

Building a southern perspective on urban planning using the comparative case method

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Situating the paper:

Urban planning as theory and practice

Normative / interventive / action-oriented thinking
....knowledge to action.

Planning theory in trouble?

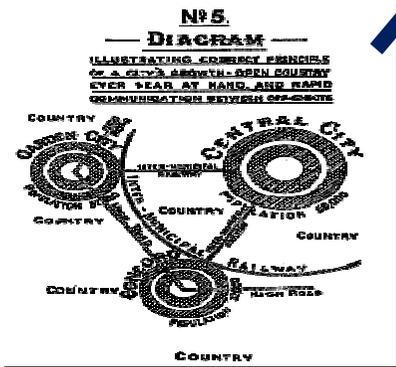
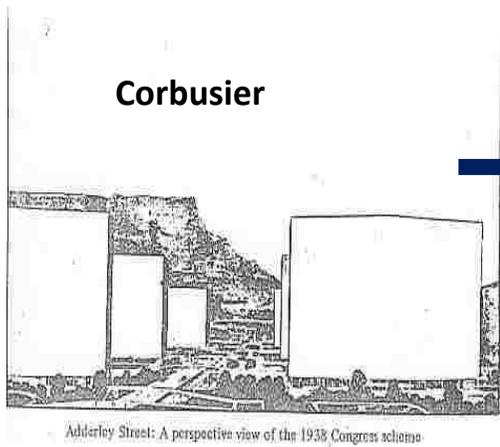
Dubious and unjustified generalization from the Euro-American territories to the rest of the globe.

Little to say about the most pressing planning problems of the 21st century: what is the role of planning (if any) in cities of the global South.

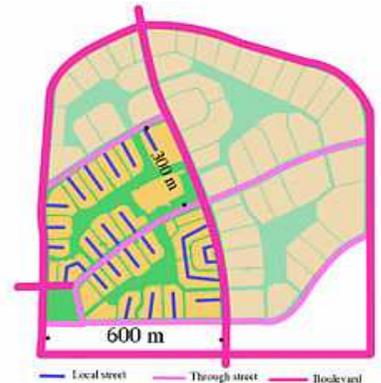
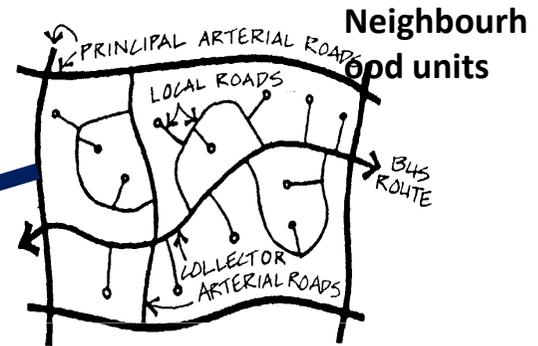
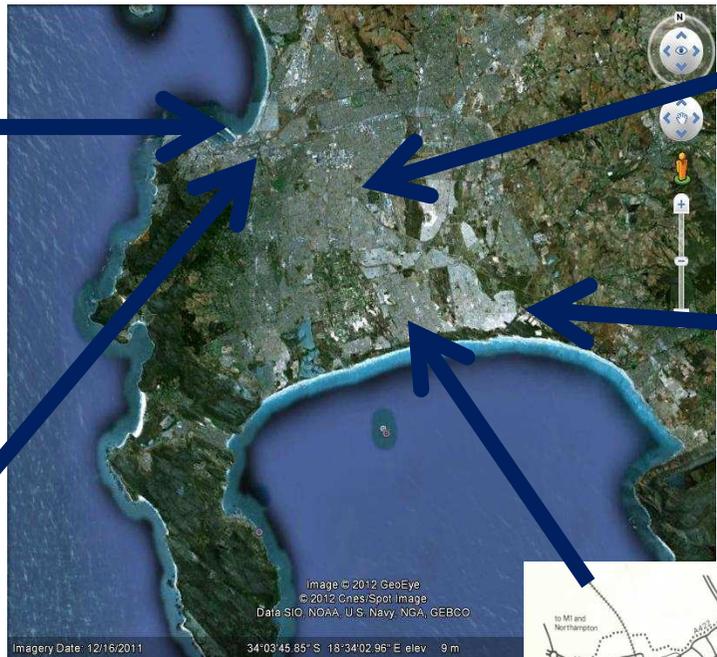
Can comparative research be useful here?

Comparative thinking in planning

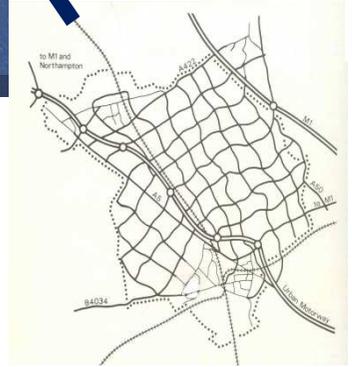
A long history of thinking geographically across the world – based on the assumption that models / solutions / ideas are ‘context-free’



Garden Cities



Radburn



Milton Keynes

Case research in planning

Only since 1980s as part of the 'practice movement' in planning: documenting cases of planning processes to inform action.

Focus on communication in planning – communicative and collaborative planning – influence of Habermas.

More recent Foucault – interest in governmentality

But all largely originating in global North and continuing to assume generalization is possible.

Recent interest in comparative research work

EU



UK

Encouraged by EU cohesion policies and funding.

Largely promoted by 'idea borrowing'.

Often ignoring context.

Das 20-40-50-Pentagon



***Phronetic* approach to planning research – comparison through learning (Flyvbjerg)**

Also Donald Schon – ‘reflection in action’ and ‘reflective transfer’.

‘Phronetic’ = practical judgement informed by values

Planning research to inform action, deep case-study analysis in specific contexts. Planning action informed by context-dependent judgement and situational ethics, not by universal theories or models, or ‘best practice’ solutions from other parts of the world.

Judgement and learning

Learning takes place through exposure to many cases (written or experienced) dealing with similar issues (in context) and a comparison, in the mind of the reader or learner, in relation to the issues at hand.

Judgement based on comparative experience and understanding, not the application of abstract and decontextualised rules.

Also see SDI's 'horizontal exchanges' – networks of mutual learning of slum-dwellers visiting sites to share knowledge and gains.



Comparative case research to shift the geopolitics of knowledge production: the AAPS-ACC workshop

How to counter the Northern dominance of urban planning knowledge production and circulation?

How to begin to build urban planning theory that speaks to the issues of cities in the global South?

How to develop comparative case research that is more directly 'useful' ie informs action, in Southern cities?

How to contribute to a global learning process but rooted in understanding the specificities of southern 'cityness'?



Brazil
India
Kenya
South Africa
Thailand

Raewyn Connell (2007) 'Southern Theory'

Calls for comparative case research cutting across Northern and Southern contexts to draw attention to global relationships of authority, exclusion and inclusion, hegemony and partnership. Taking a common issue (eg land, informality etc) across different contexts.

This avoids generalizing from the metropole and places the relationship between metropolis and periphery as a central explanatory element.

Finding common paradigmatic and epistemological grounds for a shared intellectual project – across global South contexts

Need a starting point in understanding different epistemic backgrounds and research cultures in different parts of the world. How to achieve a shared intellectual project.

Brazilians – theoretical departure, institutional pressure to publish in English language journals and situate work in these areas of theory.

Thailand – strong empirical focus and less concern with English language journals and thinking.

Inductive or deductive?

Start by deductively testing northern theories? Or alternatively generate hypotheses inductively in Southern regions?

Who is the audience for this work? Global audience? Local social movements and planners?

In defining analytical units, move beyond the 'most similar cities' approach to allow theory-building to be more open-ended – look for diversity to unsettle assumptions.

Indian team: Build up data on place-based meta-cases which can be used for different purposes (inductive and deductive) and for comparison.

Common themes and areas of comparison

Observatório Das Metr6poles (Brazil) – how to compare Brazilian cities with contextual differences but affected by similar global processes? Focus on historical-developmental trajectories of change has been useful.

Start with driving a common concept (eg social regime theory) across different cases? Or a common issue (eg land)?

Or take local planning problems as a starting point? Eg ‘why is it so difficult to reduce inequality in city x’?

Agreement that these are all interdisciplinary issues.

Comparative cases and teaching / learning

Phronesis and reflective learning – building up a body of case material following common formats and methodologies as a source of learning.

Teaching from cases to develop professionals with context-dependent knowledge and intellectual flexibility needed to understand dynamic urban processes.



Cities on water: Makoko (Lagos) and Venice