URBANISATION PROCESSES

AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL REORIENTATION

Christian Schmid

The urban world has fundamentally changed in the last few decades. A wide range of urbanisation processes is generating a great variety of complex and often surprising territories, which are disturbing conventional understandings of the urban. The challenge to scholars is thus to analyse not only the multitude of urban territories, but also the various urbanisation processes that are transforming those territories. This also means that what constitutes the spatial units of analysis has to be fundamentally reconsidered. Urbanisation processes are unsettling and churning up urban territories, and are constantly generating new urban configurations. The essential task, therefore, is to investigate the historically and geographically specific patterns and pathways of urbanisation and the dynamics of urbanisation processes. A new vocabulary of urbanisation is required to help us decipher these rapidly mutating urban territories and to facilitate discussions and common understandings of urbanisation.

This chapter introduces the essential theoretical concepts for reframing a dynamic analysis of urbanisation processes. Together, they constitute a novel territorial approach, based on a decentring perspective on urbanisation. This perspective was first brought forward by postcolonial approaches that marked an important change in urban theory and research by going beyond western models of urbanisation to address a variety of urban situations and constellations developing across the planet.

In an ambition to develop global urban studies, they also proposed to bridge the various divides that criss-cross our planet.

This postcolonial perspective has been complemented by the invention of the concept of planetary urbanisation that has exploded city-centric understandings of urbanisation. The term planetary urbanisation captures the phenomenon that contemporary urbanisation processes are taking place throughout the world, and thus can be grasped only by using a planetary perspective. To analyse planetary urbanisation, we must abandon the concept of bounded settlement areas, and analyse urbanisation processes instead of urban forms. This approach not only focuses on urban developments 'beyond the city', but also fundamentally reorients the analysis of densely settled urban areas.

CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES FOR URBAN RESEARCH

This decentring move in urban studies demands an epistemological reorientation of urban analysis. To better understand patterns and pathways of urbanisation in time and space requires new concepts and theoretical framings that are suited to a dynamic, process-oriented analysis. This motivated the development of a *territorial approach* to urbanisation, which has been elaborated over more than two decades in the context of several research projects. Starting from Henri Lefebvre's theory of the production of space, the territorial approach has continued to be developed in the interaction between practice and empirical research. It gives a new answer to the old question: how to understand urbanisation?

First of all, urbanisation has to be reconceptualised as a multidimensional process. A deeper analysis reveals that the various constitutive elements of urbanisation processes are continuously producing new urban forms, and thus the patterns and pathways of urbanisation of a territory are always specific. This needs a reorientation of urban theory to conceptualise the dialectic between the general and the specific. The concept of urbanisation processes is at the centre of this reorientation, so we now address the question: how can we identify and conceptualise urbanisation processes? One possibility is to do this by contextualising specific situations in the overall field and employing inspiration gained in other situations. This always includes a comparative moment: we have to diversify the sources of inspiration and enrich our language with a wide palette of terms representing the manifold emerging urban situations.

DECENTRING URBAN RESEARCH

To understand urbanisation in time and space demands a fundamental epistemological reorientation: the analysis of the diverse patterns and pathways of urbanisation developing across the planet needs a decentring of the analytical perspective on the urban. This decentring perspective follows, and is in fact inspired by the postcolonial turn in urban studies that challenged the deeply inscribed geographies of theory production, particularly the Anglo-American hegemony in international urban studies. More than two decades ago, Jennifer Robinson (2002) called for a diversification of the sources and inspirations in urban theory, a suggestion that has been repeated many times since then (see e.g. Roy 2009; Sheppard et al. 2013, Parnell and Oldfield 2014). One important analytical

and methodological starting point to address this challenge is to treat every urban area as an 'ordinary city' (Robinson 2006) and thus as an equally relevant place for learning about contemporary urbanisation as well as a relevant and valuable starting point for theory generation and conceptual innovation. Our own project is strongly influenced by this invitation, and seeks to address the analytical and methodological consequences that it implies.

Another consequence of this decentring move in urban theory and research is that it encourages us to go beyond conceptions of separate area typologies. The emerging patchwork of spatial unevenness can no longer be captured adequately through a typological differentiation between centre/periphery, rural/urban, metropolis/colony, North/South, or East/West. Indeed, the 'southern turn' of urban studies (see e.g. Rao 2006), so strongly fostered by postcolonial approaches, has paved the way towards a more comprehensive and differentiating view of the urban world, questioning the compartmentalisation that inherited concepts inscribe and prescribe and that implicitly and explicitly structure theories as well as research and practice (see also Simone 2010, Robinson 2014). In order to implement this decentring perspective, however, we have to go one step further and question the still dominant city-centric conceptions in urban studies that limit and impoverish our understanding of contemporary urban processes. The second important starting point for this project was therefore the concept of *planetary urbanisation*, which addresses a wide range of urban transformations that have given rise to questions about many of the fundamental assumptions and certainties of urban research (Brenner and Schmid 2014, 2015; Merrifield 2014). This includes various processes that extend the territorial reach of the urban into a seemingly non-urban realm, and the development of heterogeneous and polymorphous extended urban landscapes that are characterised by the superimposition and entanglement of cores and peripheries. These processes are continually producing new patterns and pathways of uneven urban development, while urban territories are becoming much more differentiated, polymorphic and multi-scalar.

At the same time, the concept of planetary urbanisation requires an epistemological reorientation of the focus of urban research: no longer to look at bounded settlements, but to examine urbanisation processes stretching out over the territory. We use the perspective of planetary urbanisation to question not only conventional analyses of areas located outside a putatively urban realm, but also to challenge inherited understandings of urban core areas. This conceptualisation has important consequences for long-entrenched understandings of urbanisation: it examines the debilitating effects of city-centrist approaches and related methodological cityism (Cairns 2019; Angelo and Wachsmuth 2015) that focus exclusively on agglomerations and urban regions, which are defined by catchment areas, commuter zones or labour markets. All these approaches are based on the agglomeration paradigm; the assumption that cities can be defined as concentrations of labour power and the means of production (Brenner and Schmid 2014; Schmid 2023). Contemporary agglomerations stretch out to form multipolar, polycentric urban configurations, leading to overlapping catchment areas, and thus seriously challenging any attempt to place boundaries for identifying the putative basic units of both urban analysis and everyday life. To put the postcolonial turn discussed above into a planetary perspective means to assert that every point on the planet might be affected by urbanisation processes in one way or another, and thus could provide important insights into the urban process. Robinson's recent call to make 'space for insights starting from anywhere' (2016: 5) invites us to look for inspiration and for new concepts to emerge from any place on this planet.

FROM URBAN FORM TO URBAN PROCESS

The perspective of planetary urbanisation has fundamentally changed inherited views on the urban. First of all, it proposes a much more dynamic procedure of analysing urban territories, focusing on the urbanisation processes that are shaping and reshaping these territories instead of urban forms. This process-oriented perspective is expressed by the introduction of the related terms 'concentrated', 'extended' and 'differential' urbanisation, which indicate three basic modalities of the urban process (Brenner and Schmid 2015). Firstly, any form of urbanisation generates not only the concentration of people, production units, infrastructure and information that leads to *concentrated urbanisation*, but also inevitably and simultaneously causes a proliferation and expansion of the urban fabric, thus resulting in various forms of *extended urbanisation*, stretching out beyond dense settlement spaces into agricultural and sparsely populated areas. Food, water, energy and raw materials must be brought to urban centres, requiring an entire logistical system that ranges from transport to information networks. Conversely, areas that are dominated by extended urbanisation might also evolve into new centralities and urban concentrations. Thus, concentrated and extended forms of urbanisation exist in a dialectical relationship with each other and can, at times, merge seamlessly. Very large urban territories may therefore be marked by both concentrated and extended modalities of urbanisation. Secondly, both modalities of urbanisation must deal with processes of *differential urbanisation*, which are unevenly

churning settlement spaces, leading to various processes of commodification and incorporation, but also to the creation and generation of new centralities and new differences. This requires a dynamic and relational understanding of urbanisation, taking into consideration both the extended and the uneven character of urban territories, in which new centralities can emerge in various places, in the urban peripheries, but also outside densely settled areas, creating complex interdependencies and multi-scalar urban realities (see Diener et al. 2015). Thus, the concept of planetary urbanisation does not postulate that urban areas are becoming more homogenous or that one overarching process of urbanisation is shaping the world, as many critics of the concept imply. Instead the opposite is true: planetary urbanisation reinforces and intensifies uneven development and leads to much more complex and contradictory urban territories. It is therefore essential to consider the specificity of these territories and hence to analyse concrete processes and manifestations of the urban on the ground (Diener et al. 2015, Schmid 2015, Schmid and Topalović 2023).

These considerations have far-reaching consequences for the analysis of urbanisation, not only for territories of extended urbanisation, but also for densely settled metropolitan territories. Urbanisation has to be understood as an unbounded process that transgresses borders and extends over vast areas. This implies a fundamental shift from a centric perspective that starts from the real or virtual centre of a 'city' and then stretches out in order to define its boundaries to identify the 'relevant' perimeter of analysis; instead, a decentred perspective is needed to understand the wider urban territory. Shifting the analytical perspective away from the centre enables a view on the production of urban territories from a different, ex-centric angle, avoiding the traps of methodological cityism and the illusory dualism of city and countryside. We thus have to keep open the unit of urban analysis and avoid analysing cities, urban regions or similar bounded units, focusing instead on *urbanising territories*.

In order to understand the rapidly changing universe of our urbanising planet, we thus have to rethink the current conditions of urbanisation. Urban forms are constantly changing in the course of urban development; they can perhaps best be understood as temporary moments in a wider urban process. The challenge is thus not only to analyse the multitude of urban territories and forms, but also to focus on the various urbanisation processes that transform those territories and generate those forms. This means that the spatial units of analysis —conventionally based on demographic, morphological or administrative criteria—also have to be reconsidered. Urbanisation processes do not simply unfold within fixed or stable urban 'containers', but actively produce, unsettle and rework urban territories, and thus constantly engender new urban configurations. The essential task, therefore, is less to distinguish 'new' urban forms, but rather to investigate the historically and geographically specific dynamics of urbanisation processes.

The call to analyse urban processes is not novel and has been expressed by urban scholars many times (see e.g. Lefebvre 2003 [1970]; Harvey 1985; Massey 2005). However, to realise this call in concrete urban research in a thorough and consistent way has many consequences and faces various obstacles and difficulties. Many new terms and concepts intended to designate various putatively new urban phenomena have been introduced into urban studies in the last two or three decades. However, most of this energy has been spent in identifying and labelling different types of cities or urban regions based on emergent urban functions, forms and configurations such as global cities, megacities or edge cities (see e.g. Taylor and Lang 2004; Soja 2000; Murray 2017). Many of these once novel terms and concepts have already lost much of their explanatory force, as the new urban forms that they were intended to grasp have changed profoundly in the meantime. However, much less has been achieved in developing new concepts to understand, analyse and define the various ways in which urban areas are being transformed. As a result, the field of urban studies is not well equipped with analytical tools to analyse urbanisation processes.

We have then to question in a more general way the concept of urbanisation itself, which is often understood and interpreted as a one-dimensional, all-encompassing, linear and universal process. For a long time the dominant conception of urbanisation was based on a demographic definition of the population growth of cities (for a detailed discussion see Brenner and Schmid 2014). This purely statistical definition has countless implications which are rarely discussed, and it reduces the urban to a black box in which all sorts of contradictory developments are homogenised and turned into one universal movement. Everything that happens outside this black box is treated as 'non-urban' and consequently not even taken into consideration. The one-dimensional and trans-historical economic postulate that the agglomeration process follows a universal law of spatial concentration that can be applied to all cities from ancient times to contemporary global city-regions, irrespective of any concrete historical and geographical context, has a similar effect. Thus, in a widely debated text on the 'nature of cities', Allen Scott and Michael Storper (2015: 4) postulate: 'All cities consist of dense agglomerations of people and economic activities'. Such narrow views that only take into consideration one single criterion and focus exclusively on urban centres and agglomerations reinforce a simplistic and dichotomous view of the world—in which only cities and non-cities or

urban and rural areas exist. However, as urban research constantly reveals, the urban phenomenon is much more complex and polymorphic than in this characterisation (see Schmid 2023).

Accordingly, there is an urgent need for more differentiated conceptions of urbanisation which, instead of being based on statistical definitions, the morphology of settlements or transhistorical urban features such as size or density, analyse the urban as a multidimensional process—a process that includes the economic, social and cultural aspects of daily life. Thus, David Harvey regards urbanisation, from the perspective of political economy, as a process of the production of the built environment; that is to say, the construction of houses, production plants and infrastructure, with all their attendant social implications. However, as urbanisation unfolds, it is not only the space economy that changes, but also the understanding of the world and the social meaning of the urban. Consequently, Harvey (1985) also analysed the urbanisation of consciousness and the emergence of an urban experience. Such a multidimensional understanding is developed in much more detail in Lefebvre's theory of the production of space, which I will elaborate upon in the next section.

A THREE-DIMENSIONAL UNDERSTANDING OF URBANISATION

Urbanisation processes include many aspects of urban transformation that crystallise across the world at various spatial scales, with wide-ranging, often unpredictable consequences for inherited socio-spatial arrangements. We thus have to understand urbanisation as a multifaceted *emergent phenomenon,* formed by an ensemble of several interrelated dimensions that shape and transform urban territories. They are linked to abstract processes of capitalist accumulation, industrialisation and commodification, state strategies and broader social relations at various spatial scales; but at the same time they are always anchored in everyday life and realised through concrete constellations, struggles and tactics on the ground.

In his theory, Henri Lefebvre offers us an elaborated three-dimensional understanding based on his double triad of the production of (urban) space: perceived, conceived and lived space, and spatial practice, representation of space and spaces of representation (see Lefebvre 1991 [1975]; Schmid 2008, 2022). Firstly, we have to analyse how *spatial practices* produce a material space that can be perceived by the five senses, and thus constitute a *perceived space*. Secondly, we need to understand that we cannot see a space without having conceived of it beforehand. To be able to orient ourselves and act in a space, we need a concept, or a representation of space, which is directly related to the production of knowledge. Thirdly, we must consider the question of lived space, and thus how space is experienced in everyday life, which involves the process of meaning production. This depends on the social forces that create an urban space by initiating interaction, and hence relationships, among people and places. In this process, specific patterns of social, economic and cultural differentiation evolve and can be seen as main elements of the specificity of an urban territory. This triad can be used to differentiate urbanisation processes. While we did not apply this triad in a formal manner, these interrelated moments of the production of space guided our field research and the criteria by which we defined urban processes, constituting a helpful framework for thinking across diverse urban contexts.

Firstly, we can analyse how a spatial practice produces a material space that can be perceived by the five senses. Spatial practices encompass all sorts of movements of people criss-crossing the urban territory and they are associated with concrete interactions. They create connections and points of orientation, and thus lead to the production of a system of networks of interaction connecting people, goods and information as well as to the

formation of centres and peripheries related to each other in various constellations. All these movements and actions in urban space are facilitated, enabled and supported by short-term and long-term investments into the built environment, starting from the building of provisional shacks and incremental improvements to building houses, and proceeding upwards to the construction of large housing compounds, office blocks, neighbourhoods and all sorts of infrastructure. Together, they form an urban fabric that defines the material framework of daily activities and routines, the constraints and options people have in their daily life and the access to all sorts of material and social resources. This results in the production of an urban fabric covering increasing parts of the territory and enabling as well as hindering social actions. In concrete places, very different configurations of centralities and patterns of the urban fabric might develop, and thus the material form of an urban territory is always specific.

Secondly, we can explore how urbanisation is conceived, planned, controlled and regulated. Urban processes unfold under specific regimes of territorial regulation that include various forms of representation, models of urban governance (understood in a broad sense) and market or state-led urban strategies on all possible scales (see Schmid 2014). Territorial regulation comprises the rules that guide the production of the built environment and the use of the land, and therefore also determines what will be located in which part of a territory. This includes all aspects and modes of ruling including formal and informal, explicit and implicit, tacit and expressed, but also the different degree and form of access to power and decision-making processes for different social groups. However, as we clearly learned during the course of our research, these territorial regulations are not only very complex but also highly specific and therefore often extremely difficult to understand. Territorial regulation involves complex relationships between various groups, including tenants and landlords, land and property owners, financial organisations and also state actors. It thus leads to complex constellations of regulatory dynamics such as market mechanisms, state regulations, long-entrenched traditional and customary rules and various cooperative forms of negotiation. These rules are always specific, and they lead to very different processes of urbanisation. The most fundamental question here is the material and legal relationship to the land. Who has access to which land? How do various landownership systems intersect? How can people achieve tenure security? What are the power relations between various state agents, institutions and social networks in terms of rules and regulations? What conceptions and representations of space and what kinds of urban strategies dominate the debates, and how does the practical implementation of planning proceed?

Finally, urban processes always entail the disruption, dislocation and reorientation of the inhabitants' experiences. This third dimension of the urbanisation process is anchored in everyday practices and driven by various experiences of collective action and struggle, lived solidarity, feelings of success, disappointment and failure, desires and all the dramas and pleasure of everyday life. Important aspects of the urban experience include symbols, meanings and collective memories, which sometimes condense into taken-for-granted certainties. Questions of social composition and class relations, the social and legal status of migrants, family life, gender relations and sexual life, among others, are key to this experience. For our analysis, this third dimension played an important role and, as we show later, has been decisive in defining urbanisation processes.

Considering the characteristics and interrelationships of these three moments of the production of space, it is possible to condense them analytically and to proceed with an identification of concrete urbanisation processes. The production of an urban fabric on the basis of everyday actions and interactions, the processes of territorial regulation through which power structures are inscribed into a territory and the patterns and dynamics of lived differences that emerge, consolidate or get incorporated—all these contribute to the specific character of urbanisation processes and urban territories. The differentiation of these three dimensions of the general process of urbanisation allows us to define urbanisation processes more precisely and to go beyond the familiar set of processes offered by urban studies today.

ABSTRACT AND CONCRETE: THE QUESTION OF SPECIFICITY

How can we conceptualise urbanisation processes? How can we relate the process of general urbanisation to concrete processes on the ground? The relationship between the general and the specific, or in philosophical terms the universal and the singular, is a recurrent question in urban studies. It has been treated in detail in a research project of ETH Studio Basel that analyses a range of case studies across the world (Diener et al. 2015). The strategic thesis (Lefebvre 2003 [1970]) of this project postulates that each urban territory is distinguished by certain characteristics that underpin the production and reproduction of its own specificity. This means that we have to investigate how specificity is constituted and at the same time to explore how we can bring specific processes into a more general conceptualisation.

Recently, the question of specificity has been revived in the context of debates on planetary urbanisation (Schmid 2018, Goonewardena 2018). This debate has foregrounded a range of epistemological questions concerning some basic understandings, orientations and procedures in critical urban studies: How can we analyse urban developments in a planetary context without neglecting the specific determinations of concrete places and experiences in everyday life? How can we make a comprehensive analysis of urbanisation that brings together a multitude of experiences in different contexts? How should we approach and conceptualise the relationship between specific places and general processes?

These questions address a range of theoretical challenges: the role of totality, the relationship between urbanisation as a general process and specific urban constellations, between the abstract and the concrete, between universals and singular cases. There are many ways to conceive such fundamental concepts and their respective relationships. Thus, to give only one example, the alleged dichotomy between the singular and the universal could also be conceptualised in a dialectical manner. Hegel understood these as moments of a 'concrete universal' that he conceptualised with his famous triad—the universal, the particular and the singular—as an instrument to grasp the relationships between different theoretical categories. In his philosophical system, the universal moment represents a general principle of development, whereas the particular moment stands for the differentiation of the universal. Finally, the singular moment arrives as the concrete realisation of the universal moment (see e.g. Stanek 2014: 64–65).

The idea of a concrete universal as a dialectical unity of singularities and particularities deeply influenced not only Marx but also Lefebvre. It can be recognised in core concepts like 'labour' or 'capital', but also in Lefebvre's understanding of the 'urban', of 'everyday life', and of 'space' (see Schmid 2022). However, starting from a clearly materialist position, unlike Hegel, both Marx and Lefebvre located concepts not only in thought, but also in practice, and therefore understood abstraction not only as a mental procedure but also as a material social process in and through which certain abstract principles, such as exchange value, become a concrete social reality: a 'concrete abstraction'. Related to this understanding is Lefebvre's definition of urbanisation as a comprehensive transformation of society that he analysed as a total phenomenon. He defined urbanisation as the totality of changes that a society undergoes as it evolves from its agrarian beginnings to its urban present (Lefebvre 2003 [1970]). Lefebvre links capitalist urbanisation directly to the process of industrialisation that he understands in its most general sense as referring not only to the construction of machines, factories and infrastructure, but also to the related industrial organisation of society. This includes the ensuing financial, technical and logistics systems; the generation, processing and distribution of energy, food, raw materials and information; and also the rules and agreements regulating global markets; the various economic, social and cultural networks that permeate and span urban space; and the modernisation, standardisation and commodification of everyday life that comes with industrialisation. Lefebvre famously concluded that this process tends toward the complete urbanisation of society and hence the urbanisation of the entire planet, a position he reconfirmed again in his very last published text analysing how the city dissolves in a planetary metamorphosis (2014 [1987]).

Urbanisation can therefore also be understood as a social process of abstraction—whereby a given natural space is transformed into an urban space and hence also into a technologically determined, abstract space dominated by industrialisation—a 'second nature'. At the same time, however, this urban space is a concrete physical reality; it has its own specific characteristics. Urbanisation is thus a process during which general social developments are territorialised, which involves the materialisation of social relations in a specific place and at a specific period of time. This materialisation is always confronted with concrete conditions—the land with its characteristics, specific political, social and economic constellations and rules and regulations—which they reshape and transform. Thus, the materialisation of general tendencies in concrete contexts leads to specific urban situations and configurations. The crucial point therefore is to understand how general tendencies and abstract processes materialise, how they become

a social reality, consolidating and inscribing themselves onto a territory. Thus, we can examine a territory as the specific material form of urbanisation and trace the transformation of nature to a second nature: an urban space, produced by society.

From a general point of view, urbanisation can therefore be conceptualised as an encompassing but uneven transformation of the territory that unfolds in time and space. From a temporal perspective, each successive round of urbanisation encounters the results of earlier phases of urbanisation and transforms them anew. However, this is not to say that the traces of earlier phases completely disappear. Urbanisation is thus not—like a footprint in the sand—the direct expression of a general social development. The land, the territory, are never 'empty' or 'primal': they are always occupied by people and various social practices, they bear the marks of earlier social processes and they are embedded in wider contexts and social networks. Urbanisation is crucially dependent on specific local conditions and therefore does not proceed evenly across the board but leads to differentiation and uneven urban development.

However, this dialectic of general processes or universals (such as urbanisation) on the one hand and the specific urban territories or the individual on the other leaves us with a dilemma: We don't understand how a concrete situation is produced and how general processes materialise in concrete places. This is the moment in which a third term moves to the foreground: the particular. Following Hegel's triad, urbanisation could thus be understood as a universal category that contains many particularities or constituting instances; among these are many different urbanisation processes. Urbanisation is a general process with manifold particularities that finally materialises in singularities, each of which forms a concrete totality: a specific urban territory with its own features and specific patterns and pathways of urbanisation.

This gives rise to the question of how the theoretical and the empirical are related. As we have explained elsewhere (Brenner and Schmid 2015, Schmid 2022), urbanisation (as well as the urban, the city and so on) are not empirical, but theoretical categories; they are theoretical abstractions constructed on the basis of general considerations. However, what we encounter on the ground are always concrete phenomena. In empirical research, we start from certain observations in specific locations and bring them into conceptualisation, which means that we construct a representation or a concept. The point is to identify and analyse particular urbanisation processes as particular moments or as constituting instances of a universal—the general process of urbanisation.

We thus conceptualise urbanisation processes as particulars or as differentiations of a general process of urbanisation and analyse how a specific territory is transformed by these particular (socio-spatial) urbanisation processes. In doing so we therefore understand the particular as a mediation between the universal and the individual: Particular urbanisation processes constitute general traits of socio-spatial development on the ground and thus on a specific terrain. As a consequence, we can analyse an urban territory as the result or outcome of the interaction and entanglement of a specific combination of different urbanisation processes.

DEFINING URBANISATION PROCESSES

How can we conceptualise multidimensional urbanisation processes that allow us to decipher the production of specific urban territories? Looking at contemporary approaches, we realise that they offer only a very rudimentary and limited set of urbanisation processes, such as urban regeneration, gentrification, suburbanisation, peri-urbanisation, or informal urban development. These concepts do not suffice to grasp and understand the differentiated and dynamic patterns and pathways of urbanisation emerging across the planet (see Chapter 4). A revitalised vocabulary of urbanisation is therefore required to decipher—both analytically and cartographically—the transformation of urban territories. In our project we were looking for concepts that address the multidimensionality of urbanisation and not just highlighting one isolated aspect. As we will argue in more detail in Chapter 4, these concepts should not be derived from only one specific paradigmatic case, but have empirical starting points in different urban territories. Therefore, a comparative procedure is necessary for the development and conceptualisation of urbanisation processes.

Lefebvre did not define urbanisation processes more specifically. He gave us a series of important concepts, such as the production of the urban fabric, the hypothesis of the complete urbanisation of society and the important consideration that urbanisation affects both urban and non-urban areas. But, beyond these general reflections and conceptions, we have to be inventive and identify different processes of urbanisation. To make Lefebvre's concept fruitful for concrete analyses we need to go beyond his general theoretical considerations using a transductive research procedure (see Chapter 2).

A COMPARATIVE PROCEDURE

The guiding theoretical question of our project was how to conceptualise urbanisation processes. This implies a moment of generalisation: to detect a bundle of characteristics, common underlying mechanisms, logics, regularities and common traits in the way urbanisation unfolds and proceeds, thus producing similar outcomes. Using an appropriate comparative procedure, it is possible to identify a common problematic across different cases or singularities and the various divides that separate them.

These specific urban outcomes can be grouped in order to make systematic distinctions between different situations that share a common problematic. Thus, if we look at existent concepts, we see that they define in a more or less precise way a core problematic, such as the forced relocation of inhabitants (gentrification), geographical peripherality (suburbanisation) or precarious settlements (urban informality). We can understand these concepts as expressing and defining particular moments of the general process of urbanisation. In other words: urbanisation as a general and generic concept has to be specified by more narrowly defined concepts of urbanisation processes.

In a separate step, we subsequently have to identify concrete urbanisation processes and bring them into conceptualisation: the main aspect here is to find appropriate definitions of these processes. This includes a theoretical moment, to examine extant concepts and terms and possibly also develop and define new concepts. This always includes a comparative moment: We compare a specific urban configuration with extant concepts and assign it to one of them. Or we come to the conclusion that this configuration does not fit the extant definitions and start to develop a new concept with a different definition. In the following step, these concepts have to be specified, tested using different examples and finally stabilised in order to propose using them for further discussions and various applications.

TOWARDS NEW VOCABULARIES OF URBANISATION

Our territorial approach allows us to analyse the surface of the earth and to discern certain consistencies emerging in the ongoing current of urbanisation and in the continuous mesh of the urban fabric. This analysis detects the interplay and entanglement of urbanisation processes that give a territory its distinctive features and characteristics. It identifies territories within which the same rules apply, the same regulations are in operation; in which certain overarching connections and modes of interaction dominate and may give rise to a more or less coherent understanding of the urban. However, it does not follow that we should consider only the specificities of urban territories and fall into the trap of singularity. Rather, urbanisation can be seen as a general but differentiated process with several dimensions. It is composed of a wide range of particular urbanisation processes unfolding in the confrontation of general processes and specific territorial conditions that can be identified through comparative analysis.

From a more general perspective, our project highlights and confirms the necessity of developing a differentiated view of urbanisation. The reduction of the concept of urbanisation to certain universal principles or mechanisms cannot suffice to address productively the diversity and richness of the contemporary urban universe. By identifying different processes of urbanisation

as constitutive elements of an urbanising planet, this project offers an analysis that goes beyond the apparent contradiction between universalising and particularising research strategies.

The results of this project and the analysis presented here provide a dynamic understanding of urbanisation processes across the divides that characterise our contemporary world. Urban territories are open to a vast range of urban developments and hence also to realising the possibilities that are intrinsic to urbanisation. Throughout the considerations addressed in this chapter, the overall ambition of this project has become evident: to contribute to the development of an extended and more diversified vocabulary of urbanisation and at the same time to offer a much more differentiated framework for analysis and practice.

New concepts and terms are urgently required in order to help us to decipher the varied and restlessly mutating landscapes of urbanisation that are currently being produced across the planet. It is necessary to diversify the empirical references and theoretical sources in urban theory, and to enrich our language with a wider palette of terms that represent the manifold emerging urban situations and urban processes. The goal is not to develop a unifying language, but to propose an enriched vocabulary that leads to a differentiated view of the world and helps us to better understand the dynamics of urbanisation as well as to facilitate the exchange of ideas and debates in urban studies that is increasingly multilingual and multinational in character.