

Introduction to a Virtual Issue on Comparative Urbanism

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Abstract

Comparative urbanism has been a core feature of IJURR's editorial agenda since its founding. This virtual issue comprises 30 articles reflecting IJURR's contribution to comparative urbanism, reinforced by the growing postcolonial insistence on a more global scope for urban studies widely aired in this journal. This introductory article discusses the contemporary potential of comparative urbanism to contribute to a more global urban studies and considers some of the key insights for this project which can be gleaned from early contributions to the journal, including comparing across cities jointly shaped by the uneven development of the world-economy, thinking across socialist and capitalist cities, and the important role of world cities approaches in shaping the scope of urban comparisons. The articles in the section on the 'tactics and terms' of comparison reflect on the methodological, analytical and political challenges involved in building a more global urban studies. In the 'composing comparisons' section there are examples of classic and more recent variation-finding comparisons, and innovative analyses which consider variations amongst cities within and across regions, including comparisons which challenge or bypass Northern or Western reference points. More experimental comparative methods associated with tracing connections across cities are reflected in the third section, beginning with the seminal world cities analyses and building on more recent interest in policy mobilities. The final section draws together a series of articles which demonstrate the scope for building analyses from specific contexts for wider theoretical interrogation: 'launching and engaging concepts'. These articles reflect the best traditions of IJURR's editorial practices which have encouraged contributions from authors around the globe whose work disrupts and extends prominent analyses but who are also eager to initiate new theorizations through attending to the specificity of their case studies and situations. Here we see, for example, the concept of 'informality' emerging in studies of cities in Africa, to be put to work in the final contribution to the issue, in the USA.

In the archives of comparative urbanism: from IJURR's early years

This journal, IJURR, initiated and has sustained for almost four decades now a commitment to thinking cities across the globe, seeking to span a great range of urban processes, outcomes, forms and regional contexts. Preparing a virtual issue on Comparative Urbanism, an idea germinated in the long and stimulating discussions held during the journal's annual collective editorial board meetings, it has been easy to be inspired (again) by the geographical spread and quality of debate hosted by this journal. That its lifetime also spans my personal trajectory as a scholar, hosting many of the circulating theoretical debates and empirical evidence which helped me make sense of my own research in Port Elizabeth, Durban, Johannesburg and more recently in London,

provides it with a certain intimacy indicative of the community of critical international urban scholarship which it indexes. The first issue of *IJURR* which I read, in 1984, had a special issue on the transition to socialism (see Murray and Szelenyi, 1984, this virtual issue), foregrounding an important debate of the 1970s and 1980s: what was distinctive about those countries which had experienced a transition to actually existing socialism, how could this transformation be explained, could cities in these now socialist contexts be thought alongside those in actually existing capitalism? These detailed theory-driven debates from the other side of the world were gripping: I was hooked, on cities, theory, *IJURR* . . .

The first *IJURR* editors explained their inspiration for the journal, observing that:

Problems of urban and regional development are of growing visibility on a world scale, in rich and poor, socialist and capitalist countries alike. Often, as already mentioned, they directly derive from processes which operate on an international level. This journal will compare and contrast such problems as they occur in widely differing situations and social systems (*IJURR* editors, 1977: 1).

The enthusiasm to provide a venue for thinking across cities from a wide range of contexts, and for comparison, was realized through an extended network of contributors, helped by the journals association with the International Sociological Association and the Research Committee 21, which continues to this day, and which then as now drew together scholars from across the world whose work found their way into the pages of the journal (see Milicevic, 2001 for a history of these networks which shaped the early days of *IJURR*). The geographical spread of articles in *IJURR* was impressive: scholars working on and, significantly, in many different countries wrote articles, contributed to the Praxis section, or were drawn together in special issues, with early volumes reporting on urban developments in cities, countries and regions such as Vietnam (see Nhuân, 1984, this virtual issue), Cuba, Czechoslovakia, Mozambique, Brazil, France, USSR, Zambia, the Middle East and North Africa, Bangkok, West Africa, Mexico City, Japan, Eastern Europe, Nicaragua, the Pacific Rim, China and also South Africa (for example, Reintges, 1990). More generally, a strong interest in radical politics made the pages of the journal open to reviews and critiques of urban movements and policies in this wide array of contexts.

This inclusive publishing commitment was matched by a methodological enthusiasm for *thinking* across these different urban experiences: putting a comparative imagination to work in a clear and self-conscious way. In the first years, the journal hosted articles in both French and English. And in responding to the brief for a wide-ranging exploration of urban and regional processes, there was immediate concern for how ideas developed in one context might be helpful for thinking about others, as in this example:

Before we elaborate on these points, we want frankly to acknowledge that our speculations are based primarily on our knowledge of urban processes and structures in the United States. We have tried to distil from this experience the propositions that might form the basis for more intensive comparative examination of the nature of urban fiscal strains and the institutional arrangements which we think help to explain them. And, although we refer to empirical studies to illustrate our argument, our main object is to suggest a theoretical perspective which at this stage remains largely untested (Friedland *et al.*, 1977: 450).

In one of several important contributions over the next decades in which he drew attention to the great potential to think with South American theorizations in relation to cities and a variety of social processes, David Slater made an early and strong intervention in *IJURR* observing that:

although it is certainly the case that in the last few years the theoretical analysis of capitalist urbanization has progressed considerably . . . much of this progress has been rooted in the

experiences of the advanced capitalist economies. This does not mean that such research is only relevant for those economies, far from it, but the general direction of these studies does tend to leave open the question of the relations between urbanization and the varying historical contexts of capitalist accumulation and socio-political structure. Also, and expressed very generally, this inevitably poses the question of why, how and in what ways are the peripheral social formations different from the central or metropolitan social formations? (Slater, 1978: 27).

To the contemporary reader this and related articles reflect what might seem like relatively arcane Marxist debates about capitalism and imperialism (for example in this virtual issue see Murray and Szelenyi, 1984 and Storper, 1990). Slater seeks to explain the 'specificity of capitalist urbanization in peripheral societies' (1978: 43) eschewing a false dichotomy between external and internal processes. Through the case of Peru, he sees urbanization as shaped by changing investment patterns influenced by transformations in the forms of capitalism in the West, alliances between industrial and agricultural capital, changing conditions of production in agriculture leading to rapid urbanization, state investment and industrial, housing and health policies. By contrast, Gugler and Flanagan (1977) draw on a more policy-influenced analysis of urbanization in West Africa, in which excessive investment in cities and attractive wages drive urbanization to the detriment of agriculture and rural areas. Where Slater sees 'overurbanization' as mystifying the analysis of peripheral capitalism (he insists on placing all these countries within the same analytical time zone, and proposes that scholars should rather be surprised that urbanization rates in these countries are so low compared to others), Gugler and Flanagan rehabilitate the concept of overurbanization to focus their concerns regarding the consequent 'plight of the urban masses', dependent on spontaneous housing and irregular employment.

In an interesting contribution for reflection on comparative urban methods, Lubeck and Walton build on world systems analysis and the assumption that 'structural and social change must be understood in its totality and hence on a world scale' (1979: 3) to explore the differential incorporation of Mexico and Nigeria into the world system, and to compare class formation and urban processes in Monterrey and Kano. Moving beyond the 'controlled experiments' of variation-finding options to compare either most similar or most different systems, they propose a third logic, 'a more historical and systemic approach' exploring both similarities and differences in the context of a theoretically specified understanding, following Immanuel Wallerstein, of how the different cases are rooted in the 'historically specific totality which is the world capitalist economy' (*ibid.*: 6). In effect the comparison is of two processes of incorporation of semi-peripheral nations into the world economy, at different times and with different pre-existing indigenous elite formations. However, the shared experiences of dependent industrialization and the interventions of the centralized but dependent national state can, they argue, explain the rise of worker mobilization in each case, partly because of the relative inability of the state to secure a localized settlement with labour because of the international nature of capital, and because of the presence of a growing 'lumpen-proletariat' undercutting wages, consequent upon agrarian transformations.

To some extent scholarship today, engaging with the diversity of urban forms pressing on analysis, replays the manoeuvres and concerns of these early contributions. Theoretical innovation to address distinctive urbanization processes, say in the 'global South', and policy debates informed by insistent, expanding developmental need continue to punctuate wider shared vocabularies and common theoretical inheritances in urban studies to set intellectual agendas for scholars in different parts of the world. In IJURR recently Kuymulu (2013) and Brown (2013) explore theoretical and more policy-oriented engagements with the idea of 'right to the city' respectively; while Parnell and Pieterse (2010) call for a broader theoretical and practical engagement with a developmental urban agenda. Pieterse's (2013) IJURR lecture expands on the potential for Southern Urbanism, an approach also developed alongside Parnell and Watson in

other work (Parnell *et al.*, 2009). But such debates about different starting points and emphases for urban studies are now expressed in the context of a more encompassing concern with ‘globalization’, as opposed to the 1970s’ Marxist analyses of combined and uneven development, or world systems. This shift took place in the early 1980s when a very important intervention for urban studies drew attention to the shared but differentiated processes shaping ‘world cities’. This opened up opportunities for systematic comparative reflection across different urban experiences across the globe. New and relatively inclusive lines of analytical connection across different urban experiences as a result of globalization were forged by Friedmann and Wolff’s seminal article (in this virtual issue) in which they suggested that a hierarchical system of cities played an important role in coordinating the world economy. They argue, provocatively, that:

What makes this typology attractive is the assumption that cities situated in any of the three world regions will tend to have significant features in common. As the movement of particular countries through the three-level hierarchy suggests, these features do not in any sense determine economic and other outcomes. They do, however, point to conditions that significantly influence city growth and the quality of urban life (Friedmann and Wolff, 1982: 311).

World cities were to be found in core and semi-peripheral parts of the world and to be involved in coordinating and controlling the economic, political and ideological functions of the capitalist world-economy, although these roles were not simply functionally determined, but subject to contestation and political action. This initial and highly prescient analysis of world city economic activities included the unemployed; informal activities; government; industrial; tourism; personal, retail and property services; as well as business services. Highlighting social polarization as an important consequence of the world city structure, and considering the ‘third world’ aspect to many world cities with large immigration from poorer countries, the social and physical restructuring of these cities (as ‘urban fields’ or urbanized regions) and consequences for administration and political conflict were of concern. They complain that to that date traditional urban studies had not drawn case studies of individual cities into a wider, comprehensive analysis of the processes producing human settlements, and that while Marxist analyses of the city had criticized the class relations shaping urban production under capitalism, they had not made the links with the wider processes shaping the world-economy. They bring in a world systems perspective to explore how world cities are key points of spatial articulation of the world-economy. Methodologically they encourage a focus on the ‘systemic’ nature of urbanization (as part of the world-economy) which implies placing specific urbanization processes within this wider systemic context.

Since this intervention the articulation of global processes in shaping urbanization and urban outcomes has been essential to understanding any city (in this virtual issue, see Shatkin, 1998 and Fainstein, 1990). This has generated a new mode of comparative analysis, one which works with the connections amongst cities, the globalized conditions of production of the urban (see section 3 of this virtual issue, ‘Tracing Connections’). It was the changing nature of the global economy which inspired Friedmann and Wolff (1982), whose article foreshadowed shifts in production location and practice, and the move towards financialization and deepening inequalities, all of which are now taken for granted in analyses of the global economy, and as key features shaping urbanization. In this virtual issue, this is reflected in the article by Richard Child Hill (1989) comparing two sets of transnational automobile production systems orchestrated through Japan and the USA (which in a later article could be contrasted as Toyotaism and Fordism (Fujita and Hill, 1995). Michael Storper’s important intervention on regional industrial development in the ‘third world’ reflects the broader shifts in analysis which characterized this moment, driven by a theoretical shift away from the Marxist analysis

of neo-imperialism and third world development that shaped the contributions to IJURR through the 1980s, and by profound empirical changes in the organization of transnational production and the politics of development in many countries around the world. He observes that:

The replacement of the technological-institutional model of mass production by this as yet emergent regime of production flexibility introduces a set of new realities to which policies for industrialization, urbanization and regional economic development must be addressed, in the developed countries as well as in the third world. It demands a close re-evaluation of received concepts and assumptions. It is now, to a large degree, necessary to approach problems of development in a way that is both post-Fordist and postimperialist (Storper, 1990: 441).

Thus, even as the global and world cities debate set some geographical limits (providing resources to explore only a relatively small number of cities) and imposed analytical restrictions (focusing only on certain sectors of the urban economy) on the comparative potential of urban studies (Robinson, 2002), they also consolidated the possibility for thinking across different kinds of cities because of their participation in shared processes of globalization, and indeed provided strong grounds for placing different cities together in the same analytical category (Sassen, 1991; 1994; Taylor, 2004). Susan Fainstein's (1994) comparative study of London and New York, *The City Builders*, perhaps stretched this to the limit in setting processes of urban property development in each city as effectively helping to analyse the same phenomenon, the production of the global city (see her 1990 article in this virtual issue). Certainly her study investigated many aspects of urban development in the two cities which both *a priori* and on careful inspection repaid thinking together. Although, she insisted, there is no single model of the late twentieth-century city:

New York and London are special cases, but their atypicality makes them worth studying not because they present a model of all cities but because they exemplify a certain, and especially influential, class of city (1994: 19).

Importantly for methodological debates and critique which often assume an infinitely mobile researcher (as Peck and Theodore, 2012, note), Fainstein comments that for personal reasons it was not possible to incorporate Tokyo alongside these two cases but she astutely considers a 'mix of general and specific factors that create the London and New York of this moment in time' (1994: 19). Along the way there are many features of urban development (in fact not unique at all to global cities, including housing programmes, redevelopment plans, community mobilization) which demonstrate her (planner's) sensibility that there are 'areas of indeterminacy that can be seized locally within the overall capitalist economic structure' (ibid.: 11): outcomes are not inevitable. Indeed, Janet Abu-Lughod's (1999) extraordinarily rich comparison of New York, Chicago and Los Angeles establishes the highly differentiated outcomes of 'global cities', where the localized histories and political economies articulating wider global processes inspire her to conclude that there is no inevitable outcome of globalization. She proposes that it is helpful to her comparative exercise to consider cities within the same national context (although their differential positions and responses in relation to this nonetheless delivers great variety in outcomes), but then suggests, tantalizingly, that there would be significant interest in taking a wider scope: 'A replication of this study in other non-American global cities could yield even more precise answers to the questions posed here' (ibid.: 401) something which studies to follow clearly demonstrated (in this virtual issue see Shatkin, 1998; also for example, Machimura, 1992; Hill and Kim, 2000; McNeill *et al.*, 2005).

But as the analysis of global processes and conceptualizations of the relationship between local outcomes and the wider processes associated with globalization became more sophisticated, other comparative opportunities have been opened up by the world

cities analysis. Most notable is the possibility of using wider global networks to draw urban experiences together in what Olds (2001) calls a non-comparative comparison (discussing overlapping and shared processes without directly comparing territorial outcomes as such); or to compare the wider networks themselves. Thus Kris Olds' pathbreaking (2001) study explored Vancouver and Shanghai together through analysing the different networks which were drawn on in the 'megaprojects' of 1 Canada Water and Pudong Island. The comparative tactic here was novel to compare the different networks of a family firm of Hong Kong-based property developers investing in Vancouver and drawing on and forging close ties to generate trust and embedding localized commitments, and of a group of architects (he focuses on Richard Rogers) invited to contribute to a design exercise for Shanghai's mega-project developments, whose lack of engagement with local issues saw them produce proposals with little purchase on local histories and imaginations. The two cities are treated quite equally, and both are placed within the category of 'global city', caught up in the same design and investment circuits. In this virtual issue, Richard Child Hill's innovative comparison of two transnational production networks adopts a similar strategy, as does Ola Söderström's (2014) book which analyses two 'cities in relations' comparing the wider networks shaping Hanoi and Ougadougou, indicating the potential of this comparative strategy.

Marianne Morange, Fabrice Folio, Elisabeth Peyroux and Jeanne Vivet's (2012) comparison of the circulation of gated communities through Southern African towns of Windhoek, Maputo and Cape Town demonstrate how new comparative methods might be invented, tracing the multiplicity of connections amongst cities. They not only track the ways in which ideas are put on the move, and made to work in new contexts (in this virtual issue see Kevin Ward's, 2006, seminal study of policy transfer) but demonstrate clearly how the appropriation of these wider circulating ideas interweaves with many other local and translocal processes to shape the invention of distinctive (but apparently repeated) urban forms (see also Dick and Rimmer, 1998; Beal and Pinson, 2014). Also in this virtual issue Yves Sintomer, Carsten Herzberg and Anja Röcket (2008) document the ways in which a Brazilian innovation in participatory governance has circulated, in different forms, to European cities (Melo and Baiocchi, 2006, bring a wider theoretical critique to these participatory experiences). Their article highlights the potential to trace urban policy circulations as a way to explain differentiated, but repeated urban outcomes (see also Roy and Ong, 2011; Peck and Theodore, 2012).

The comparative urban problematic of the repeated urban form, wider global circulations and differentiated urban outcomes is one which currently frames the project of global urban studies. This could be in a Deleuzian idiom, considering the production of a 'global effect' as a result of repetitious outcomes (Jacobs, 2006; 2012) or, from a political economy perspective (Peck *et al.*, 2009; Brenner *et al.*, 2011) where the always hybridized urban outcomes (of neoliberalism, for example) analytically displace the possibility of an overarching and pre-determined global process (in IJURR see for example Tsukamoto, 2012). It is in this analytical context that arguments for an overhaul of the spatial analytics of contemporary urbanization are growing, notably in the Lefebvrian formulation of 'planetary urbanization', working through his hypothesis of the complete urbanization of society, which is also a response to the extending field of urbanization across the planet (in IJURR see Merrifield, 2013; Brenner and Schmid, 2014).

Experiments in urban comparison: this virtual issue

A range of renovated and experimental comparative methods which can work creatively with the complex spatialities of contemporary urbanization are needed. I explore this at length elsewhere (in this virtual issue, Robinson, 2011; see also 2014). In this virtual issue, I have signposted some possibly fruitful directions for reformatting comparative

methods and practice through the articles gathered together in four sections. Firstly, it is important to reconsider the terms on which different contexts are drawn together into comparisons: in the first section, ‘Tactics and Terms of Comparison’, Robinson (2011), Roy (2011) and Bunnell and Maringanti (2010) insist that all cities are starting points for theorizing. Inspired by earlier debates in comparative methods, especially, in this virtual issue, Chris Pickvance (1986) and Paul Kantor and Hank Savitch (2005), as well as by King’s (1989, this virtual issue) provocation that colonial cities (and indeed all cities) are world cities, a new wave of internationalization of urban studies, drawing on critical postcolonial studies has established the potential for cities everywhere to be drawn into wider theoretical conversations (Robinson, 2006; Roy, 2009; McFarlane, 2010, this virtual issue). As inherited theoretical statements about urbanization are exposed for their locatedness, the expectation is that urban studies will be informed by a great diversity of experiences, articulated by ‘new subjects of urban theory’ (Roy, 2011) and supported by a non-universalizing approach to the diverse processes of globalization which shape differentiated outcomes in cities around the world (Peck *et al.*, 2009; Ong, 2011; Simone, 2011). In their editorial statement for *IJURR*, Roger Keil and Jeremy Seekings, editors in the 2000s, recast the international and comparative vision of *IJURR* to reflect these shifts:

More fundamentally than this, internationalization is surely above all about acknowledging that theories derived from the experiences of North-West Europe and North America may not be universally applicable, and that those regions may be exceptional from a global perspective. Internationalization is thus a process of reconsidering and challenging theory on a range of levels . . . Most importantly, perhaps, *IJURR* seeks to encourage *comparative* analysis, through both encouraging explicitly comparative studies and facilitating conversations between scholars with knowledge of diverse settings. Comparison does not mean the abandonment of theory through descriptive juxtaposition. On the contrary, the objective of comparison should be theoretical revision (Seekings and Keil, 2009: vi–vii).

Within this project, Bunnell and Maringanti signpost the need to guard against ‘metrocentricity’ by inadvertently focusing on a selected range of larger, apparently exemplary urban centres. Importantly, and resonating with both postcolonial and feminist approaches, they call for a culture of theorization which embeds a modest, self-reflexive witness to the urban, open to revision and critique from elsewhere. Roy proposes to move beyond the postcolonial critique which draws on a subaltern subject (and a figuration of a subaltern urbanism) insisting on the wider generativity of emergent theoretical ideas from the global South, installing the possibility for new subjects of theory to propose insights from anywhere. In the section on Composing Comparisons, this potential is enacted in a number of ways. Firstly through classical comparative methods across a range of European cities (Andreotti *et al.*, 2013) and, in what has been the most fertile of comparative urban streams, urban regime analysis, Susan Clarke (1995) and Hank Savitch and Paul Kantor (1995) present exemplary variation finding comparisons.¹ Also included in this section is an article which creatively draws together personal and secondary research to explore the divergent and then convergent pathways of cities across South America in relation to municipal neoliberalism and municipal socialism by Benjamin Goldfrank and Andrew Schrank (2009). And also included here is a generative critique of a European-inspired concept, gentrification, from South America (Janoschka *et al.*, 2013), which calls for significant revisions to the term if it is to be put to work in this context (in *IJURR* see also Carpenter and Lees, 1995; and for

1 See Cheshire and Gordon (1996) for a wider consideration of European cities in relation to the US literature on urban regimes; and for a variety of alternative starting points on local political alliances see the rich literature emerging from studies of governance in Indian cities: Weinstein (2014) in Mumbai; Ghertner (2011) in Delhi; Benjamin (2008) and Goldman (2011) in Bangalore; and for some suggestive insights from Lagos, see Fourchard (2011).

a wider discussion, Lees, 2012). Very important for the post-postcolonial ambitions which Roy signposts are the kind of ‘South-South’ comparisons which by-pass the Euro-American heartlands of much earlier urban theory, and start with concepts and challenges arising in different contexts. Here, Mary Hancock and Smriti Srinivas’s (2008) excellent introduction to a special issue on religion and the urban in Asia and Africa signposts a very dynamic site of the production of the urban around the world (see also the innovative *Global Prayers* project, Becker *et al*, 2013). This analysis takes aim at some of the core theoretical assumptions guiding urban studies for over a century, concerning the form of the urban modern, and the relationship between urbanity and secularity.

This comparative tactic, decentering Euro-American theoretical starting points, comes to the fore in the final section of the virtual issue, ‘Launching and Engaging Concepts’. Starting from anywhere, then, concepts at large in the field of urban studies are available for thinking with (see Korff, 1986, for example, who explores power relations in Bangkok through the lens of Adorno), but also for disturbing, displacing and in fact replacing. In its commitment to theoretical revisability, a comparative imagination provides the opportunity to think with concepts and experiences from elsewhere, to explore their generativity and productivity, to critique and extend ideas, but also to recognize that they might stretch to breaking point new concepts might well be needed. There is a useful formulation in Deleuze’s (1994: 360) *Difference and Repetition* which in the conclusion offers some guidance on how concepts might be put to work in different situations. He observes the tension between ‘concepts without difference’ concepts which might travel and not change, being unable to accommodate different outcomes and, the consequence of this, the possibility of ‘difference without concepts’: those situations overlooked, or bypassed by theory, or cast as repositories of facts to support pre-existing ideas (in IJURR Scott and Storper, 2014, make this argument directly; for a stern critique of this, see Connell, 2007).

There is great potential with the new (postcolonial) wave of decentering urban studies to begin conceptualization anywhere, and an urgent need to propose innovative theorizations from precisely those contexts rendered off the map of urban theory. In this virtual issue we include Maliq Simone’s (2001) creative account of public space and settings as generative of associational life in highly informalized urban contexts (in IJURR on reconceptualizing urban public space in India, see Arabindoo, 2011). We can find inspiration for this comparative tactic of starting elsewhere in Paul Rabinow’s (1989) now classic postcolonial historical account of the colonial origins of French modern urban norms and forms in Morocco. And Kristien Geenen’s (2012) anthropological study of the Eastern Congo town of Butembo brings into view the influential contributions of writers such as Simone (2011) and Filip De Boeck (De Boeck and Plissart, 2004), as she patiently builds an analysis of how a national programme for eradicating a weed intermixed with a transnational sense of Butembo’s modernity (associated with an imagination of being a ‘new Brussels’ and wider Belgian colonial influences) to create a local cultural sense of being distinctively modern.

Starting from anywhere, any city, in the hope of generating insight and perhaps new concepts thus quickly draws in other places, both historically through the multiplicity of interconnections that tie cities together, and analytically as generative insights can be found in scholarship from other contexts. Here Fulong Wu’s (2004) insightful analysis of Chinese urbanization places it alongside other experiences of urban transformation in what will soon be a familiar decentering: starting in China, how might existing urban studies be relevant or helpful to conceptualizing the increasingly dynamic and influential forms of urbanism there (see also Chung, 2010). Beng Huat Chua’s (1991) excellent critique of the thesis of the depoliticizing effect of homeownership based on the Singapore model of ideological persuasion through their near universal housing programme can provide us with inspiration here. And more recently Cathy Yang Liu (2012) reminds us that prominent theorizations will perhaps need to face the ‘Shanghai’ test to consider their continuing generativity. The final article of the virtual issue by Seth

Schindler (2013) enacts for IJURR readers a reverse analytical move which will, I suspect, also become increasingly prominent: by putting conceptualizations of informality to work in the deindustrialized city of Flint, Michigan (USA) he performs a conscious methodological application of subaltern and comparative urbanism.

Conclusion

The analytical stage has been set for the proliferation of experimental comparative tactics. Thus comparative urbanism has moved from the variation-finding assumption that shared experiences across relatively similar cities would form the proper basis for analysis; through the Marxist and world-systems analyses which established shared relationships to global capitalist processes across a wider group of cities as the foundation for analysis. Comparative analysis today faces the challenge of working across a great diversity of urban contexts, which share and contribute to a multiplicity of interconnecting processes shaping urban outcomes. And following the planetary urbanization hypothesis, these outcomes will not only be territorially located in easily defined urban regions (Brenner and Schmid, 2014). Urban studies needs to devise tactics and practices equal to these analytical tasks. How can this proceed? Any comparative analysis for understanding the global diversity of the twenty-first century city will need to be able to trace the multiplicity of connections which exist amongst cities around the world, bring many different cities into closer conceptual proximity, and also address the demand that insights from cities beyond the West be launched as starting points for new theoretical conversations. New initiatives will seek to reinvent comparative urbanism to support theory-generation from any city, and indeed seek to confidently use a comparative imagination to stretch existing urban theories to their breaking point.

The articles in this virtual issue provide an invitation to be inspired by the history of comparative practices in urban studies as we face these challenges. This journey through the archives of comparative urbanism offers a glimpse into the effervescent creative impulses of scholars around the world who have energized IJURR's twin commitment to international and comparative urban research. In the last decade, the journal has attracted an explosion of interest with submissions from scholars working in and on a very wide array of cities around the world, bumper issues doubling output through 2013 and 2014, drawing on analyses of a huge variety of urban contexts. The reviewing and editorial process makes an important space of interlocution, ensuring that articles are drawn into some kind of wider conceptual debate, making analyses of different cities intelligible to those working on other contexts. But much is at play in this: which literatures or cases need to be referenced to stimulate these wider conversations? Should articles on Chinese planning refer to US-oriented debates on growth politics, for example; or is it appropriate for articles to make wildly generalizing claims while ignoring extant and widely available literature on large parts of the world? What of the strong language barriers which often keep writers ignorant of important debates in other contexts, even those led by others routinely publishing in the same journal? These concerns have been aired since the founding of the journal, and although they receded a little in the face of the stronger theoretical and Northern hegemony in the field evident through the 1990s, they have returned in full force after both postcolonial critiques and global urbanization trends have brought many urban contexts into sharper analytical focus for this community.

In this context, the articles in this virtual issue on Comparative Urbanism speak to the core editorial and intellectual agenda of IJURR (see Boudreau and Kaika, 2013: 3), and to the future of urban studies more generally. As the contemporary economic and geopolitical shift of resources and power redefines the global geography of investment in scholarly resources, and as urbanization trends displace the former heartlands of urban theory, urban studies will need to embrace a new generation of scholarship which arises in new centres of authority and expertise, and which is inspired by a very different

repertoire of cities and ideas. Of course this potentially entrains new hegemonic agendas and archetypal urbanities, which need to be guarded against. And this is certainly not to promote a new urban normativity based on surging new global hegemonies, or resurgent older urban models. But rather to inspire critique in the best traditions of IJURR. The overriding challenge for urban studies over the next decades will be to develop creative responses to this multiplication of sites of inspiration, authorizing concepts and new subjects of theorization. The options are not reducible to a specious choice between blandly universalizing narratives asserting one version of inherited conceptualization as relevant everywhere and a too-easily derided ‘cacophony’ of arguments where each case speaks only its own truth (although of course that would always also be multiple, as new subjects of theorizing are certainly not straightforwardly representative of the locations or case studies they speak from). To insist on new geographies of theory and to create new and politically effective insights into global urbanity in a scholarly community crosscut by generational, geographical and analytical diversity is to set in train the creation of new practices and cultures of theorizing. What will these be? The provocation of this virtual issue, and of the IJURR project more generally, is that a revitalized comparative imagination will strengthen and support these endeavours.

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