

PREFACE

This book is the fruit of almost two decades of studies on urbanisation. During this time, the phenomena of urbanisation and the planet we live on have changed considerably. A wide range of urbanisation processes are developing across the world and urban areas expand and interweave. In this process, urban forms are constantly changing and new urban configurations are evolving, which are deeply disturbing conventional understandings of the urban. Simultaneously, there has been a remarkable development in critical urban studies in the social sciences and architecture. At the turn of this century, urban studies were still dominated by Euro-American concepts, and in many respects traditional conceptualisations and methodologies prevailed. This changed when postcolonial approaches called for diversified global urban studies: not only the paradigmatic cities of the West, but every place should become the starting point for urban research and theory building (see e.g. Roy 2003; Simone 2004a; Robinson 2006). Over the last decade, we have seen a plethora of publications covering all parts of the planet and all sorts of territories. At the same time, efforts to shift the epistemology of the urban have developed. Henri Lefebvre's theory of the production of space, which had been rediscovered in the early 1990s, played an important role in these efforts. His visionary thesis of the complete urbanisation of society, formulated in 1970, gained a new urgency in light of rapidly advancing urbanisation, and invited us

to rethink how we could analyse urban territories (Lefebvre 2003 [1970]). His overarching theory, which can be understood as a general theory of society in time and space (see Schmid 2022), has strongly influenced novel theorisations. One of those is the approach of ‘planetary urbanisation’, which proposes a renewed epistemology for critical urban studies (Brenner and Schmid 2011, 2015; Merrifield 2014). At the core of this approach is the conceptualisation of an interrelated set of three modalities of urbanisation—concentrated, extended and differential urbanisation. This is intended to distinguish among centripetal urbanisation processes that generate urban agglomerations; processes of extension, transforming territories beyond the city; and urbanisation processes that create new differentiations and thus open new possibilities for alternative pathways of urban development (Brenner and Schmid 2015).

The research presented in this book developed through the various stages of this epistemological shift over the course of several projects. Some of them were directly related to the studies that ETH Studio Basel conducted from 1999 to 2018.¹ During this time, ETH Studio Basel developed a range of new concepts and methods that crystallised in a specific territorial approach to urbanisation (Schmid 2016). After publishing a path-breaking study of urban Switzerland (Diener et al. 2006), ETH Studio Basel conducted a series of analyses of urban territories across the world, exploring places with very diverse urban characteristics. To achieve this kind of analysis, it developed a range of new methods, especially the use of mapping as an analytical tool, and opened up a wide field for empirical research and architectural interventions in planning and urban design. The most important result of this research was the insight that every urban territory displays characteristic traits that underpin the production and reproduction of its own specificity, and hence the uniqueness of its material and social existence (Diener et al. 2015).

An opportunity to deepen this approach arose when ETH Studio Basel joined the research project Globalization of Urbanity.² Starting in 2009, the research team of Christian Schmid, Monika Streule, Pascal Kallenberger and Anne Schmidt explored the phenomenon of global urbanisation and made initial trials with a new qualitative methodology by analysing Mexico City, Paris and Kolkata. The team used a novel method of participative mapping in order to identify urban configurations; a method that had been developed in a research project on Havana (Peña Díaz and Schmid 2008, 2024). These experiences inspired the elaboration of a proposal for a larger comparative project.

The comparative analysis that is presented in this book started in 2011. The team of this new research project included Naomi Hanakata, Ozan Karaman, Pascal Kallenberger, Anne Kockelkorn, Lindsay Sawyer, Christian Schmid, Monika Streule, Rob Sullivan and Kit Ping Wong. These researchers come from

different disciplinary backgrounds, including urban geography, urban anthropology, sociology, architecture, architectural history and urban design. The team was also equipped with comprehensive language skills beyond English, ranging from Cantonese, Mandarin, Japanese, Turkish, Spanish and French, to German. With this project, we expanded our initial sample of urban territories to a total of eight cases, including Tokyo, the East Pearl River Delta (Hong Kong, Shenzhen and Dongguan), Lagos, Istanbul, Mexico City, Paris, Kolkata and Los Angeles.

It was astonishing that such an ambitious and at the same time highly experimental research project became possible. It was realised in the context of the ETH Future Cities Laboratory in Singapore (FCL), in which the ETH Department of Architecture played a leading role.³ We enjoyed a great degree of freedom to do unconventional and inventive research. The entire research procedure was planned to be open-ended, with the intention of clarifying various open questions during the research process itself; our project was inspired by ETH Studio Basel's approach, where only the general research question was formulated at the start of the project. The discipline of architecture has a long tradition of experimental and inventive approaches to research, in which—in contrast to most methodologies in social sciences—there are no rigid rules; instead, there is an open understanding of doing research.

While the project was still in its preparatory phase, it became clear that a profound change to our entire research approach was needed. ETH Studio Basel had developed its territorial approach to urbanisation by analysing extended urban territories, starting with the Canary Islands and the Nile Valley, and later including an entire series of large-scale territories (Diener et al. 2016). It had become clear that a thorough analysis of the urban has to go beyond the city to include the periurban hinterlands and even more remote territories to understand the dynamics of urbanisation. At the same time, Neil Brenner and Christian Schmid started their collaboration to explore the theoretical implications of these and related research efforts. Their fundamental critique of city-centric approaches and their proposal to employ a much more open, multiscale analysis of urban territories made the notion of comparing cities untenable (Brenner and Schmid 2015). We had to go beyond any kind of urban border, and to give up the idea of a bounded settlement space whatever its definition and perimeter may be.

While new methodologies for the analysis of extended urbanisation were already on their way (for an overview see the volume *Extended Urbanisation* edited by Christian Schmid and Milica Topalović, 2023), we also had to rethink and reconceptualise processes of *concentrated urbanisation*—which turned out to be a major challenge. To do so we needed to fundamentally revise the entire research design, and not compare urban territories as

such, but urbanisation processes. This change in perspective was captured in the term ‘patterns and pathways of planetary urbanisation’ that we have chosen as the title of the project.

When the project finally started in earnest in the summer of 2011, we had first to develop a clear understanding of the project goals and research procedure. At the time, what would soon be called ‘new comparative urbanism’ (Lees 2011; Robinson 2011) was in its initial stage. It was characterised by experimental comparative endeavours, crossing the divides of areal typologies, bridging the various silos of urban studies and thus permitting the comparison of seemingly incompatible experiences in well-known and intensively studied western cities and the cities of the Global South, as well as all the cities that do not fit into either of these two categories.

It was a real jump in the scale and scope of our own research experiences to compare these eight huge urban territories. We found it demanded a research approach and methodology that was different from what we used in our previous studies, and required first of all a comparative design suited to this kind of qualitative research. We had learned from our earlier experiences how to use mapping as a tool to conduct thorough empirical analyses and also to integrate and synthesise different modalities of knowledge. We knew about the great value of guided discussions as instruments for exchange and collective learning and also for developing syntheses and concepts. Inspired by Robinson’s (2011) procedure of bringing different cases into conversation with each other, we organised team workshops, in which we constantly shared our research experiences and results from the field. We had started these comparative conversations at the very beginning of our collaborative project: in the first session we shared our knowledge about the different territories based on team members’ already existing expertise. These workshops constituted the very core of our comparative procedure; they allowed each researcher to reinterpret their findings in relation to other cases, and to develop a collective and comparative understanding of urbanisation processes. During the entire duration of the project, we organised a total of 12 workshops of one to two weeks each.

It then became a major challenge to conduct fieldwork in these territories. Each researcher had the task of developing an understanding of an immense, densely settled territory. We thus had to develop new methods of field research based on multi-sited ethnography, a revised method of mapping as well as a procedure for concept generation via comparison. This was a truly collective research, in which the entire team not only exchanged experiences and ideas, but also developed a new methodology and advanced conceptualisation and theory building.

Postdoc researcher Ozan Karaman played a key role for the entire project, particularly for the development and implementation of the comparative research design and the coordination

of the research team. He also contributed his extensive work on the case of Istanbul (Karaman 2013a, 2013b, 2013c, 2014) and research support for the Los Angeles case study. The PhD researchers had the double task of doing the comparative research and elaborating their dissertations and book publications on the individual territories: Monika Streule on Mexico City (2016, 2018), Lindsay Sawyer on Lagos (2016), Naomi Hanakata on Tokyo (2016, 2020), and Kit Ping Wong on Hong Kong, Shenzhen and Dongguan (2017). In turn, these studies greatly benefitted from the comparative approach, as it made it possible to put into perspective the individual cases and to go beyond their idiosyncrasies to identify the structural components that guided urban development. Anne Kockelkorn contributed significantly to the project with her profound expertise on the urban development of Paris and the histories of mass housing based on her PhD analysing a large-scale postmodern housing project in a *ville nouvelle* (2017). The insights of postdoc researcher Rob Sullivan on Los Angeles (2014) were crucial to developing our comparative concepts, adding yet another case study. Lara Belkind supported our research on Paris and contributed greatly to the text. Pascal Kallenberger contributed to our comparative research and focused on Kolkata. He pursued a career change mid-way through the project; we therefore had to omit the planned chapter on Kolkata in this book but still present those research results that were formative to the entire project.

In our comparative process, we generated two different types of analysis, both of which are documented in this book. On the one hand, the encompassing and novel analyses of these eight large-scale urban territories necessitated the periodisation of urban development and the mapping of urban configurations for each territory. The maps were originally used as working tools for geographically locating information gathered during our explorative mapping sessions, and then became an important analytical base for the entire analysis. Finalising these maps was a project on its own, one that we accomplished together with geographer and cartographer Philippe Rekacewicz and designers Dorothée Billard and Roger Conscience in intense workshop sessions. We exhibited these maps at the Shenzhen Bi-City Biennale of Urbanism / Architecture in the autumn of 2015. These maps and the related analyses of patterns and pathways are published in this book; most of them for the first time.

On the other hand, we developed a series of articles that conceptualised six individual urbanisation processes. Five of these have been published in academic journals, while one text has been newly written for this book. The collective elaboration and writing of these articles demanded not only further efforts of theorisation, but also additional comparative work via a critical evaluation of existing conceptualisations in order to sharpen and consolidate our newly elaborated concepts.

This book is divided into four parts. Part I offers a general understanding of urbanisation processes. It explains the comparative strategy and methodology and the way we collaboratively conceptualised urbanisation processes. It also contains an overview of all the new concepts of urbanisation processes that we elaborated over the course of our collective study. A shorter version of the four chapters of Part I has been published in the article 'Towards a new vocabulary of urbanisation processes: a comparative approach' (Schmid et al. 2018). In Part II we trace the social production of urban territories in each case study. The maps at the beginning of each chapter convey a novel analysis of the patterns of these huge territories. The texts explain the respective patterns and pathways that urbanisation has taken and reveal the specificity of each urban territory. Most of these texts are condensed versions of the much broader analyses developed during our research. Part III presents our enriched vocabulary of urbanisation processes. We reprint the articles, slightly revised and adapted to the context and style of this book and expanded with maps and illustrations. For certain processes, particularly bypass urbanism and multilayered patchwork urbanisation, the maps published in these chapters helped considerably to detect the process as such. The chapter on the incorporation of urban differences was complemented with an additional case study on Istanbul, and the chapter on multilayered patchwork urbanisation is published here for the first time. In the concluding Part IV, Christian Schmid and Monika Streule present a synthesis of the entire comparative analysis. Thinking the patterns and pathways of urbanisation together allowed us to develop a comparison of the different paradigms of urbanisation.

The empirical results and theoretical considerations assembled in this book convey a kaleidoscope of urban territories and processes across the planet. They are open to various ways of reading, as the different components can be linked in new ways, and thus new aspects and connections among them can be identified. We offer this book for critical examination and discussion, and as inspiration for inspiration to further comparative endeavours. It is meant as an invitation to develop a renewed vocabulary of urbanisation, and to advance new theoretical frameworks to grasp the contemporary urbanisation of the planet.

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Christian Schmid, Monika Streule and Kit Ping Wong

- 1 ETH Studio Basel was an offshoot of the Department of Architecture at ETH Zürich located in Basel, led by architects Jacques Herzog, Pierre de Meuron, Marcel Meili and Roger Diener, and geographer and sociologist Christian Schmid. In this framework, researchers and students were conducting experimental urban research together.
- 2 The research project Globalization of Urbanity brought together the chairs of Josep Acebillo (Accademia di architettura, USI Mendrisio), Jacques Lévy (ENAC EPF Lausanne) and Christian Schmid (Department of Architecture, ETH Zürich) in the framework of the Swiss Cooperation Program in Architecture (Acebillo et al. 2012).
- 3 The Future Cities Laboratory (FCL) is the first and largest programme of the Singapore-ETH Centre. It was launched in 2010 as an interdisciplinary research hub that addresses the future of urbanisation. It brings together researchers from many parts of the world and a wide range of disciplines.

