Manufacturing difference, disconnecting a region: post-socialism as a barrier to thought

Michael Gentile
University of Helsinki

Perhaps the strongest legacy of socialism/communism is the persistence of the term in both descriptions and perceptions of the region over which its rule prevailed. “Post-communism”, “post-socialism” and similar concepts abound within the academic literature, and within urban studies referring to the “post-communist/post-socialist city” when talking about any urban location between Germany and the Pacific remains completely uncontroversial and is, in fact, the standard way of expression. This way, post-socialism reproduces an imagined community of cities that unites Tallinn and Tashkent, Novi Sad and Novosibirsk, and even Berlin and Beijing, separating them from the rest of the world’s cities by an artificial, perfunctory and imaginary wall of difference. Although recent works have attempted to revisit post-socialism at its roots (notably, Tuvikene’s (2016) well-

argued call for its deterritorialization), the concept has proven to be surprisingly resilient despite reality's multiple attacks on its fragile foundations.

In my talk, and in my paper, I will argue in favour of the dismissal of “post-socialism”, and I will do so by discussing a range of gentrification-like phenomena that are best understood as local incarnations in the relational architecture of the world of cities. These phenomena include (1) tele-urbanization in Tbilisi, a process of remote controlled newbuild urbanization that has much in common with Sigler and Wachsmuth's (2015) transnational gentrification, but where diaspora capital occupies a more prominent position at the expense of “global” capital, (2) “Schengtrification” in Riga, whereby mid-sized foreign capital is channeled into the property market, allowing investors to obtain coveted renewable 5-year (Schengen) residence permits, and (3) colour-splashing in Kiev, a recent newbuild development trend that enacts a radical break with (or disruption of) the austere chromatic repertoire of the Soviet-vintage urban fabric.

Medellin in motion: Governmental technologies of city-model making

Catalina Ortiz

The Bartlett Development Planning Unit, UCL

Becoming a city model to emulate across contexts befit as deliberate strategy to ‘govern’ contested cities. The circulatory power of urban policies and planning ideas is shaping the ways in which the politics of space production takes place in contemporary urbanism. Emerging urban models place the ‘global south’ at the center of urban innovations, challenging the traditional sources of innovation and transgressing the mainstream directionality of travel North-South. The debate on policy mobility – mutation and the acceleration of the international exchange of planning practices gained increasing attention to be considered pivotal for unveiling a variegated neoliberal *modus operandi*. However, the particular institutional, spatial and symbolic arrangements that enable the movement of ideas are often overlooked. Following the ideas of critical policy mobility scholars, using governmentality approaches to urbanism, this article aims to explore the context-sensitivity of the recalibration of urban imaginations that city models engender. Particularly, this study seeks to reflect on the practices of *city model making* and its embedded *governmental technologies of circulation* offering empirical evidence from the case of Medellin, Colombia. Medellin, as a recently praised urban renaissance model, provides a site to explore the guiding question of the research: how an urban model gets enacted and circulated? I argue governmental technologies of city model-making rely on an ensemble of circulatory discursive coalitions, acupuncture of iconic-urban/architectural design, inter-sector alliances and transnational platforms of exchange for internal and external political legitimating purposes.

Session 1.2 - Thinking the urban from somewhere

The metonymic urbanism of 21st Century Mumbai

Andrew Harris

UCL Department of Geography and UCL Urban Laboratory

Over the past decade, Mumbai has increasingly been understood as representative of new forms, trajectories and processes of 21st-century urbanism. This has been a welcome rejoinder to a continued predominance of North American and European cities within international urban research and debate. Yet it is important to query what theory cultures and geographical imaginations have been mapped onto Mumbai in this recent emphasis on the city. This paper argues that, unless Mumbai's specificities and grounded realities are used to disrupt and reframe existing urban analysis, there is a risk of replicating the comparative perspectives and visions of élite policy-making. This does not mean conferring paradigmatic status on Mumbai or isolating Mumbai as an exceptional form of contemporary urbanism, but instead generating new theoretical dialogue and opening up new channels of urban research and policy formation within a wider world of cities.

Regional urbanism, international circuits: Ellen Hellmann's urban anthropologies of Johannesburg and their implications for global urbanism today

Ben Campkin

The Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL and UCL Urban Laboratory

In this presentation I will examine the historical example of the body of urban scholarship on Johannesburg and environs by the anthropologist and active member of the South African Institute of Race Relations, Ellen Hellmann, from the 1930s to the 1960s. I will focus on Hellmann's study of a Johannesburg slum, *Rooiyard: A Sociological Survey of an Urban African Slum* (1948), resulting from a fieldwork survey undertaken in 1934. This has been hailed as a pioneering work of slum ethnography although its implications for urban studies are under explored. In this highly located research Hellmann gives a written and visual account of a specific housing yard and the lives of its inhabitants, drawing from interviews and observations undertaken over the course of a year, and documenting through case studies the lives of newly arrived migrants who would be imminently 'resettled' to Orlando, Soweto. There are tensions between the specificity of the *Rooiyard* research – focused on a distinctive and precarious urban unit that was demolished by order during the research period – and the universalising Anglo-European intellectual influences (e.g. Malinowski, 1922) that shaped Hellmann's epistemology of the urban and attitudes towards field work and her informants. *Rooiyard* will be contextualised through reference to other key works from this period which placed Johannesburg in networks of global urban research and practice, especially John Maud's *City Government: the Johannesburg Experiment* (1938), and the Modernist architectural pamphlet *Zerohour* (1933); as well as through existing scholarship on the historical geographies and global dynamics of Johannesburg in this period (Robinson, 2003; Parnell, 1988, 2003).

Given critiques of the Western construction of modernities (Mbembe, 2001; Robinson, 2013), what are the implications of historical analyses of these texts-formed through international circuits of knowledge and practice - for contemporary global urban studies?

The Practice of Mobile Market as the Making of Bangkok Everyday Urbanism

Kisnaphol Wattanawanyoo

The Bartlett Development Planning Unit, UCL

My research seeks to understand one form of urban informality in Bangkok context, commonly known as the practice of 'mobile market' or 'rod-kub-khao'. Taking its roots from the street market and mobile vending, this informal practice moves and weaves through the interstices of the urban fabric, adding another layer of Bangkok's complexity. The research investigates how Bangkok everyday urban spaces are being made/assembled and remade/reassembled by this ordinary practice. In doing so, this study applies the ethnographic methodology of participant observation in the fieldwork/ data collection and adopting the theoretical framework based on Deleuzo-guattarian thinking (Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari), along with some concepts from Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau.



In particular, this research explores how this practice of mobile market play an influential role in the process of city making and how they have creatively collaborated. The focus is also to explore another way of understanding and conceptualising the city through the mobility and rhythm. This would also contribute to the debate over the formal-informal dichotomy in the planning discipline, suggesting that the continuum and mix of informality-formality that is vital to the city. Thus, it endeavours to render the complex urban networks at play at multi scalar level, and the creative transformation of the mobile practices that shape Bangkok urbanism with its unique character and lively atmosphere.

PUBLIC SESSION

Session 1.3 - Regional Perspectives on Planetary Urbanisation

Provincialising planetary urbanisation: A view from Chennai

Pushpa Arabindoo

UCL Department of Geography and UCL Urban Laboratory

This paper is essentially a pause-and-ponder exercise involving a self-critical reflection of the epistemological possibilities resulting from a decade long ethnographic investigations of urban transformations in one particular Indian city: Chennai. While it is tempting to claim Chennai's socio-politically defined regional specificity and restrain the analysis within a framework singular to its own localised history, it is also important to acknowledge its significance in challenging the emergence of new kinds of metonyms within a re-imagined global South and fashioned around cities like Mumbai. This paper is thus an attempt to provincialise at two levels: urban studies and the urban. Firstly, in an effort to resist the divisions between the particular and the planetary, I explore how a less familiar city like Chennai that despite the now established agenda of a 'southern turn in urban theory' rarely features in these conversations but can open up new pathways to critical urban theory production. Secondly, it reconsiders Chennai's urbanity where attempts to globalise itself has precipitated a socio-spatial restructuring way beyond to a territorial hinterland challenging our conventionally understood notions of a city, metropolis, and region. Employing the idea of the 'hinterland' to rethink the assumed rigidities of peripheral urbanisation, I show how this increasingly hybridised geographical terrain empirically reveals an unprecedented scalar reconfiguration of the urban.

Urban Theory with an outside: planetary urbanization, ideology, and the difference of Area Studies

Tariq Jazeel

UCL Department of Geography

This paper critically engages Planetary Urbanization's claim that it generates 'Urban Theory Without an Outside'. It argues Planetary Urbanization is part of the broader ideological terrain of Urban Studies whose textual field reifies 'the city', 'the urban', and 'urbanization' as objects and processes of analyses. The paper argues the conceptual and political value of delineating views from outwith Urban Studies and Planetary Urbanization – in particular from Area Studies – that unmoor the primacy of the city, the urban and particularly urbanization in understandings of socio-spatial processes across planetary space. To do this, the paper sketches an anticolonial history of Colombo, Sri Lanka

Thinking through planetary urbanism as a regional geographer: perspectives from history and livelihood studies in rural and urban Africa

Debby Potts

Department of Geography, Kings College London

The concept of planetary urbanism includes the idea that the city itself is not the unit of analysis – the interest is in urban processes. The concept particularly opposes any approach to understanding and analysing such processes which includes reference to ‘the numbers’ – the underlying demography of urbanization which is regarded as ‘statistical empiricism’. The first idea is reasonable enough – there is plenty of space in the broad church of urban studies for work on cities and their various manifestations, per se, and the nature of the political, social and economic processes which work their way through cities. The second idea has been eloquently argued and is not new, with its roots in Wirth’s work acknowledged. Were this accepted, however, one stands to miss a great deal about the nature of urban processes because shifts in the ‘numbers’ and nature of urban (and rural) populations tell you things about those processes that would otherwise be missed. This paper draws upon ideas and understandings about urbanism, urban places and urban processes developed over decades of engagement with these themes, as a geographer, in sub-Saharan Africa. However, and crucially, it also draws upon similarly longstanding engagement with rural places, rural livelihoods, smallholder and large-scale agricultural change and the political, social and economic processes which work their way through rural places. Self-evidently therefore the paper rejects the idea that there is no ‘rural’ and that such places are best termed as a ‘non-urban realm’ that can only be usefully understood in terms of its ‘connections to the heartlands of urban concentration’ (Brenner and Schmid 2014:750).

Three main arguments are put forward against the ideas embedded in planetary urbanism. The first derives from thinking historically about the origins of urbanism and its roots in the agricultural revolution 12,000 years ago and the associated creation of surpluses which allowed urban places to emerge. These were places of labour specialization. They still are. It is argued that ‘what people do’ cannot be ignored in relation to understanding urbanism or ‘the rural’. The second also derives from this historical perspective. Urban places have always been nodes in political and economic space and have channelled, transformed and added value to the surpluses derived from rural areas. But these processes are not ‘of the city’, they are being channelled ‘through the city’ in just the same way as they work their way ‘through the rural’. Livelihoods in *both* urban and rural areas in Africa, but also everywhere else, have long been made and unmade by globalised forces. But stronger links between different actors in a system do not deny their separate roles. The third argument derives from research on migration and material linkages between rural and urban areas in Africa which highlights their two-way nature and the fluctuating fortunes of both urban places and urban people – the power of ‘the urban’ is not always as great as presumed.

Response: Comparative Investigations of Planetary Urbanisation

Christian Schmid

Faculty of Architecture, ETH Zurich

In the last decades, urbanization has become a planetary phenomenon. Urban areas expand and interweave, and novel forms of urbanisation emerge. In this process, new urban configurations are constantly evolving. Therefore, an adequate

understanding of planetary urbanisation must derive its empirical and theoretical inspirations from the multitude of urban experiences across the various divides that shape our contemporary world. Urbanisation has to be considered an open process, determined as much by existing structures as well as by constant innovation and inventiveness.

This talk presents results of a comparative study of urbanisation processes in eight metropolitan regions across the world (Tokyo, Singapore, Hong Kong / Shenzhen, Kolkata, Istanbul, Lagos, Paris, Mexico City, and Los Angeles). According to the broad sample of cities brought together in this research, a specific methodological design is applied mainly based on qualitative methods and a specifically developed method of mapping. The main goal of this project is to develop new conceptual categories for better understanding the patterns and pathways of planetary urbanisation.

Tuesday 17 May

Session 2.1 - Globalisation and the production of urban difference

“The real modernity that is here”: understanding the role of digital visualisations in the production of a negotiated, cosmopolitan urban imaginary at Msheireb Downtown, Doha

Clare Melhuish

UCL Urban Laboratory



This paper discusses how the technical apparatus of transnational design processes has shaped the production of a large-scale urban development project in Doha, Qatar, which embodies the globalisation of urbanisation processes through urban design, while also providing a platform for exploration of a specific agenda around cultural identity and heritage in the regional context.

The paper draws on ethnographic research conducted in 2012 with architects, visualisers, and representatives of the client body, to examine how digital architectural visualisations (Computer Generated Images, or CGIs) were central not only to the marketing but also to the design and ultimately implementation of the Msheireb Downtown project. This included the scripting of urban life in the future development. Msheireb typifies in many ways ‘the new downtown [as] a redesign of the urban centre’ described by Rotenberg (2012:30 in the global context, which is materialised through a ‘transnational architectural production... characterized by the involvement of a wide spectrum of actors - architects, developers, investors, media

networks, and state bureaucrats', described by Ren (2011: 5). At the same time however, it demonstrates the mobilisation of regional (specifically national, Qatari) heritage as cultural capital across the Arab world (Serageldin 2008) and seeks in various ways to distance itself from western models of urbanisation, described as creating 'a void... in our architecture' (Sheikha Mosser bint Nasser 2006). In this sense it endorses Elsheshtawy's identification of a battle for sophistication and culture being waged within the Arab region which is framed less by competition with cities of the global north, and the authority of orientalisising western heritage experts (AlSayyad et al 2005), but rather by the displacement of the old regional centres of history, culture, and learning – Cairo, Beirut and Baghdad – and the rise of the new modern cities of the Gulf in competition with Singapore and Hong Kong, defining their own cultural agendas.

The paper looks at the production and circulation of the Msheireb CGIs across a transnational architectural and construction team and reveals how their digital characteristics allowed for the development of a negotiated, hybrid urban imaginary, within the context of a re-imaging and re-positioning of cities in a shifting global order. It suggests that CGIs enabled the co-production of a postcolonial urban aesthetic, disrupting the historical orientalist gaze on the Gulf region, in three ways. Firstly, they circulate through a global network of actors negotiating diverse forms of knowledge from different contexts; secondly, they are composed from a mix of inter-referenced cultural sources and indicators visualising hybrid identities; and thirdly, they evoke a particular urban atmosphere which is both place- and culture-specific, and cosmopolitan. The paper concludes by emphasising the importance of research into the technical and aesthetic production processes which generate new regional urban spaces in the context of global market-led urban development; and, by considering the circulation of CGIs between regional sites connected within a global network, contributes to the development of 'a more properly postcolonial studies' (Robinson 2011: 17).

New Urbanism's 'double movement'

Susan Moore

The Bartlett School of Planning, UCL

This paper outlines a new approach to theorizing and studying New Urbanism from an 'after' New Urbanism perspective. It focuses on the movement's production, variation, and stabilisation by drawing on literatures considering post-suburban governance and policy mobilities, assemblage thinking, and relational materialism to theorize how New Urbanism is produced in ways that are locally distinct but broadly recognisable as belonging to a common planning and development paradigm. First a critical departure is made from the established ways of thinking about the global spread of New Urbanism. It is argued that the implementation of NU now more than ever produces heterogeneous forms that are recognisable as part of the same movement. A 'double movement' is unpacked in order to capture the processes of divergence and convergence characterising what constitutes New Urbanism. On the one hand, the paper will show how NU produces divergent forms, so much so that it is now appropriate to speak of multiple New Urbanisms or even question the utility of the label. On the other hand, it will demonstrate that the implementation of

this principle-based movement still generates multiple types that converge to form an identifiable pattern of typification that appears across different geographical contexts. Examples from several regions will be drawn on to explain why these variations take place and how it is that the same type of variation appears in different locations. These case studies help illustrate how New Urbanism's double movement entails a localized process of development improvisation and translation that operates alongside trans-local processes of policy transfer and pursuits of best practice, which channel development into specific formations and patterns of conformity, and in doing so perpetuate the apparent mobility of the movement.

Eastern Promises: Shopping in the Socialist City

Nicholas Jewell

The Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL



This paper looks at the hybridization of the shopping mall as its international spread has mirrored the migration of global capital from the Western to Eastern hemisphere. Hybridization here consists of more than simply transplanting a pre-ordained building form into an alternate cultural context. Rather, the arrival of the shopping mall in these locales is accompanied by seemingly profound changes to its physical structure.

At the nub of this process of hybridization is a change of situation. If the historic evolution of the shopping mall was largely enacted in American suburbia its present resides in Asia's megacities – most notably the unprecedented urban expansion that has accompanied China's ascent to global pre-eminence. Where the shopping mall was once a byword for a stretched-out, car-dominated physical landscape, the

Asian hybrid responds to multi-scalar infrastructural pressures, urban connectivity and hyper-dense human habitation.

A critical exploration of the evolution behind this hybrid proposition forms the starting point of this discussion – from its arrival in Singapore as an object of quasi-metabolist experimentation; to its adoption in Hong Kong as an agent that manipulates the city section; to the synthesis of these propositions in mainland China where the shopping mall has become a keystone in the mixed-use expansion of its urban schema. Here, the seemingly incongruous form of the shopping mall has found curious common ground with the ‘open’ and ‘closed’ syntax of the historic Chinese city. This has enabled a process of soft assimilation and hybridisation that has simultaneously harnessed the urban experience as a means of entrenching a new ideology of consumption within a formerly Communist milieu. Its relevance and adaption to the unique urban syntax of this cultural context will be explored in parallel with its ideological and social dimensions.

The physical consequences of the shopping mall’s urbanism will be discussed by charting the evolution of the diagram led architectural principles behind its architectural form – from figure-ground to complex three-dimensional interactions – exploring the meaning of these diagrams as existential constructs that reify or contest aspects of its pseudo-urban experience. In turn this will ask a number of questions concerning the relevance of this urban form to emergent social and class structures in modern China.

Finally the re-import of the typology will be explored, looking at further degrees of hybridization that underpin the mixed-use regeneration of many Western cities today.

Session 2.2 - Global Circulations of Architecture in Africa

Beyond ‘the West’ – from Modernism to Multiple Modernities: Lessons from China and Africa

Edward Denison

The Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL

In the twenty-first century conventional theories associated with modernity, which assume modernisation’s equation with westernisation and an increasingly homogenised and globalised world founded broadly on western values, are seen as increasingly inconsistent with global experiences and challenges. This presentation proposes the notion of *multiple modernities* as a more effective means of evaluating and understanding encounters with modernity inside and outside ‘the west’. A multiple modernities approach not only questions the application of conventional theories of modernity or post-colonialism to many ‘non-western’ contexts, but also offers a more helpful way of comprehending the unique complexity of many encounters with architectural modernity, with far reaching implications across many disciplines, from architecture to cultural heritage.

The presentation will comprise two parts: the first will introduce the concept of multiple modernities using the example of early modern architecture in China (pre-1949) and the second will focus on the very different and distinct example of Asmara, the capital of Eritrea. Planned and built under the rule of fascist Italy in the first half of the twentieth century, Asmara was once Africa's most modern city. In January 2016, the city submitted its nomination to UNESCO for inscription on the World Heritage List. This presentation will conclude by raising questions about the role of modernist architecture as heritage and wider implications in an increasingly turbulent and globalised world.

Competing Solidarities in Post-Independence Ghana: Accra's International Trade Fair as an Urban Project

Lukasz Stanek

School of Environment, Education and Development, University of Manchester

The International Trade Fair in Accra was designed and constructed by Ghana National Construction Corporation (GNCC) following the commission of the government of Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's first president (1960–66), but it was completed in 1967, after the putsch which toppled Nkrumah the year before. In this talk, the work of the GNCC is reviewed as assembling resources from various networks, from local ones to competing networks of global solidarity and cooperation which intersected in 1960s Accra: American-based economic institutions, the British Commonwealth, socialist technical assistance, and the Non-Aligned Movement. Based on an ongoing research in public and private archives in Eastern Europe and in Ghana, this talk analyses the production of the Fair at various scales including, in particular, its understanding as an urban project within the postcolonial master-planning of Accra with new traffic infrastructure, leisure spaces, and urban regeneration projects, such as the scheme for the Labadi neighborhood. This talk develops my recently published paper "Architects from Socialist Countries in Ghana (1957-1967): Modern Architecture and Mondialisation," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 74, no. 4 (December 2015).

On the Kinaxixi Square in Luanda, Angola

Afonso Dias Ramos

UCL History of Art Department

Angola's capital city, Luanda, has lived through one of the most spectacular reconstructions in recent decades, as the country emerged as the world's fastest growing economy after forty years of war. Luanda has always been a privileged stage across which the metanarratives that shaped the last five hundred years have played out, from its colonial establishment as the first European city in southern Africa to its present neoliberal condition as the most expensive city on the planet. Nowhere have these historical tensions and changes been more expressively imprinted and contested than in one downtown square, Kinaxixi.

My paper discusses the urban transformations of Kinaxixi over the last decades, teasing out the ways in which this square eloquently indexed, through radical creations and destructions, the varied political arrangements (colonial, socialist, and capitalist) and attendant architectural languages (from tropical modernism to the global modern style). I will also



attempt to show that these urban makeovers on the ground not only hold a mirror to the global problems besetting big cities today (shrinking public spaces, social disparities, corporate takeovers) but also serve as an imaginary window through which novelists and visual artists have imagined modes of reclaiming the city and inhabiting the space differently, by rethinking the history of the world from the global South.

Session 2.3 - Thinking with/across Difference

Towards Comparing Urban Difference: Learning from Stockholm and Jerusalem

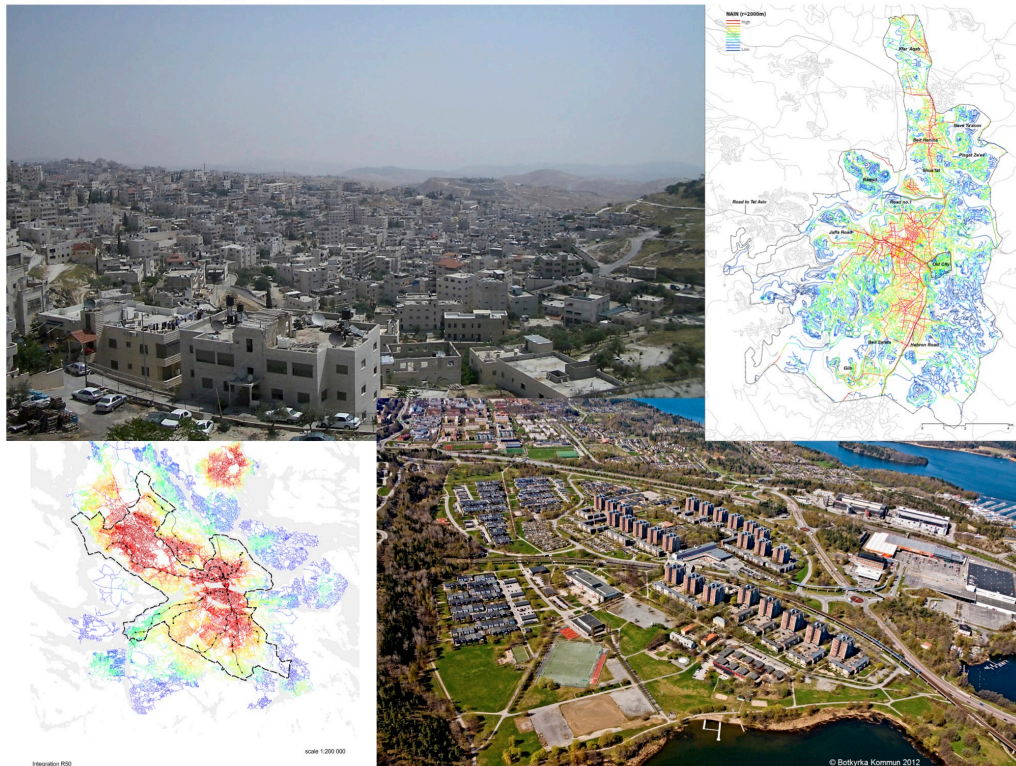
Jonathan Rock

The Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL

This paper explores how, in an era of growing neo-liberalization, ethno nationalism and international migration, cities are mixing and dividing in unpredicted and unordinary development patterns. In Jerusalem, despite an active ethno-national conflict, a newly integrated public transport network and lack of development in Arab areas is generating market led mixing of opposing ethno-national groups. In Stockholm, a differentiated public transport network and mass privatization of the housing market is generating ethnic polarization of the inner city separating it from its diverse minority peripheries.

This paper joins the active debate within urban geography and planning studies about the Global North's declining dominance in the production of urban theory and the need to move beyond methodological regionalism and incommensurability in urban studies research. (Robinson 2011; Parnell & Robinson 2012; Sheppard et al 2013; Watson 2013, 2014; Peck 2015). The proposition put forward is that through analyzing local complexities of spatial politics and planning within two defined case studies, we can establish a comparative investigation of urban difference (McFarlane and Robinson 2012).

Methodologically the paper engages with *three themes*, selected to illustrate contrastive patterns within the *planning politics nexus*; the relationship between planning and politics (Rokem & Allegra 2016). Examining, in both cities patterns of; (1) *housing and development*; (2) *mobility and transport*, and; (3) *local government and civil society*.



The research suggests rather than theoretically limiting our understanding of *contested urbanism* to a selected number of cases we need to re-think the category itself. To construct a more nuanced contrastive and relational examination of different social, spatial and political patterns in cities, currently considered as incommensurable cases. In other words, it is timely to start critically comparing across different *contested cities* to better adapt planning policy and practice to ethnic minorities and migrants in an ever more fractured unordinary urban present.

Radical Centres? The Political Morphology of Monumentality in Warsaw and Johannesburg

Michał Murawski

School of Slavonic and Eastern European Studies, UCL



This paper compares and contrasts two monumental architectural ensembles, both positioned at the peripheries of shifting global political-economic orders: Walter Sisulu Square of Dedication in Kliptown, Johannesburg, opened in 2005 by President Thabo Mbeki; and The Palace of Culture and Science, a Stalinist skyscraper 'gifted' to Warsaw by the Soviet Union in 1955.

Walter Sisulu Square of Dedication (WSSD) is a huge, public square at the heart of Kliptown, Soweto. All vernacular-tinted soft brutalism, it looks an awful lot like something Nehru's India or Kubitschek's Brazil might have built in the 1950s or early 1960s. But it was completed in 2005, opened by President Thabo Mbeki, on the site where – fifty years previously, on the 26th June 1955 – 3,000 delegates and 7,000 spectators had gathered to adopt the ten postulates of the Freedom Charter, the foundational manifesto of South Africa's anti-apartheid movement.

Less than a month following the signing of the Freedom Charter, on 22 July 1955, an opening ceremony took place in Warsaw for the Palace Culture and Science, an enormous Stalinist skyscraper 'gifted' by the Soviet Union to Poland. Now, Kliptown's Square (horizontal, modernist, concrete, restrained) and Warsaw's Palace (vertical, Stalinist, brick and stone, bombastic) have almost nothing to do

with each other, it would seem. One common feature of both, perhaps, is their anachronism – while WSSD’s mid-century high modernism was out-of-time in 2005, the Palace’s late-Stalinist grandiloquence was, conversely, something of an oddity in the mid-1950s, when most of the world – including much of the Eastern Bloc, and indeed of Warsaw – was busily embracing high modernism. But there are a few other significant shared features too. Both are monumental architectural and planning ensembles, created more or less a decade following the beginning of a period of political reconfiguration: the introduction (or imposition) and consolidation of state socialism in Poland; and the collapse of apartheid and the construction of a new political order in South Africa.

I juxtapose these events and these buildings, to draw attention to some questions, which lie at the core of this paper. If we hope to make a meaningful comparison – as scholars, artists, and others have attempted to do – between the Eastern European and South African transitions, ought we really be focusing exclusively on Eastern Europe’s 1989-1991 and South Africa’s 1994? Furthermore, what are the shapes, scales, geometries and aesthetics attached to certain ways of organising and thinking about politics and economics? Do authoritarianism and democracy, communism and capitalism – and the passage from one to the other – come ready-made with their own, inherent, formal or morphological characteristics and trajectories? A comparison between Kliptown’s WSSD and Warsaw’s Palace does not answer any of these questions definitively. But it provides the ground for a few reflections, complicating some commonly-held ways in which scholars – of politics, of architectural aesthetics, of urban planning – have tended to answer them so far.

The science in/of comparative gestures: interdisciplinary entanglements in Dubai, Sydney and Singapore

Michele Acuto

Department of Science, Technology, Engineering and Public Policy, UCL

Whose urban studies is ultimately responsible for the way we build (global) cities? Whilst theoretical and field advances in social scientific urban research have contributed important notions at the heart of present-day urban practice, the contemporary influence of more scientific takes in urban policy appears blatant. Discussions of big data or complex systems, amidst others, have penetrated the modes in which cities are built from the ground up. How can we grasp this complex science-policy condition? And, what theoretical strands are actually shaping the ‘urban’ on the ground, beyond narrowly construed ‘urban studies’?

Contemporary discussions in (social) urban studies point at the potential of “comparative gestures” (Robinson 2011) to unlock broader and experimental modes of theorizing cities beyond Global North, regionalist and meta-theoretical biases. Yet the ‘elsewheres’ available for urbanists to decentre urban research are not just physical spaces. On the contrary, urban studies narrowly construed, as we see it today, is embedded in a far wider realm of urban theorising that involves scholars in the arts, laws, and even more critically STEM, as well as in the often forgotten realm of urban practice. The paper takes cue from an investigation of the ways in which Dubai, Sydney and Singapore have been built as ‘global cities’ to

highlight the challenges and advantages emerging from a wider view of urban theory that takes engineers, scientists and other STEM scholars seriously, not just critically. In particular, the paper focuses on the practices of evidence production in comparative urban policy to respond to the current debate on the “nature of urban theory” (Scott and Storper 2016; Robinson and Roy 2016; Mould 2016) and the challenge of a “new science of cities” (Batty 2013). In discussing the politics of data in comparatively-framed urban policy, it highlights the interdisciplinary and material “entanglements” (Barad 2007) this broader view of urban studies unveils and the challenges to effective “co-production” (Theodore 2015) it presents.

Session 2.4 - Comparative Imaginations

Global urbanism in a world of fragments

Colin McFarlane

Department of Geography, Durham University

In this presentation I consider the question of ‘global urbanism’ in the context of an urban world of fragments. As the world becomes increasingly urban, for more and more people life in the city entails working with fragments. Coping with poverty and negotiating new possibilities are often questions of working with bits and pieces – infrastructures that were only ever splintered, housing that always seems to be under repair or improved bit-by-bit only to be set back again, or services that remain partially available only some of the time. The promise of formal and informal institutions put together by different configurations of residents, activists, and city officials is often one of sustaining an urbanism that is more than so many fragments. At the same time, the politics of urban poverty often becomes one of protecting what fragments do persist, or of forcing a new set of conditions that might undo a dependence on fragments. Reflecting on recent fieldwork in informal settlements in Mumbai, Kampala, Berlin and Cape Town, I argue that amongst the broad debates on understanding global urbanism, it is useful to examine how residents and activists live with, shape, and contest urban fragments. I end by reflecting on the broader status of the idea of the ‘fragment’ - and its relation to a set of other related terms – in relation to debates attempting to make sense of global urbanism, including as an entry point to thinking global urbanism comparatively.

Abstraction, Levels of Generality, and the ‘Ecological Dominance’ of the Urban

Jean-Paul Addie

UCL Department of Geography



This paper forwards two central arguments regarding how we conceptualize the universal and particular dimensions of global urbanization and urbanisms. First, drawing from Ollman's (2003) analysis of Marx's dialectical method, I argue contemporary debates surrounding urban theory and epistemology – including the emergent schism between a 'universalist' planetary urbanization and post-colonial urbanism – reflect, in large part, the mobilization of dissonant processes of abstraction operationalized at differing levels of analytic generality. As abstractions engender extensions and set boundaries, they bring into focus a particular level of generality to examine both the part and the system as a whole. The problem facing urban theory is not which assertions are true based on the level of generality, but which level of abstraction is appropriate for grappling with particular issues given that each establishes a range of possibilities for what can occur.

Second (and building from this), I suggest that paying attention to (and working across) multiple levels of generality differentiates our urban theorizations: (1) not only deepens our understanding of particular crystallized instantiations of generalized urban phenomena, but: (2) indicates that urbanity is in many regards only a partial element of the social relations and processes internalized in 'urban' socio-spatial formations. By adapting Jessop's (2000) work on global capitalism, I posit that urban processes may (or may not) realize 'ecological dominance' relative to particular places, spaces, and systems, but they do not 'dominate' other socio-spatial dynamics involved in their production. This forces us to consider the extent to which the *urban* developmental and structuring logics internalized within the

production, governance, or use of space may assert themselves over other social relations forged at alternative scales and levels of social reality.

Assessing the ecological dominance of the urban consequently presents a rejoinder to the argument that 'planetary urbanization' "charts the final frontier, the telos of any earthly spatial fix" (Merrifield 2013, 6). This is not to reject the notion that "even spaces that lie well beyond the traditional city cores and suburban peripheries... have become parts of the worldwide urban fabric" (Brenner and Schmid 2014, 163). But working in concert with more concrete levels of generality (while remaining sympathetic to the underlying Lefebvrian foundations of the process-oriented 'planetary urbanization' scholarship) provides a language and conceptual approach that introduces a more nuanced reading of the social and spatial extension of urban relations. In contrast to the totalizing, teleological discourse of the 'planetization of the urban', it points to the extension of urban processes and relations *and* asserts their necessary variations as they interact with systems that are not subsumed within a universalizing logic of urbanization. As a result, the process and extent to which socio-spatial relations are *urban(ized)* in different regions and specific cities opens potentially constructive avenues for future empirical and comparative investigation.

London as a theory destination: comparative urbanism in practice

Jennifer Robinson

UCL Department of Geography

As urban studies responds to shifting trends in global urbanisation, a much wider range of urban experience is informing conceptualizations of urban processes. This paper explores how innovations in the practice of comparative analysis can support such an expansion in the horizon of conceptualisation. An example of how to put this into practice by thinking across London and cities in Africa draws on the analysis of urban politics in South Africa and in other African contexts, which offers a rich repertoire of theoretical insight, stretching from governance and policy formulation in the post-apartheid era, to revolutionary urban social movements as well as a fine infrastructure of mobilisation, engagement, contestation, collaboration, evasion and invention which marks out a prosaic but significant arena of ongoing urban transformation. This body of literature confronts the relative pessimism of post-democratic and post-political analyses of urban governance and contestation in London with views from post-colonies, where democratisation and hopes of transformation have figured so strongly in shaping dynamic forms of emergent political association – but where these have also had to engage with spectral and peremptory forms of power. What can the post-colony bring to the analysis of post-democracy? This kind of experiment in comparative thinking takes seriously the potential of a strong post-colonial commitment to decentering theorisation, provoking a more global urban theory, and making London a destination for theory.

PUBLIC SESSION

Session 2.5 - Thinking (the urban) with the Global South

Afterlives of the South: Whatever happened to the black city?

AbdouMaliq Simone

Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity

What has happened to the “black city?” What has happened to those places of murky solidarities, arcane institutions, secret practices and compressed lives? From Mumbai to Chicago to Salvador to Jakarta, various vernaculars have designated the “black city” as something impenetrable but replete with an erotic captivation, as something full of squalor but unaccountable generativity—the inhabited uninhabitable. Increasingly the black city is being effaced or leveraged. Its specificity is disqualified, its dynamics characterized as fundamentally implosive. It is now made almost completely invisible, in expulsion to far peripheries, through dilution, or simply extinguished. If its empirical body, its “thingness” or demographics disappear, it may be necessary to return to the very mechanics of the inscription that designated this city as “black”, and perhaps find something in the sheer technicity of these mechanics to think how the blackness lives on. How it is operationalized in the inoperable, as something *detached* from concrete realization, “that need not respect the conventional boundaries of space and time” (Melissa Wright).

The urban, far from being a locus of redemption, is instead that through which the human may not be that of a self-reflecting individual subject but a force field of oscillating collective enunciations, affect, and *being-with* that circumvent all available terms of recognition. Black life, otherwise historically condemned to finitude, to not exceed anything but itself as an expendable other or as the epitome of calculated life—as property, as welfare cost, as correctional probability—promises the infinity of the *incomputable*.

For relational configurations constantly emerge that are incapable of conveying the predictability that otherwise synaptically connects detached stacks and socio-temporal layers in the city. While being conjured through unique elicitations, such sets of urban relations assert themselves more like inconsistent or even heterogeneous potentialities that never quite make it in the open. And, still, they do not

Emerging Chinese Cities: Implications for Global Urban Studies

Fulong Wu

The Bartlett School of Planning, UCL

Chinese cities are emerging in multiple senses: They have created new physical spaces to accommodate the fast urbanization of the country but have also developed new properties and characteristics along with urban transformation. The novelty created by emerging cities in China is not easily covered by Western urban theory. This article examines the dynamism of Chinese urban transformation, especially political economic changes vis-a-vis so-called neoliberalism, and spatial outcomes as diverse and contrasting spaces of formality and informality. Finally, this article speculates on implications for global urban studies.

A more cosmopolitan urban (global) field? Reflections based on bibliometric evidence

Miguel Kanai

Department of Geography, University of Sheffield

Research at the intersection of urban and global phenomena is undergoing a renewal, which we could characterize as a contested cosmopolitan turn in the making. In this presentation, I will revisit calls for a Southern turn and to move past narrow definitions of global city-enclaves in urban globalization research. This engagement with the ordinary city in the global South (and North) has been met with critiques regarding its lacking of universality in terms of theoretical purchase and at times a flagrant unworldliness, which also need to be considered. Yet, I will emphasize the issue of breadth and the need to look at urban research as a whole, in terms of all published works, rather than more circumscribed theoretical debates. In a recently-completed collaborative bibliometric study of urban-global publications over the past fifteen years, we found that whereas the field has expanded the realm of actually-existing cities brought into the analysis, and improved its coverage of urbanization in world regions beyond the North Atlantic basin, this shift is not yet as thorough as it may be implied by its proponents' writings. My presentation will conclude with a reflection on how critical bibliometric techniques could be mobilized further to promote the cosmopolitan turn by shining a light on cities still being left in the dark; the topics that animate urban global theorization; the sites nodal to its production and the directions and transformations of traveling urban constructs.

Discussant

Adriana Allen

The Bartlett Development Planning Unit, UCL