

Urban learning

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Learning as content and conception of social change

Model house built in Zambia using hydroform bricks and inter-locking soil blocks to reduce cement



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 SDI RITUALS
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 ROLE OF WOMAN
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 HOUSE MODELS
 WATER
 BROKERING
 ADVOCACY

SAVINGS

All Federations in the SDI network are collectives of slum-dweller women's savings schemes. Whenever a Federation enters a community, be it in Accra or Harare, this is the most basic and essential building block of the entire structure. When a women's savings collective in an area is strong, then the entire federation is strong.

is the operation of savings and credit groups. It does its form saving and credit groups in strategy. When a women's savings

Eco-san toilet block, Harare



- How to make a sense of ‘...an urbanism in motion, whereby what we come to term ‘knowledge’, ‘infrastructure’ and ‘resources’ are never simply ‘there’, but must be translated, distributed, coordinated, perceived and inhabited...’
 - Christine Hentschel, IJURR

Learning

- Often ‘black-boxed’ within accounts of urban production, experience and politics
 - Debates in planning theory, economic geography, organisational theory, but often overlooked or treated as ‘self-evident’
 - “All too often neglected in urban studies” (Ward, 2013)
- Yet important to working out strategies that work or don’t work, to forming political tactics, and to finding ways of negotiating with different groups (states, residents, institutions, etc)

Learning

- Occurs not just through formal, linear and cognitive processes, but through experiential immersion in urban space-times
- It is tactical, haptic, incremental, sometimes a sudden shift in perception, never simply individual and always relational – a distributed assemblage
- Examples in *Learning the city*
 - The translocal learning processes of Indian slum dwellers' organizations; the attempts of residents in São Paulo's *favelas* to build houses from all sorts of salvaged and re-assembled materials; the survival strategies of street children in Mumbai; the movement of urban planning strategies in East Berlin

A critical geography of urban learning

1. *Evaluating* urban knowledges that are presented to us as inevitable (e.g. planning/policy);
2. *Democratizing* learning processes, including different people in them (e.g. Porto Alegre);
3. *Proposing* alternative sets of urban knowledges, practices, imaginaries, namely a more equal, socially just, form of urbanism (e.g SDI and others)
4. *Unlearning*: of dominant organizations of knowledge production (e.g. postcolonial urban theory)

Learning the city

1. Translation

- Changing forms of knowledge through movement, practice and intermediaries

2. Coordination

- Functional systems that enable coping with complexity and which facilitate adaptive organisation

3. Dwelling

- Education of attention: learning as a way of seeing and inhabiting urban worlds and what they afford

Translation: e.g. self-build

- Makeshift toilet in Rafinagar, northeast Mumbai
 - Re-using materials
 - Cloth, timber, jute, iron sheets bought, found or salvaged from waste





Learning

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Coordinating responses

(i) short term response



Bringing water back from adjacent localities

Coordinating responses (ii) longer term response?

- *Right to pee* and coordinating knowledge and NGOs
 - 35 movements, recently completed survey of 109 toilet blocks across city
Campaigning to make it ‘free to pee’, as well as for sanitary provisions for women
 - Pressured municipality into constructing 500 public toilets



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Learning, dwelling, and calculation

- Money for food and water versus money to pay for toilets
- Time to join queues now or better to wait until later?
- Safe to use open space now or better to wait until friends can go later?
- Enough money and/or clean water to wash bodies, utensils, clothes and cope with an ill child?



- Urban learning offers one conceptual framework for understanding how people cope with and contest precarious conditions
- And for an urbanism that is made and ‘in motion’
 - A broader lens through which to conceptualise important parts of urban production, experience and contestation (planning, policy, play, ordinary urban life, etc)
 - EG: McCann and Ward *Mobile Urbanism*



Learning and governance

1. How does *learning itself* enter into particular forms of urban management?
 - EG: ‘creative city’ strategies , the ‘smart city’ agenda
2. Need to identify the logics, processes and geographies “where global regimes of capital and truth commandeer incremental urbanism and its everyday bricolage” (Ananya Roy)
 - Entrepreneurial logics are key here
 - Generalisation of self-organised micro-credit
 - Toilet blocks in Mumbai...



Learning contexts & unlearning

1. What sorts of learning becomes possible for different individuals and groups?
 - Typology of learning (Soderstrom)?
2. ‘What about all the moments and constellations when learning seems impossible, too painful or simply not worth trying?...How can a theory of learning encompass being stuck, immobile, untranslatable, or the drive to just keep on doing the same?’ (Christine Hentschel, 2013)
 - A dialectic of learning and unlearning?