

cities@manchester: urban studies for the twenty first century?

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Today's structure

- Introducing cities@manchester
- Some assumptions underpinning cities@manchester
- Some conceptual/theoretical issues
- Some methodological issues
- Group work/Reporting back

Introducing cities@manchester

- Twin focus:
- First, Manchester as a *university* of academic excellence, as a place to come and study and to do research on all kinds of urban processes and systems anywhere in the world, including across the global north and south. This puts the University of Manchester centre stage, and makes reference to the research done across the Faculty of Humanities. Here the University is understood as a learning laboratory. The primary audiences for this brand are other academics, potential graduate and undergraduate students and all sponsors of research;

- Second, Manchester as a *city region* in which to study all kinds of urban processes and systems. This puts the city of Manchester centre stage, and makes reference both to its unique past as the first industrial city and to the challenges (cultural, economic, environmental, political and social) it faces in the twenty first century. Here Manchester is understood as an urban laboratory, a place in which to try out, to test and to study transformation. The primary audiences for this brand are politicians, policymakers, practitioners, and private sector sponsors/partners, as well as academics, potential graduate and undergraduate students and public sector sponsors of research.

- Three co-directors, advisory board (drawing across all of the schools in the Faculty of Humanities)
- Website consisting of news, videos etc
- Researcher details with keyword search function
- Blog with regular contributions
- Academic/non-academic seminars/workshops
- Events organized on and off campus
- E.g. <http://www.cities.manchester.ac.uk/>

- *A world of cities: comparison across the disciplines ...*
- <http://www.cities.manchester.ac.uk/events/worldofcities/documents/WorldofCities.pdf>

Some assumptions underpinning cities@manchester)

- The world is primarily an urban place and so scholars, policy makers, and public debate needs to address the urbanity of human experience. Cities are often projected as sources of disorder and social problems, yet cities have always been sources of cultural creativity, transnational connection, diversity, conviviality, and motors of intellectual, economic, environmental and political transformation;
- Building on our work in both the global north and south, we speak to city making and its contradictions that include growing economic disparities, challenging environmental conditions, shifting political affiliations and borders, and globe spanning cosmopolitan cultures.

- ... towards an urban age/urban century?
- Urbanization without industrialization? (Davis, *Planet of Slums*)
- From an industrial age to an urban age? (Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*)
- **I'll begin with the following hypothesis.** Society has been completely urbanized. This hypothesis implies a definition: *An urban society* is a society that results from a process of complete urbanization. This urbanization is virtual today, but will become real in the future (Lefebvre 1970: 1)

- For the first time in history, more people live in cities than in the countryside
- By 2050, three quarters of us are expected to be urbanites
- Chicago, London, New York, Paris, Rome (and Manchester!) – slow burners
- Mumbai, Delhi, Karachi, Shanghai, São Paulo, Kinshasa - these are the fastest-growing cities in the world, most of them destined to have populations of more than 20 million by 2025

- According to Paquot (2011: 92):
- By 2030, planet Earth will have achieved its urban revolution. In other words, 8.5 billion inhabitants, of which about three billion are ‘poor’ people, will be ‘urbanised’ ... Asia will account for almost five billion individuals, predominantly in China and India. Africa will reach about billion and half, Latin America more than 700 million, North America, more than 360 million, Europe will border on 550 million, and the former Soviet Union, 340 million.

Global urbanisation: agglomerations with more than 1 million inhabitants

(source: www.citypopulation.de, 2008)



- This situation of *planetary urbanisation means, paradoxically, that even spaces that lie well* beyond the traditional city cores and suburban peripheries—from transoceanic shipping lanes, transcontinental highway and railway networks, and worldwide communications infrastructures to alpine and coastal tourist enclaves, “nature” parks, offshore financial centres, agro-industrial catchment zones and erstwhile “natural” spaces such as the world’s oceans, deserts, jungles, mountain ranges, tundra, and atmosphere—have become integral parts of the worldwide urban fabric (Brenner and Schmid 2012: 13)

- *Quantitative* – the growth in the number of ‘cities’ and the growth in the size in cities
- *Qualitative* – the reconfiguration of relations between cities and between cities and non-cities and of the relations within cities and non-cities
- Complete urbanization/planetary urbanization is about system wide transformation

- Approach the city as ‘both a place (a site or territory) and as a series of unbounded, relatively disconnected and dispersed, perhaps sprawling activities, made in and through many different kinds of networks stretching far beyond the physical extent of the city’ (Robinson 2005: 763)

Couple of my interests ...

Interest I

- What are the conceptual/theoretical consequences of thinking about cities in this way?
- How do we balance an understanding of cities/place as a territorial unit and as a point in a myriad of networks and webs that connect/dis-connect cities?

Interest II

- What are the methodological consequences of thinking about cities in this way?
- How do we think about 'the field' while also understanding cities/place as a territorial unit and as a point in a myriad of networks and webs connect/dis-connect cities?

Some conceptual/theoretical issues

- ‘Unbounded’ – in what sense?
- Critical social science scholarship on cities has examined the connections between urbanization and capitalism, and the place of cities within wider (longer?) networks of decision-making
- Examples include: Harvey’s (1982) conceptualization of the dialectic of fixity and mobility in capitalism and the implications of investment and disinvestment for urban built environments

- Massey's (1993) notion of a global sense of place in which specific places are understood to be open to and defined by situated combinations of flows of people, communications, responsibilities, etc. that extend far beyond specific locales;
- Taylor (2004) the world/global cities literature with its focus on certain cities as powerful nodes in the networked geographies of finance capital
- Nevertheless, still a tendency in urban studies to focus on (or privilege) what happens *within* cities rather than *between* them

- Relational comparative urban studies
- ... that recognizes both the territorial and the relational histories and geographies that are behind their production and (re)production. This means understanding ‘cities’ differently from the way they have been theorized in past comparative urban studies. Stressing interconnected trajectories – how different cities are implicated in each other’s past, present and future – moves us away from searching for similarities and differences between two mutually exclusive contexts and instead towards relational comparisons that uses different cities to pose questions of one another (Ward 2010: 483)

Table 1: ‘Traditional’ comparative and relational comparative foundations

	‘Traditional’ comparative urban studies		Relational comparative urban studies
Ontological foundations	City as bounded and given, self-identifiable; scale as given and non-contested		City as open and constituted in and through relations that stretch across space and that are territorialized in place; scale as constructed and politicized
Epistemological foundations	Marxists/Neo-Marxists	Neo-Marxists/Neo-Institutionalists	Post-colonialists/Neo-Marxists
Methodologies	Quantitative (secondary data, questionnaires)	Quantitative (secondary data)/Qualitative (semi-structured interviews)	Qualitative (Archives, Content Analysis, Discourse Analysis, Ethnography, Semi-structured interviews)
Formative period	1970s	1990s	2000s
Disciplinary homelands	Sociology, Human Geography	Political Science	Anthropology, Human Geography
Key authors	Janet Abu-Lughod, Manuel Castells, John Walton	Alan DiGaetano, Susan Fainstein, Paul Kantor, Hank Savitch, Jeffrey Sellers	Gillian Hart, Jennifer Robinson

Some methodological issues

- ‘Unbounded’ – in what sense?
- These conceptual/theoretical developments challenge us to re-think our methodologies
- In combination – assembling, moving, and relational comparison -- open up for question the where and the who that makes up ‘the field’
- At the core of anthropology and geography has been a notion of the field or site
- This is a clearly geographically delimited space in which research – ethnographies, participant observations or interviews most commonly – is undertaken

- In assembling, researching various bits of elsewhere that are drawn together
- In mobilities/mutations, researching a policy, its often multiple origins, its travels, its stops and starts, its translations and mutations etc.
- In relational comparisons, researching the exchanges, the inter-connections, the networks

Table 2: ‘Mobile methods’ in the study of the contemporary city

Objects of study	Methodologies & Methods
<p>Mobile people</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who mobilizes policy? • How does learning occur through face-to-face relationships? • How does learning occur through site visits, field trips, and policy tourism? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Techniques of following:</i> Traveling with or travelling after consultants, individual policy actors, or delegations to understand their purposes; tracing policy travels through documentary evidence. • <i>Relational situations:</i> Studying the ‘atmosphere’ of situations in which policy knowledge is shared; paying attention to the way stories about places and policies are told to delegations; exploring participants’ reflections on the utility of these communications; analyzing how stories about lessons learned are communicated ‘back home.’ • <i>Methods:</i> Ethnography, interviews, direct and participant observations, questionnaires, field notes.
<p>Mobile policies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are policies made mobile? • What calculative technologies and political contexts facilitate policy mobility? • What situations, ‘transit points,’ and ‘sites of persuasion’ do policies travel through? • How do policies mutate as they travel? • What are the consequences for the places through which the policies are moved? • How do mobile policies impact the character and politics of places? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Techniques of following:</i> Tracing and mapping the spread and mutation of policy models across space through documentary evidence; following policy models as one would follow policy actors (above); conducting oral histories of the spread of powerful ideas through policy communities or of their arrival in specific places. • <i>Relational situations:</i> Attending practitioner and trade conferences to explore how certain policies become ‘hot’ topics to be learned; identify the reasons organization choose specific places for conferences (reasons related to what can be learned from specific settings). • <i>Methods:</i> Ethnography, interviews, direct and participant observations, questionnaires, field notes, content analysis, analysis of citation reports, discourse analysis, oral histories, mapping knowledge domains and networks.
<p>Mobile places</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do places ‘move around,’ figuratively, in the context of policy-making? • How do places get ‘attached’ to policies to create mobile and persuasive models? • What mediators and media facilitate the circulation of place-branded policy models? • How are places changed by the reputations they gain in wider policy circles? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Techniques of following:</i> Tracing and mapping the origins and spread of stories about places/policies in the professional and popular media; working back to the exemplary places to understand the contexts in which the model developed and their view of it’s uptake elsewhere; working forward to where the model is adopted (in modified form) and the consequences of this adoption. • <i>Relational situations:</i> The ‘atmosphere’ of the social and physical situations in which the model is narrated by practitioners, emulators, and mediators (conference rooms, council chambers, site visits); understanding popular understanding of and reaction to ‘exemplary’ status in policy-making circles. • <i>Methods:</i> Ethnography, interviews, direct and participant observations, questionnaires, field notes, content analysis.

Thinking about cities/urbanization in this way raises some issues for all of us:

- In our own discipline/work, how should we define the ‘field’ of study?
- In our own work, what methods should we use to best generate insights/knowledge?
- In our own work, where should we conduct our fieldwork and with whom?

Group work/Reporting back

- In groups say a little about your research
- Does the city/urban figure in your discipline?
If so, in what ways?
- Will the city/the urban figure in your thesis? If so, in what ways?