Special Issue: Comparative methods for global urban studies
Editor: Jennifer Robinson (Department of Geography, University College London)
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7716-4770

Introduction: Generating concepts of 'the urban' through comparative practice

Jennifer Robinson

Abstract. This Introduction to the special issue, "*Comparative methods for global urban studies*", outlines the basis for a reformatted comparative method inspired by the complex spatialities of the urban world. A range of tactics arise on both 'genetic' (based in connections and wider processes) and 'generative' (guided by researcher curiosity) grounds for comparison. The papers in the volume each bring forward innovative approaches to comparative methods which support wider conceptualisations of urban processes and urban experiences. The papers in this volume consider a wide range of urban contexts and collectively move beyond geopolitically imprecise propositions of "southern" urbanism to embrace the wider comparative agenda of thinking with both the diversity and the profound interconnectedness of the urban globally. The papers contribute to decentring urban studies, opening conceptualisation to a range of different contexts and differently positioned writers. They also speak to the analytical and methodological challenges posed by current trends in global urbanisation, as dispersed, fragmented and extending over vast territories. Thinking with the multiple elsewheres of any urban context invites a comparative imagination – this introduction draws together the creative ways in which authors in this volume have responded to this potential. Processes of conceptualisation both emerge from and more acutely reveal the spatiality and nature of the global urban: comparative method, then, also proposes a certain mode of theorisation of the urban.

Keywords: Comparative urbanism; comparative method; spatiality; conceptualisation; global urban studies

Introduction

The imperative to think the urban "with elsewhere" encapsulates the need to build new understandings of urbanisation, from anywhere, to decentre a field historically dominated by scholarship inspired by a limited range of (mostly northern) contexts (Robinson, 2006; Roy, 2009, Parnell, Pieterse and Watson, 2009). Such initiatives are also needed in order to better engage with the complex, networked and dispersed spatialities of the globalised, interdependent and extended urban territories which characterise contemporary urbanisation (Merrifield, 2013; Brenner and Schmid, 2015; Keil, 2017) and to bring to the fore issues of positionality and diversity (Peake, 2016; Buckley and Krauss, 2017). On this basis, Sheppard et al. (2015, p. 1948) motivate for a "conceptual revolution" in urban studies. A number of authors have called for a renewal of comparative method as a way to address these agendas (Ward, 2010; McFarlane, 2010; Robinson, 2011; Lancione and McFarlane, 2016; Schmid, 2018). Comparative practices can open the possibility for urban

scholars embedded in different contexts to start analyses anywhere and build wider insights across a diversity of urban experiences and urban territories.

Conventional comparative methods have however been identified as not well matched with the needs of global urban studies (Brenner, 2001; Robinson, 2011). The papers drawn together here therefore each advance elements of a reformatted comparative methods, proposing tactics able to address the challenges for global urban studies of twenty-first century urban processes and spatial formations. The papers demonstrate how a reformatted comparative practice can draw on the specific and emerging spatialities of the urban to inspire an expanded range of methodological tactics. They build from critiques of inherited comparative urban methods (Brenner, 2001; Robinson, 2011) and from statements indicating the general potential of a comparative imagination for expanding the scope of urban studies (Nijman, 2007; Ward, 2010; McFarlane, 2010; Peck, 2015; Robinson, 2016). Some authors are inspired by formulations of "relational" comparison which rely on a "connections" view of space (Hart, 2003; Massey 2005), or which expand on this to articulate a wider "conjunctural" analysis of the social and political formations, multiple scales and extended social processes in which urban life is enmeshed (Hart, 2018; Leitner, Peck and Sheppard, 2019; Leitner and Sheppard, 2020). The papers draw on a rich and varied spatial vocabulary to frame a range of innovative comparative tactics for urban studies, including thinking from the urban as specific or distinctive, and working with the prolific interconnections which produce urban territories. These tactics enable the authors to engage critically with some of urban studies' key concepts and pressing urban issues, from analyses of infrastructure to critiques of infrastructure-led and speculative developments, neoliberalisation, contemporary forms of colonial and settler power, housing crises, reworking histories of post-independence planning and architecture, drawing on anti-colonial resistant politics as an inspiration for contemporary urban politics, examining the complex politics of large-scale developments, and exploring the potential for progressive urban politics.

This introductory essay argues that a reformatted comparative urbanism is both a dynamic methodology with scope for innovative tactics specifically suited to global urban studies, and a distinctive mode of theorising global urbanisation – generating concepts of urban processes, and more broadly a theorisation of the urban (Robinson, 2022). Starting with the multiple spatialities of the urban - its interconnected multiplicity, its diversity and necessary distinctiveness - offers a rich field of creative grounds to forge insights of the urban through its many "elsewheres", starting with and inspired by (anyw)here. An open and experimental approach to a reformatted comparative urbanism results in a perspective on comparison as:

> "involving the broad practice of thinking cities/the urban through elsewhere (another case, a wider context, existing theoretical imaginations derived from other contexts, connections to other places), in order to better understand outcomes and to contribute to broader conceptualizations and conversations about (aspects of) the urban." (Robinson, 2016, p.3)

The papers in this volume move beyond geopolitically imprecise propositions of "southern" urbanism to embrace the wider comparative agenda of thinking with both the diversity and the profound interconnectedness of the urban globally, including a putative "global East"

(Stanek, this volume; Yiftachel, 2020; Sheppard et al., 2015; Lawhon and Trulove, 2019; Müller and Trubina, 2020). They each bring into focus different ways to go about rebuilding urban studies' key concepts in the midst of the contemporary urban world. Together the papers indicate a suite of experimental tactics for empirical investigation and conceptual reflection in urban studies in a broadly comparative idiom; they chart a substantial agenda for methodological innovation and demonstrate how comparative urbanism is yielding new insights in relation to a range of topics in urban studies. Collectively, then, the papers signpost the potential for innovative comparative methods to contribute to renewing and extending or inventing new conceptualisations related to key aspects of the politics and political economy of contemporary urbanisation: the politics of urban development, transnational circuits of planning and design, political contestations and mobilisations, processes of speculation, value capture and investment; the politics of infrastructure.

The papers gathered here draw on a wide range of urban contexts (Brazil, Colombia, Argentina, Canada, Martinique, Palestine-Israel, Chile, South, East and West Africa, Socialist Eastern Europe, UK, France, Indonesia, China, and India) with authors recently coming from or based in different regions (North America, UK, South America, South and East Asia, Middle East, South Africa), as well as scholars from across the career trajectory (PhD students, post-doctoral researchers, early career researchers, mid-career and established scholars). I am delighted that three (relatively) early career scholars whose own work on comparative urbanism has closely inspired my own (Brill, 2022; Ren, 2020; Wood, 2020) accepted our invitation to comment on the Special Issue. They offer a guide to some key themes that emerge from the papers and suggest some ways in which readers might approach the Special Issue as a whole – Frances Brill, whose own work has explored urban developers in Johannesburg and London, draws on the papers to probe what doing 'experimental' comparisons entails (Brill, 2018; this volume); Astrid Wood considers how tracing key elements of urbanisation processes opens to comparative analysis, grounded in her own research on bus rapid transit policy mobilities (Wood, 2021; this volume); and Julie Ren develops themes shaped by her own creative contribution to urban comparative method which proposes building comparative analyses on the basis of 'theoretical cases' across connected urban contexts (Ren, 2020; Ren, this volume). Reading these commentaries in advance of the papers will also offer a guide to their contents and the debates they engage with.

In the rest of this Introduction I outline the ways in which the spatiality and form of the urban provides grounds for experimental comparative tactics which can expand and invent concepts concerning key aspects of urban life and urbanisation processes. The contribution of each of the papers in this Special Issue to extending the repertoire of comparative practice and to expanding conceptualisations of urban processes is presented. More generally, wider propositions about the nature of "the urban" emerge in the process of reformatting comparative urban practice. In the conclusion I indicate how reformatting comparative urbanism contributes to theorising the urban, as such.

The shape of the urban: grounds for comparative practice

A range of comparative possibilities emerge in the practice of tracing the prolific interconnections amongst urban territories and working with the wider processes shaping

urbanisation and urban outcomes (Hart, 2003; Baker et al., 2016). I have suggested we call these, "genetic" grounds for comparison (Robinson, 2016; 2022). Two broad theoretical perspectives prominent in urban studies (materialities, political economy) yield different kinds of tactics. From the more materialities perspective, attending closely to connections and flows (such as policy mobilities, or financial circuits) can build up insights about urbanisation processes across different contexts (Lepawsky et al., 2014). Working across differentiated outcomes can inspire conceptual innovation - perhaps subtracting from existing analytical framings (Jacobs, 2012), or initiating looser processes of learning across interconnected cases (Saraiva, this volume). Tracing connections can help to identify cases for "comparative conversations" (Teo, this volume), or offer inspiration for more structured insights on a variety of urban processes associated with diverse urban outcomes (Goldfrank and Schrank, 2009; McFarlane et al., 2014; Montero and Baiocchi, this volume).

Sergio Montero and Gianpaolo Baiocchi (this volume) exemplify this comparative potential of tracing connections as they present an "*a posteriori*" comparative practice, developed once each had independently conducted research on the ways in which cities became circulating best practice models for particular policies. They focus on what is "left behind" in the appropriation or mobilisation of urban policy ideas. Their paper considers participatory budgeting and sustainable transport as circulating policy ideas which shaped governance practices in Porto Alegre and Bogotá respectively. Their comparative insights focus on the different transformations in governance and financing which had to be developed in each context to enable and underpin the policy innovations there. Thus, even as these policies were put on the move internationally from each city, important aspects of the transformation in each were "left behind". Comparing these helps to explain the fate of these policy innovations in the original contexts and beyond. In contrast, starting with two different urban contexts, Niranjana (this volume) is drawn to two interconnected cases (repeated instances) of water desalination plant investments in coastal cities (Chennai and London). As her comparison develops, she identifies differences in the transnational circulations of engineering expertise from/to the two contexts: while the expertise of Chennai's engineers remains locally grounded, that of London's technical experts achieves global significance in circuits of advice and policy development. These differential circuits are shaped by the contrasting location of the two cities in international standing still shaped by colonial inheritances. As Ola Söderström (2014) demonstrates, comparing relations (or connections) can offer insights into how the differential trajectories of urban contexts are shaped by the particular kinds of wider relations in which they are enmeshed.

Łukasz Stanek (this volume) argues for attending to different connections than those which are conventionally understood to constitute "globalisation" in a Western-centric urban studies literature. He draws on histories of processes of 'socialist worldmaking' in exchanges on the built environment and urban development between central and Eastern Europe and post-independence contexts in Africa, the Middle East and Asia. If globalisation is the backdrop to the "new" comparative urban studies, he argues, attending to the different possibilities embedded in socialist worldmaking offers scope for a critical engagement with comparative urbanism today. Welcomed as an alternative to colonial era links to Western Europe, emergent comparative urban practices developed amongst socialist advisors and African collaborators, opening up creative analyses across these two regions. He notes two types of comparative practice: "adaptive" (drawing on and adapting eastern European ideas

and practices) and “appropriative” comparisons. In the latter, Eastern European practitioners saw themselves as occupying a shared positionality with African and Asian interlocutors, “striving to overcome political subordination, economic exploitation and cultural devalorisation by external empires” (p. 0). For Stanek, these experiences throw a different perspective on the possibility of collaboratively produced knowledge across different contexts and positionalities within global urban studies. Edouard Glissant’s motivations for comparisons of equivalence across different contexts resonate here (Myers, 2020).

Circulations also yield urban outcomes, and thus territories to interrogate. Miguel Kanai and Seth Schindler (this volume) focus attention on emergent peri-urban territories associated with a “scramble for infrastructure” driven by global growth coalitions and conditioning practices of financing and development agencies. Tracing connections, they identify a global scale urbanisation process, as well as the new kinds of urban territories produced. These territories in turn provide new starting points for interrogating the nature of contemporary urbanisms through comparative experiments. They propose genetic grounds for comparison in which (a) the urbanisation process of Infrastructure Led Development (ILD) is explored across numerous cases and contexts, and (b) specific emergent territories/cases are identified by tracing the circuits of investment and policy which drive ILD. The urbanising territories identified then provide grounds for a more exploratory “generative” comparative analysis to build insights on the nature of urbanisation under conditions of ILD. Camila Saraiva (this volume) also explicates a creative methodology for combining analysis of both circuits and the cases which are entrained in them. Tracing and “disassembling” a policy circuit between Durban (eThekwini municipality) and São Paulo provides a way to analyse the circuit itself and, once disassembled, invites new grounds for comparing the two contexts which it encompassed. Her case study demonstrates how the object of comparison might shift in the course of analysis. Initially framing a comparative focus on different slum upgrading practices through a city to city learning process initiated between two municipalities, the comparison turns to interrogate how democratic political change may perversely negatively impact progressive urban policy initiatives, replacing bottom up and transformative interventions (*in situ* upgrading) with state-led formal housing policies in both contexts. Bringing two or more cases into perspective through tracing connections opens up the possibility of reflecting on one case through the other, and thickening interpretations of each (Akrich and Rabeharisoa, 2016). The South African trajectory from slum upgrading to formal housing development is well known; reflecting the experience of Durban back on the case of São Paulo casts new light on the history of housing policy there.

Political economy perspectives move us away from the geographical idiom of connections as trajectories or circulations, and from a methodological focus on the relatively thin tracing of specific empirical connections and flows of people, ideas and practices, such as in policy mobilities, or trajectories of investment and design. A relational imagination, particularly in inheritance from Marxist approaches, sees it as important to pay attention to so-called wider processes which are part of, produced by and in turn shape many different contexts. In this perspective, it is wide-ranging historical processes which help to draw different cases into comparative perspective. Thus, forms of systemic or structural social, political and economic formations spread extensively and in complex ways to reconfigure many inter-related contexts. Globalising processes and practices, such as markets, financialisation,

trade, colonial settlement, ideologies, institutions, or the means of violence and the organization of coercion are of concern (Tilly, 1984; Mann, 2012). Geographically extended systems provide 'natural experiments' within which cases might be causally located, say, Capitalism, or the trade in enslaved persons (Tilly, 1984; McMichael, 1990). Such wider networks of interaction or interdependent historical processes draw places into comparative reflection and are themselves identified and illuminated through comparative research.

There is overlap between the methodological potential of tracing the ways in which connections reveal repeated instances, and the insights to be gained from working with the "relational connections" between places, or cases, as well as with wider systems and extensive social formations. However, the questions which we are drawn to ask are somewhat different, concerned to illuminate and understand widespread, general and emergent systemic processes and their variation. From a political economy perspective, interrogating wider social processes through different cases might expand, enrich, or undermine existing analyses of these processes (Tilly, 1984; McMichael, 1990). Especially where numerous processes converge in "contexts", there is potential to identify alternative explanatory dimensions through comparative reflection (Hart, 2018). Rather than simply strengthening existing analyses or assuming cases feed back into shaping already identified processes (as in the extensive research on "variegated neoliberalisation"), comparative practices inspired by the rich fullness of urban contexts can help to assess claims to "family resemblance" across cases (Peck, 2013; Robinson, 2022; Robinson et al., this volume). The multiple (and diverse) elements entailed in each case might open out to define different social processes altogether than those which originally inspired the comparison (Wilson, 2004).

Niranjana's (this volume) contribution is exemplary here. She turns to the Deleuzian and feminist idea of "minor theory" (Katz, 1996) to suggest how unravelling the complexity of any urban place might invite attention to processes and theories which are hidden, or underemphasised. "Minor" themes might emerge as a researcher tracks back and forth between two or more contexts. Methodologically it is the desalination plants which initially drew her attention as repeated across both London and Chennai and thus as good grounds for comparative analysis. But it is the two different sets of complex regulatory assemblages, different water systems and different positioning in the post-colonial and globalising regimes of technical and policy knowledge which ground her comparison in this paper. They bring into view two contrasting systems of infrastructure governance: one secretive and hidden, framed through algorithms, automation and distanciations (London); the other embedded in close personal relationships, informal negotiations and institutional rivalries (Chennai). Both governance systems emerged through the long evolution of distinctive territorialised processes of regulation in each context. Each case throws light on the other, illuminating "minor" themes in the midst of the multiplicity of processes shaping any urban context. In this way, learning from "southern" contexts holds significant scope to expand insights in wealthier urban contexts, and also to dislodge entrenched theorisations dependent on dominant contexts, displacing "major" theory. In this case, analyses of water infrastructure which see southern contexts as characterised by fragmented infrastructures (compared to the integrated norm of northern systems) are replaced by an analysis through "fragments" in both contexts which reveals the hidden dimensions of governance in

London. “Minor” theory emerges as an important foundation for continuing post-colonial critiques of existing analyses, and for initiating new theorisations within the rubric of global urban studies.

Wider social formations encompassing a range of urban contexts open the possibility of comparative analyses which draw attention to how these wider formations are differently instantiated and produced across diverse situations. The differential territorialisation or scaling of capitalism or of colonial political economies, for example, as well as the contestations which map and destabilise these geographical formations, provide rich grounds for creative comparative experiments (Leitner, Sheppard and Peck, 2019; Leitner and Sheppard, 2020; this volume; Kipfer, this volume). In this volume, Stefan Kipfer takes his cue from Franz Fanon’s transnational and comparative political analysis undertaken in the interests of informing struggles for independence across Africa and the Caribbean to explore three settings of historical and contemporary anti-colonial politics. The lines of comparative analysis emerge, then, within and across the inter-related transnational formations of colonialism and resistance to colonial rule. The geographies of Fanon’s transnational strategic analysis inspire and invite comparative reflections across histories of urban development in Martinique, anti-colonial indigenous struggles in Canada, and mobilisation of anti-racist coalitions in contemporary France. Such a comparative analysis across inter-related sites supports “understanding colonial rule and its legacies (including its urban dimension, which Fanon understood under the larger rubric of colonial compartmentalisation) in relationally comparative ways: historically and geographically distinct but inter-linked through broader processes, strategies and intellectual practices” (p. 0, abstract). In the tracks of Fanon, then, the three cases deepen the potential for transnational analysis of contemporary anti-colonial and anti-racist politics, and provide insight into the wider systemic inheritances of colonial rule.

Helga Leitner and Eric Sheppard (this volume) frame their comparative analysis across two different areas (one central, one peripheral) within one urban context, the Jakarta (Jabotabek) metropolitan region in Indonesia (on intra-urban comparisons see also McFarlane et al., 2014). They adopt a “conjunctural” and relational approach, inspired by a Marxist political economy analysis which draws attention to both the vertical and lateral dimensions of a social formation: inter-related political economies stretching across regions or globally, as well as scalar hierarchies in which national, regional and global formations shape particular urban contexts (Leitner and Sheppard, 2020). For them, a conjunctural analysis invites a politically-motivated assessment of social, political and economic formations (Leitner, Sheppard and Peck, 2019; Grossberg, 2019). In their paper, across their two contexts both developers and residents produce conjuncturally specific interpretations of urban development and imaginations of possible futures which invite different but inter-related speculative orientations: speculating on formal developments in the inner city or periphery; speculating on housing and options for access to land across different parts of the urban region to secure livelihoods and residences. The two areas frame different possibilities for developers and residents in different parts of the city producing differentiated landscapes, but enmeshed within the wider context, political “moment” or conjuncture.

In addition to being drawn to frame comparisons on "genetic" grounds, tracing connections and relations to identify urbanisation processes and to bring different cases into comparative analysis, the shape and focus of comparison can also be inspired by researchers' curiosity as they seek to generate new concepts and interrogate inherited terms. These we might call, after Deleuze and Guattari (1994), "generative" grounds for comparison (Robinson, 2016). Here, who the researcher is matters. This calls for interrogation of how positionality inspires and shapes comparative practices and methodological innovations (Tuhawi-Smith, 2009). Even as framing comparisons and thinking with and across difference holds scope for the generation of new concepts, it takes place in a field of striated histories and contested power relations.

This is most evident in the provocative paper from Oded Haas (this volume) who explores two cases of housing production in Palestine/Israel. Both are ostensibly neoliberal developments, oriented to privately owned housing and part of neoliberal governance regimes. They could be read, then, as part of the wider processes of the neoliberalisation of urban development. However, looking from the two cases and from the perspective of Palestinian actors rather than from the a priori analysis of the wider process of neoliberalisation – seeing from "one new city at a time" – he places them within the wider social relations of colonised rule. The cases generate insights into the form of housing settlement promoted for Palestinians living in Israel, and into the nature of Palestinian resistance and strategies for navigating this urban landscape. "*Sumud*" resistance, ways of remaining on the land, take different forms: inhabiting the relative privilege of privately-owned houses to claim a personal lifestyle often denied to Palestinian citizens of Israel; and resisting a new development to claim the right to housing for existing residents. Positioning his analysis from the perspective of Palestinian citizens of Israel, Haas offers different insights on ostensibly neoliberal developments, and articulates an agenda for global urban studies which attends to a continuing contemporary politics of colonisation (see also Porter and Yiftachel, 2018).

Delving more specifically into the generation of concepts of the urban, possible tactics for comparison on generative grounds depend on how the shape of the urban is imagined. In this volume, authors explore openings from different starting points. Thinking conjuncturally (Leitner and Sheppard, this volume), starting with apparently contingent urban outcomes rather than wider processes (Haas, this volume; Montero and Baiocchi, this volume; Niranjana, this volume), or seeing the urban as "specific" or "diverse" (Teo, this volume; Robinson et al., this volume) frame different opportunities for comparative experiments. Differing approaches both draw certain contexts into comparative reflection, and set some limits to what makes for productive comparisons within that perspective. Thus, while some contexts might be considered as part of a certain political "conjuncture" or moment, others could be hidden from view and excluded from consideration. For example, exploring questions of fiscal discipline and austerity politics in the post-2008 financial crisis conjuncture invites productive comparisons across, say, US cities or US and European contexts. But the much longer duration of structural adjustment policies and fiscal austerity experienced in South America and Africa are occluded (Beswick et al., 2016; Peck, 2017; Sanchez Jimenez, 2017). Ideas of the radical contingency of social processes and the emergent nature of the urban move towards a view of the urban as distinctive – always

"individual", interrupting efforts at universal conceptualisations (Lefebvre, 2003; Sotiris, 2014; McFarlane, 2019).

One additional aspect of the urban is crucial for developing this insight further. This is that the urban is not a two-dimensional context on which wider social processes are played out, but a rich, inexhaustible and three-dimensional space which produces social relations and (urbanisation) processes (Lefebvre, 2003; Schmid, 2015). This assessment grounds the possibility of building concepts of the urban from specificity (Schmid et al., 2018). As specificity, from the perspective of the researcher, the urban is also diverse. Researchers can be drawn to develop comparisons to think with this diversity, for example on the basis of shared features, or to provoke exploratory reflections on difference. Such comparisons can expand the relevance of key concepts for global urban studies, attending to a diversity of forms of governance, urban actors, and urban processes beyond those which have conventionally informed urban theory (Shatkin, 2017). Shared features might include urbanisation processes or certain mechanisms, such as those associated with distinctively urban dynamics, for example, land use, agglomeration or territorial governance/regulation (Robinson, 2014; 2022; Schmid, 2015; Storper and Scott, 2016; Robinson et al., 2021; this volume). New concepts of the urban and urbanisation can emerge, then, through comparative experiments devised in response to urban diversity, including across divergent urban contexts (Teo, this volume; Sanchez Jimenez, 2017). In this mode of comparative analysis, concepts developed in specific urban contexts might speak to other urban contexts and find themselves launched into wider circulation; but they might not, and could retain a more restricted pertinence closer to the particular and heterogeneous experiences that informed them (Lancione and McFarlane, 2016; Jazeel, 2019). In either case, in composing comparisons across the rich diversity of the global urban, there is significant scope for conceptual innovation.

Shaun Teo (this volume) operationalises a "comparative conversation" across two divergent contexts, grounding his analysis on the shared feature of significant housing challenges facing authorities and residents in Shenzhen and London. Working back and forth across the two contexts, allowing research in each one to inform the other, he slowly arrives at a shared theoretical object (creating an emergent "theoretical case" – Ren, 2020): 'shared projects' and 'symbiotic collaborations' frame the ways in which state and non-state actors in both contexts worked together to generate small-scale or pilot projects which could demonstrate potential to scale up and address the wider housing crisis. While involving very different socio-political formations and actors, the comparative analysis permitted insights for each context which stretched interpretations characteristic of those locations and invented new terms which allow collaborative aspects of urban governance to come into view.

Jennifer Robinson, Fulong Wu, Phil Harrison, Zheng Wang, Alison Todes, Romain Dittgen and Katia Attuyer (this volume) find a different starting point for comparative analysis in the shared feature of large-scale urban developments. Found in many cities around the world, all large-scale developments face challenges of multi-jurisdictional governance, mobilising significant financing, and managing lengthy project cycles. Building a comparison based on three large-scale developments in three divergent contexts (Shanghai, Johannesburg and London), their paper highlights the diversity of governance, financing and political dynamics

across the three cases. Each case expands the potential for interpretation and analysis in the others. So, for example, whereas UK-based urban political analysis has been influenced by a post-politics which finds little scope for effective resistance to development plans (Swyngedouw, 2011), the South African case invites us to look again at how progressing large-scale developments requires embedding in diverse residents' interests, and navigating their engagement and mobilisation. This finding holds true across all three cases, as they note the significant role of very local state institutions in negotiating the relocation and compensation of residents in Shanghai. Their paper outlines similar learnings from one case to the other in relation to financing developments (in all three cases through the value uplift associated with the development, but differently achieved) and the complex inter-jurisdictional negotiations needed to put in place appropriate governance. Beginning with the territorialisations of large-scale developments produced through a multiplicity of actors, circuits and regulatory pathways (as opposed to the tracing of specific connections or circuits by Kanai and Schindler, this volume), their comparative method moves "beyond variegation" to propose starting points for comparative insights which open out from emergent urban territories and distinctive socio-spatial formations in different contexts.

The urban as specific, as distinctive, grounds a wealth of potential comparative experiments to expand the conceptual repertoire of global urban studies. Beyond thinking with connections and relations, then, comparative tactics which launch conceptualisation from distinctive urban territories are essential, and potentially most innovative. Robinson et al. (this volume), Niranjana (this volume) and Teo (this volume) propose methods which take forward the potential for open comparative experimentations based on understandings of urban outcomes as specific and distinctive, building conceptualisations from grounded empirical observations and cautious extension of insights across heterogeneous urban contexts (see also Lancione and McFarlane, 2016*;* Schmid et al., 2018).

Conclusion: Comparative practice - grounds for conceptualising the Urban?

Taken together, the special issue contributes to wider engagement with the status and potential of concepts of the urban. What restrictions or limits might there be on the reach of concepts of the urban? Are some concepts distinctive to some contexts, such as the global South, regions or localities? To what extent can concepts emergent in concrete urban situations operate as "universal" terms for wider understandings of urbanisation and the urban? On what basis might innovative concepts with reach beyond the single case be generated through comparative practice? These papers articulate a range of different ways beyond the impasse which has counterposed issues of positionality and diversity with wider analyses of urbanisation (Brenner and Schmid, 2015; Buckley and Strauss, 2017; Ruddick et al., 2018; Jazeel, 2019). Drawing on a range of theoretical traditions, the papers do not see conceptualisation as being at odds with the "inevitable specificity" of urban experiences (Schmid, 2015), or inconsistent with a careful recognition of positionality and "new subjects of theory" in urban studies (Roy, 2009; Sheppard et al., 2015). A comparative imagination – starting anywhere, thinking with elsewhere – can inspire an urban studies both more inclusive of a wider range of urban experiences, and grounded in specific urban outcomes (Robinson, 2022). This collection proposes a range of innovative comparative tactics to take forward this agenda.

Comparative tactics emerge, then, as much from the "invitations" of urban processes which bring different urban contexts into analytical proximity as from the formulation of comparative experiments motivated by the curiosity and analytical ambitions of researchers (tactics on "genetic" and "generative" grounds – after Robinson, 2016). The papers in this volume propose a range of innovative comparative tactics along these two broad lines. On the one hand, the papers explore methodologies which work with the spatialities of the urban. Here contributions consider comparative practices which emerge along the trajectories or in the midst of the spaces of urbanisation. On the other, the papers seek to actively build new insights through composing comparisons. Such experimental approaches to building analyses of urban processes rely on the creative tactics of researchers working across diverse urban experiences.

The papers collectively signpost the potential for comparative methods to draw different contexts into analytical conversation to enable conceptual renewal in substantive topics of urbanisation: *state agency* in urban development (Robinson et al., this volume; Teo, this volume); the diverse circuits of *planning and design* which connect and explain different urban outcomes (Stanek, this volume; Saraiva, this volume); anti-colonial and nationalist mobilisations shaping *urban politics* (Kipfer, this volume; Haas, this volume); the territorialisations of transnational processes shaping urban development (Kanai and Schindler, this volume; Montero and Baiocchi, this volume); theorisation of *urban development* building distinctive insights from different contexts (Leitner and Sheppard, this volume; Robinson et al., this volume); developing concepts through attending to *infrastructure* diversity in urban contexts across the global south and north (Niranjana, this volume).

In the course of exploring comparative tactics for global urban studies, a view of the urban as such also emerges (Robinson, 2022). Differentiated (through prolific interconnections and wider processes), diverse (variations in shared features and mechanisms of urban specificity), and distinctive (each urban outcome is necessarily 'individual'), the urban is emergent as a multiplicity. Coming to know the urban, then, generates a multiplicity of possible conceptualisations. Working with the spatialities of the urban, comparative method initiates a process of engagement with the urban world which opens to revisable theorisations, starting anywhere, alert to the production of urban outcomes in the midst of multiple elsewheres. Overall, the special issue indicates that at stake in the future of urban studies is not only the need for the methodological tools to enable conceptual renewal premised on the possibility for building new insights from a wider range of urban contexts, but the very possibility of conceptualisations of the urban in the midst of such a diverse and spatially complex urban world. The papers make a significant and original contribution, individually and collectively, to current pressing and lively debates concerning both method and theory in global urban studies.

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