

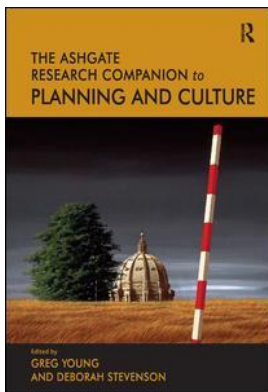
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Publisher: *Routledge*

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## **The Ashgate Research Companion to Planning and Culture**

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### **Planning Theory and Practice in a Global Context**

Publication details

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315613390.ch7>

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**Published online on: 30 Sep 2013**

**How to cite :-** Vanessa Watson. 30 Sep 2013, *Planning Theory and Practice in a Global Context* from: *The Ashgate Research Companion to Planning and Culture* Routledge

Accessed on: 08 Dec 2023

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315613390.ch7>

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# Planning Theory and Practice in a Global Context

Vanessa Watson

## Extract 1: On Kinshasa

*So that other city, that peripheral city that is the real city, has developed according to its own notion of what capital might mean, or what forms of accumulation might mean. In order to exist socially in a city like Kinshasa, expenditure, circulation and conspicuous consumption are far more important than accumulation or maximalization of profit. Accumulation requires a directionality, a teleology, a specific temporality which is not the temporality of the city today. The city, on the contrary, is a space of the sudden, the unforeseen, the unexpected and fleeting moment. In order to survive it, one has to know how to capture that moment. It is this practice of capture and seizure that determines life and survival in the city, which itself is often compared to the space of the forest. As such the city does not function according to a standard capitalist logic as we know it. That also means that the urbanscape is not so much shaped by the dynamics of modernity but rather that it is constantly infused with all kinds of notions and moralities that often have longstanding, rural roots. (De Boeck 2010: 36–7)*

## Extract 2: Essay Topics for Urban Planning Students

- What kinds of dwellings do you build for people who have a tendency to rape or be raped?
- What public leisure facilities should you design for people who are likely to be murdered?
- What are the civic participation processes most suitable for hijackers and drunks?
- What governance structures will best serve the interests of people addicted to consumer goods?

- What should the layout of commercial zones be in a city where most people are unemployed?
- How many paintings should each child be able to see on the way home from school? (Press 2010: 67)

## **Introduction**

The intention of the above quotes is to unsettle taken-for-granted assumptions about the production of space in urban environments and the role that urban planning plays in this. Most urban and planning theory is produced by authors writing in English or various European languages and through publishing companies for a market readership located in the global North. Although increasingly there are exceptions it is usually the case that these Northern authors assume that the socio-political and cultural characteristics with which they are familiar (primarily, variations of Western liberal democracy and relatively well resourced although unequal societies) are also true for most other parts of the world. Many such urban and planning theories and substantive ideas do not even specify the contextual assumptions upon which they are based, but simply put forward propositions and recommendations in a generalized manner as if they were true in all contexts. The central argument of this chapter is that the globe is characterized by deep economic, social and cultural divides and differences, and that assumptions underpinning many mainstream theories often do not hold outside their region of origin. This is not to suggest that all planning ideas, models or practices are only applicable in the place they were conceived. There are examples around the globe of situations where ideas have been successfully transferred across contexts; there are also far more examples of where this kind of transfer has been inappropriate, has taken place for the wrong reasons and has had disastrous consequences for those affected by it.

Three important dynamics shape planning ideas as they 'travel' from their regions of origin to other parts of an increasingly interconnected world: postcolonial relationships, the nature of state–society relations, and cultural variation and change. These factors interact with each other in complex and locally specific ways and influence how ideas from 'elsewhere' are received and appropriated into local contexts. Much hangs on the way in which 'culture' and 'difference' are interpreted. This chapter takes a position on culture which holds that it is dynamic, socially produced and shaped by power. It can be strategically mobilized, often in relation to processes of marginalization or domination.

The chapter begins with a discussion on culture and difference in relation to the production of space. It then considers why and how these factors are important in terms of shaping and moving planning ideas, drawing on examples. Finally it considers some methodological and conceptual ideas on how to move forward in a culture-rich world.

## Culture and Difference – a Position

Some ten years ago, Storper (2001) noted that the ‘cultural turn’ in the social sciences was already underway and political economy and structuralist approaches had been replaced with an agency-driven interest in postmodernism, post-colonialism and cultural politics. (See also Evans, Chapter 13, this volume.) The dislodging of the possibility of meta-narratives and universalist analyses and solutions was a welcome shift to many, but the cultural turn brought with it the problem that if all knowledge and practice is culturally determined then how is any comparison or judgement possible between or across different cultural groups. This is the problem of relativism. The cultural turn has been criticized – by Storper (2001) – for its misuse as a celebration of difference for its own good, for its depoliticizing tendencies and for its localism, and by Fraser (2000) for its privileging of recognition over redistribution. But the problem of relativism remains, particularly in planning. Given that planning is concerned with ethical judgement, frequently involving the allocation of resources or other advantages between places and groups, the question of how to balance one claim above another is a serious one (see Watson 2006).

Philosopher Alastair MacIntyre’s (1988) position on cultural relativism is a persuasive one. He conceives of different world-views which arise from different philosophical traditions. These traditions (of which liberalism is one) are fundamentally shaped by the time and place in which they emerged, by contingent circumstances, by particular societal concerns and disagreements of the time, and are articulated in terms of the particular language and culture of that order. Each of these traditions has distinctive conceptualizations of practical rationality and justice which are not necessarily compatible with each other. These world-views are also capable of mutating and hybridizing. Traditions change and evolve as a result of new situations which are encountered, or through contact with other communities and traditions (through migration or warfare and invasion, and as well through internet and TV), which means that ‘internal’ texts, beliefs or authorities are challenged (experience epistemological crises) and have to be reformulated. If more appropriate or attractive theoretical resources are to be found in another tradition, MacIntyre (1988) argues, they will be adopted and will come to be shared by traditions.

This dynamic and evolving notion of cultures is usefully complemented through the work of Jacobs and Fincher (1998: 2) who consider how identity is constituted and negotiated and the ways in which ‘empowerment, oppression, and exclusion work through regimes of difference’. Culture and identity are therefore not static or fixed but rather socially produced and multiply located. What this points to, they argue, is the multiplicity of differences that may cohere around any one person: ‘social distinctions are constituted in specific contexts through multiple and interpenetrating axes of difference ... and at any one time we may be fixed into or strategically mobilize different aspects of the array of differences through which our embodied selves are known’ (Jacobs and Fincher 1998: 9). Which aspect dominates is not haphazard – often the attribute to be emphasized is that which contributes most significantly to a subject’s marginalization or empowerment. Concepts of difference are thus inextricably linked to the issue of power. Jacobs and Fincher’s argument should not be taken to mean that nothing is real, that all aspects of identity are entirely contingent. Individual and group values, or world-views, (which are always present to some degree) ultimately

circumscribe the range of possible aspects of difference which any individual may be prepared to mobilize.

In many cities of the global South, where rapid urbanization in a context of severe levels of poverty and inequality, and weak states, produces highly fluid and contested social environments, culture and identity can be opportunistically foregrounded as bases for claims against the state or other social groupings.<sup>1</sup> In such contexts, identity/culture is often a product of hybridization, fusion and cultural innovation. It is frequently self-generated and self-constructed, sometimes with a renewed stress on ethnic identity or 'retribalization', sometimes intertwined with global identities (De Boeck 1996, Simone 2004). De Boeck's (2010) description of the production of urbanscapes in the context of Kinshasa (Extract 1, above) is relevant here. Arce and Long (2000) refer to a fusion of the institutions and practices of Western modernity with local ways of coping in a situation of rapid change and economic crisis. The modernizing efforts of planning and urban regeneration may be absorbed selectively by target communities and are mutated within local traditions and ways of doing things. Frequently a situation of 'conflicting rationalities' (Watson 2009, 2003) arises between incompatible world views or logics: the outcomes may be direct conflict and resistance, passive acceptance or the fusion and hybridization of practices referred to above.

MacIntyre's notion of hybridizing and evolving world views, and Jacobs and Fincher's idea of the opportunistic use of culture/identity, provide useful starting points for thinking about planning and culture in a global context. These ideas certainly challenge planning notions of 'the public good', universal ethics, standard models of the good city and the unquestioned transfer of 'best practice' solutions from one context to another. How, then, do planners decide what is good or bad, just or unjust, when dealing with competing world views, different cultures and identities, and conflicting rationalities? MacIntyre's (1988) view is that traditions are contextually informed and situated with their own ways of thinking about practical rationality and justice. One implication of this position is that no one tradition can assert its principles of practical rationality and justice as universal, or as being of a higher or better order than that contained in any other tradition. There is no 'neutral space' outside of traditions from which one can judge different and competing claims. Rational judgements can be made relative to the standards of a particular tradition, but they cannot be rational as such. One set of rationalities is as good as any other and we cannot pass judgement on those of a differing tradition (MacIntyre 1988: 352). It is this position that those within the liberal tradition find particularly hard to grasp, given that the central characteristic of liberalism has been an assumption of its own universality.

One alternative way to think about this problem is to take an inductive approach to arriving at a judgement in situations of competing world views or culture/identities. MacIntyre argues that the answer is to be found in understanding the ways in which traditions change over time and the possibility that shared values *can* emerge (from the inside out, rather than from a 'neutral' outside in). Hence 'finding the common ground is not subsequent to understanding, but a condition of it ...' (Donald Davidson, quoted

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<sup>1</sup> For example, in the region of Israel/Palestine, where conflict is fuelled both from the local and the global, Yiftachel and Yacobi (2003) describe 'ethnocratic cities' as territories where an exclusionary Israeli-Jewish identity has worked to essentialize and segregate Arabs and Jews.

in MacIntyre 1988: 3). In another slant to this idea, Iris Marion Young (2000) draws on the feminist epistemology of writers such as Donna Haraway (1991) and her conception of 'situated knowledges'. Young interprets this as 'a conception of objectivity as constructed from the partial and situated perspectives of differently positioned social actors' (Young 2000: 2). She suggests that the goal should be to arrive at judgements rather than principles or technical solutions. The concept of judgement adopted here is not one which assumes that it is possible to bring particular (situated) positions under a universal, or aims to construct a general standpoint outside and above particular views, but rather one which involves an 'enlargement of thought' that comes from considering the perspectives of many differently situated people.

The position on culture/identity taken here is that it is an expression of evolving and mutating world views, logics or rationalities which may in some respects be fundamentally different from each other, or in other respects may be the outcome of shared or intertwined understandings. This in turn has implications for how planners think about planning values and judgement on better or worse planning outcomes. It also recognizes that cultural positioning may be, and often is, tactical and strategic and can be closely linked to processes of exclusion or domination. The next section considers two examples of how planning interventions have engaged (negatively in both cases) with local contextual material and social specificities.

### **Post-colonialism, Globalization and Circulating Development Models**

The 'cultural turn' in the social sciences referred to by Storper (2001) entered planning discourse in the latter part of the twentieth century as well, building on the shift away from earlier rational technocratic approaches to planning (see Greed, Chapter 5 in this volume). At the same time increasing global interconnectedness and the use of the Internet ushered the rapid circulation<sup>2</sup> of 'best practice' planning ideas between very different parts of the world, but not necessarily a clear understanding of what cultural difference might mean. This section of the chapter will argue that earlier (modernist) assumptions of the hegemonic nature of Western democratic liberalism persisted alongside the post-modern cultural turn in planning, providing an intellectual frame which shaped and constrained much of mainstream planning thought. There is also a strong argument to suggest that the rise of the global neo-liberal order during this period (with the discovery of 'agency' and neo-liberalism's individualistic conception of society mutually reinforcing each other) opened the way for a commodification of culture in planning which several chapters in the volume illustrate well.

The two examples which follow illustrate how planning can take place with complete disregard for culture, inequality and difference. The first example is the planning of the city of Abuja, the new capital of Nigeria, but similar stories play themselves out in Latin America, the rest of Africa and now in most of the Middle and Far East. Here postcoloniality makes itself felt in subtle ways, expressed in an undervaluing of

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<sup>2</sup> The international transfer of planning ideas had of course been occurring for a very long time (see Healey and Upton 2010) but has been facilitated by more recent technologies of communication.

local histories, sense of place and environmental factors, a disregard for deep income inequalities, poverty and unemployment, as well as cultural practices, in an ongoing obeisance to Western urban modernism, and in the continuing power of globally circulating urban experts and 'best practice' ideas.

### *Abuja*

In 1975 Nigerian leaders revived an older, colonial, idea that a new capital city outside of Lagos was needed to unite the many different ethnic groups into one 'modern' nation within its colonially defined boundaries.<sup>3</sup> They hired Thomas Todd of the Philadelphia firm Wallace Roberts McHarg and Todd, and members of the International Congress of Modern Architecture (CIAM) such as Kenzo Tange and Doxiades. The particular concept promoted by these architects was 'monumental urban modernism' which found favour with Nigeria's emerging elites in a climate in which petro-dollars were fuelling a construction boom.

The original plan for Abuja drawn up by Todd was very similar to that of Washington DC, with Todd at the time also working on the Capitol Hill complex in Washington. Seemingly the fact that Nigeria was moving towards democracy at the time was justification for adopting ideas from Capitol Hill – as the epicentre of Western democracy. There was also strong influence from Le Corbusier's Chandigarh (India), dividing the city into sectors, districts and neighbourhoods (following the US neighbourhood unit idea) separated by a road hierarchy designed for a car-based movement system. The city was designed around functional zones, separating out residences, business, government and so on, controlled by land use zoning, with the monumental scale and layout of the central area designed to impress foreign visitors and government officials with vistas, axes and harmonious flows of space.<sup>4</sup> It appears that there was a strong belief amongst the architects that spatially copying physical symbols of democracy and 'enlightenment' from the United States to Nigeria would foster these political characteristics in Nigeria as well. This way of thinking has sometimes been referred to as spatial determinism.

The layout of the new town of Milton Keynes (UK) also had a marked influence on Abuja, through the transfer of professionals from the Milton Keynes Development Corporation to the Abuja project. Residential district designs are based on the Milton Keynes layout with a similar hierarchy of movement routes based on car travel, a concentration of facilities in the district's centre and provision for middle class housing. Scattered indigenous villages previously on the site were moved and their inhabitants incorporated into new satellite towns around Abuja. When asked if there had been a discussion about reflecting Nigerian architectural heritage in Abuja the answer was that the foreign professionals had been instructed (by the Nigerian government) to produce a modern twenty-first-century city of which all Nigerians could be proud.

The result of imposed urban modernism is a city which is decidedly at odds with the realities of life in urban Nigeria. Unemployment, poverty, slums and growing

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<sup>3</sup> The full story of the building of Abuja is in N. Elleh (2001). *Abuja: The single Most Ambitious Urban Design Project of the 20th Century*.

<sup>4</sup> Elleh (2001) describes how somewhat different ideas by Todd were later changed by Tange.

informality have all found their way into the city of Abuja. Attempts by the state to return Abuja to the vision of the Master Plan have been draconian. By 2006, 800,000 people had been evicted from land that was 'zoned for other purposes under the Master Plan', supposedly to achieve the beautification of the city, privatization and 'cleaning up' criminals (COHRE 2006). The demolitions included villages which had existed for decades (but were suddenly declared informal and illegal) and had solidly constructed houses and community facilities. Ancestral graves and landholdings were destroyed. Evictions were often accompanied by violence and destruction of private property as little warning was given of removals (COHRE 2008).

In other respects the modernist planned city fails to accommodate the needs of a largely poor population. Monofunctional land-use zoning prevents use of the home as an economic unit – an essential survival strategy under conditions of high unemployment. Street-trading, an integral part of most African cities and often the dominant income-generating activity, does not fit into the vision of a modern Western city and is strictly controlled. Planners and officials are determined that Abuja will remain faithful to the intentions of the original Master Plan and '... must be preserved from the processes of change, informality and complexity that dominate Lagos' (COHRE 2008: 76). Movement systems are designed to cater for a middle-class car-owning population as in cities such as Milton Keynes, not for poor and public transport dependent commuters. This is particularly serious for the newly declared 'squatters' (occupants of existing villages considered obstacles to the Master Plan) who faced removal to satellite towns such as Pegi located some 33 km away from Abuja.

Shatkin (2011: 79) draws attention to the different 'worlding' efforts of planners as they '... endeavor to reshape urban social, political, and cultural life and spatial relations to conform to an ideal of a globalized, cosmopolitan, economically integrated, and competitive city'. In the case of Abuja the worlding efforts of planners (and politicians) appear to remain focused on an imagined need to mimic the cities of older colonial masters rather than on global economic competitiveness, but the outcomes remain just as destructive for those who get in the way of this imperative. Shatkin (2011: 79–80) argues instead that planners should be concerned with '... *actually existing urbanisms*, that are rooted in alternative social dynamics (informality, violence, alternative cultural, and social visions, vote-bank politics), and that resist worlding practice'.

### *Metro Manila*

The second example illustrates a similar process of imposition to that which took place in Abuja, but in this case it was driven by a somewhat different coalition of actors. Shatkin (2008) draws on the case of Metro Manila to ask if there is a growing convergence between recent urban interventions in the burgeoning mega-cities of the global South and large cities in countries such as the United States, which are polarizing between sprawling suburbs of 'rampant consumerism' and blighted inner cities. Is there, therefore, a proliferating American urban model which will in future characterize global cities in all parts of the world?

Metro Manila is a city of some ten million people, which together with five surrounding provinces, produces some 50 per cent of the Philippines' annual GDP. Here globalization has supported the emergence of a small but powerful elite made up of a professional and merchant class, along with foreign investors and ethnic Chinese



business families. Interestingly, a significant part of the new demand for urban space comes from Filipino workers abroad who remit large sums annually to their home city. Urban space is also in demand from poorer workers and recent arrivals in the city from rural Philippines: occupying older buildings and informal settlements, they consistently pose a challenge and a threat, for private developers and their government partners, to what Shatkin (2008) calls the 'public city'.

The privatization of urban planning and development (as a new model of urban governance) has taken an extensive and all-encompassing form in Metro Manila that goes well beyond individual shopping mall and gated village developments. Here it has taken the form of private investment in cross-city transport schemes the purpose of which is to unlock the development potential of parcels of land serviced by the new movement infrastructure. In Metro Manila and other large cities of the East, these new developments are massive: Shatkin refers to projected populations of 750,000 to a million. Moreover they are scattered across the urban region and do not necessarily take on the 'edge city' form found in many US cities. These new systems of transport and residential/commercial development are overlaid onto the existing congested and decayed urban form but are detached from it, creating entirely separate pathways of circulation and land use. Shatkin (2008) refers to this as 'bypass-implant urbanism'. These schemes attract large government subsidies and this in turn drains public finance available for public space or to address the needs of poorer communities. The consequence is the steady decline of the existing older city, as well as the threatened and actual removal of communities who find themselves in the way of the new development projects and transit routes.

Both Abuja and Metro Manila demonstrate a process of foreign (but particularly US) adoption of urban forms that, firstly, is not particularly new (in Abuja it was evident in the 1970s) and secondly, is driven as much by local actors as it is by Western experts and professionals. However, there are also broader structural factors – post-colonial relationships in the case of Abuja and globalization in the case of Metro Manila – which interact with and shape the imperatives of local actors. Shatkin (2008) questions what may be a simplistic interpretation of Philippines' new urban developments as purely a copying of an American model of urbanism and argues that instead influential local actors (in this case primarily property developers and their clients) have sought to selectively adapt international models of planning and design to the context of Southeast Asian urbanization. This echoes MacIntyre's (1988) concept of cultural change as mutating world views shaped by shared or intertwined understandings. It is significant however that the sharing appears to be primarily in one direction, from West to East, and there is little evidence of American cities adopting urban forms from the East. It is also significant that what is often referred to as international is in fact highly parochial: it is the urban forms demanded by the middle and wealthy classes in the United States which are desired elsewhere, even if they are subsequently adapted to local conditions. The power relations which underlie post-colonialism and globalization, which extend in subtle ways to influence taste and preferences, and which insidiously reinforce older global relationships of domination and obeisance, cannot be ignored.

Both Abuja and Metro Manila also show how the adoption and adaption of Western urban models impacts on the lives of the poorer and marginalized groups. In Abuja it was the previously existing villagers that lost their livelihoods and their heritage as they were moved from long-established settlements to newly designed 'satellite towns',

as well as more recent construction workers who were shifted out of the city once their labour was no longer required. In Metro Manila, communities in the way of privatized developments have faced forced removal and older areas generally have fallen into decline as government attention and resources are pulled into the wake of developer-driven projects. One way of interpreting this is to see a newer metropolitan culture and lifestyle replacing an older indigenous way of life – an inevitable if unfortunate cost of progress and development. But the longer term impacts may be far-reaching. Urban processes of these kinds contribute to, and materialize, the growing income inequalities which are part and parcel of a globalized economy. The income gap between rich and poor finds direct expression in the glitzy shopping malls, office blocks and leisure centres – some of which express a crude form of heritage appropriation – in juxtaposition with shacks and decayed inner city buildings. Income inequalities and poverty are exacerbated by skewed allocations of public resources which further undermine the viability of working-class areas and the life-prospects of their inhabitants. Highly unequal cities, as many parts of Latin America have shown, can quickly become violent and crime-ridden cities (Holston 2009) controlled by drug-related and criminal gangs. Ultimately, in aspiring to the urban models of Los Angeles or Las Vegas, cities such as Abuja and Metro Manila may find themselves closer to Rio or São Paulo.

What then of MacIntyre's (1988) assertion that one set of rationalities is as good as another and there is no 'neutral space' from which one can pass judgement? In both Abuja and Metro Manila the form of urban modernization as American appropriation has been instigated by local actors and perhaps they could have equally chosen to develop cities in ways that respect and extend local histories, identities and built culture. The transplant of Washington and Milton Keynes to Abuja and 'bypass-implant urbanism' in Metro Manila is no more than an expression of locally mutating culture borrowing from other traditions and cannot be judged negatively by anyone located within other and different traditions. At one level this may be correct, but at another level urban research and precedent tell us that this path of urban modernization is likely to lead to worsening inequality and marginalization of poorer urban communities, and ultimately to violence, crime and socio-political breakdown. The urban elite may be able to isolate themselves in gated villages and segregated transit systems for a while but these artificial arrangements are not sustainable, at least politically, as 2011 events in the Middle East have shown. From any perspective this cannot be a good thing.

Young's (2000) notion of reaching judgement, not through constructing a general standpoint outside and above particular views, but rather as an 'enlargement of thought' from the perspectives of many differently situated people, may be one way to deal with this conundrum. The starting point, however, would be to recognize that a general or universal standpoint on the nature of urban modernization does already exist: it is the notion (or mind-set) that the American (perhaps more broadly Anglo-American) urban model is globally the best on offer to adopt and adapt to meet the tastes of emerging urban elites and politicians seeking national and international status. If urban and planning research has any role to play, then it is in starting to shift this taken-for-granted assumption. Thereafter, there may be room for the emergence of more situated, diverse and representative views of how rapidly growing cities should be planned and managed to meet the requirements of all its citizens, as well as responding to other current imperatives absent from American urbanism, such as climate change and resource depletion. The last section turns briefly to a methodological approach.

## Challenging Urban Hegemonies

There is a growing body of work, particularly in the urban field, which argues for a challenge to the hegemony of Northern epistemologies and suggests research methodologies to take forward this agenda. The inspiration for some of this thinking comes from social theorist Raewyn Connell (2007) who argues that the hegemony of Northern knowledge (in sociology) obliterates knowledge from all other sources. (See also Pieterse, Chapter 14, this volume.) It relegates ideas which do originate in the South to 'traditions' of ethnographic interest and will not allow them to be considered alongside 'metropolitan' knowledge.

Connell (2007) calls for 'Southern theory' which draws attention to relationships (of authority, exclusion and inclusion, hegemony, partnership and so on) between global North and South rather than to sharply bounded categories of states or societies. To counter the universalization of ideas which have originated in just one part of the world, she argues for a deeper understanding of the specific contexts from which generalization grows, and for theory which will '... illuminate a situation in its concreteness' (Connell 2007: 207). She also argues for a 'multiplying of local sources of thinking', implying, as is the case in her book, the drawing of theoretical ideas from sources outside of the metropole. One way to begin to build ideas or theories about the global South, which can enter into a dialogue with Northern theory, is through comparative case research which tracks common issues across very different contexts. For example, this could involve comparing forces underlying urban spatial change across a large Northern city and a large Southern city, as a starting point for understanding the production of space from a global perspective. This would be very different to theory development which draws on global North patterns and trends and attempts to universalize these ideas to the rest of the world, either as theories or 'best practice' urban models. Or more specifically, comparing the manifestation of, and responses to, informality across global North and South cases will give a far richer and more generalizable set of ideas about this phenomenon than research which has been carried out in one kind of context only.

Significantly, Connell's (2007) research method proposals have been echoed in the urban studies field (see McFarlane 2010, Robinson 2011). Following Connell (2007) these authors also take this position not just as a method but as a political strategy. The aim of these writings and their advocated research approach is to counter Northern epistemological hegemony and restructure the geopolitics of knowledge production. McFarlane (2010: 726) argues that cross-global comparative case research is a strategy for revealing the limitations of the assumptions on which much current (Northern-origin) urban theory is based as well as for formulating new lines of enquiry from more situated accounts.

This is a useful starting point for thinking about urban forms and processes which will be new (in fact need to be, given the changed circumstances of the twenty-first century) through an approach which aligns closely to Young's (2000) idea of an 'enlargement of thought' from diverse sources. It is not a position which is necessarily 'value-neutral': it is possible to argue that any urban strategy which results in a widening gap between rich and poor, which leads to violence and societal breakdown, which destroys the very city which it claims to improve, is to be avoided.

Developing new urban ideas through comparative, global urban research also does not easily cope with the problem of urban elites' and politicians' tastes for Disneyworld

shopping malls, glass tower office blocks or gated communities, with the unfortunate trend towards the commodification of culture in the built environment in 'heritage districts' and urban regeneration projects, or for the simplistic celebration of culture for its own good. But the unsettling of taken-for-granted assumptions about the built environment and the shifting of mind-sets about what inevitably represents progress and modernization in urban forms is certainly a starting point for a more diversified and context-informed set of ideas about how cities in all parts of the world can and should take shape in the future.

## Conclusion

This chapter examined the geopolitical production of urban planning knowledge and ideas on urban development and how this engages with local specificities, and social identities and culture. As Extracts 1 and 2 (above) illustrate, it is possible to argue that in many cities of the global South there is a major disconnect between the visions and practices of urban modernization and the lived reality of urban inhabitants. Clearly social difference needs to be acknowledged in planning, and this in turn requires a challenge to what may be considered mainstream planning approaches – shaped by the global circulation of 'best practice' ideas, the tastes of a global elite urban market, and the built form fashions promoted by international and local architects and property developers.

Acknowledging social difference immediately raises the question of how this should be understood and how it should be responded to by planned interventions. I take the position here that difference is frequently 'deep' and can usually be traced to roots in different world philosophical traditions or cultures, but at the same time is constantly mutating and hybridizing, and responding to local contingencies. It can be used opportunistically to further certain ends. Avoiding the trap of relativism in relation to deep difference, I draw on the work of Iris Marion Young (2000) who argues for an 'enlargement of thought' that comes from considering the perspectives of many differently situated people. In the case of current patterns and trends of urban development (Abuja and Metro Manila illustrate common outcomes in response to global development forces at different points in time) it is evident that the marginalization and inequality which these development processes set in motion have likely consequences in escalating crime, violence and social breakdown. There is no philosophical tradition which would in principle support this outcome, and there are undoubtedly many 'differently situated people' who would not support it either. This is not to say, of course, that individuals may (and do) use reference to cultural traditions in an opportunistic way to forward their own particular ends.

The chapter therefore argues that it is possible to judge the outcomes of dominant urban development processes (even while accepting that fundamentally different and culturally embedded perspectives on them may exist) and to find them wanting. That said, the task is then to challenge the source of ideas and beliefs in current urban modernization processes, and to seek for alternative sources. This requires tackling the geopolitical hegemony of (urban) knowledge production, lying largely in the global North. Drawing on the work of both social science and urban theorists concerned with

the same issue, it is possible to suggest a research method involving the comparative case study approach in which common issues are compared across very different parts of the world. This approach can raise questions about the assumptions on which much Northern theory is based and the validity of their universalization. It can also open the door to new understandings from sites outside the global North which will hopefully provide inspiration for new, locally responsive, inclusionary and environmentally appropriate ways of dealing with urban development.

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