

International Workshop

Model Cities: the Construction of Urban Exemplarity

Friday 20 May 2011 ❖ Geography Institute ❖ University of Neuchâtel

City governments, planners and policy-makers are increasingly modeling their urban policies on successful 'best practices' borrowed from elsewhere. Some cities have thus become 'model cities', to such an extent that their name resonates with urban policy-makers all over the world. Expressions such as 'Vancouverism', or the 'Barcelona model', have become global references of exemplarity among urban practitioners and researchers. Yet, while there is a growing body of literature on the circulation and reproduction of urban models in diverse locations, we still have a limited understanding of the ways in which model cities acquire paradigmatic status. The workshop seeks to deepen our grasp of this phenomenon by examining the historical and political processes behind the construction of urban exemplarity, and by analysing the 'careers' and trajectories of model cities.

The workshop is organised by Prof. Ola Söderström, Prof. Francisco Klauser and Dr. Laurence Crot, Geography Institute, University of Neuchâtel.

Attendance of the workshop is free and open to all. For organisational convenience, pre-registration by email would be appreciated (at Secretariat.Geographie@unine.ch)

Programme

08H30 - 09H00	Registration (at workshop venue)
09H00 - 09H20	Welcome and introductory note Prof. Ola Söderström
09H20 - 10H00	Shane Ewen, Leeds Metropolitan University From the Megalopolis to the City of Bits: Approaches Towards the History of the Model City

10H00 - 10H40	Jennifer Robinson, University College London and MOVE Network-UNINE The Topological Spaces of Policy Learning: how Urban Policy Ideas Circulate
10H40 - 10H50	Coffee break
10H50 - 11H30	Kevin Ward, Manchester University Relational Comparisons: the Assembling of Cleveland's Waterfront Plan
11H30 - 12H10	Questions and discussion Moderator: Nick Clarke, University of Southampton
12H15 - 14H15	Lunch
14H20 - 15H00	Andy Thornley, London School of Economics Olympic Model Meets Real Cities
15H00 - 15H40	Emeline Bailly, Université Paris-Est Cross-cultural Urbanism
15H40 - 15H50	Coffee break
15H50 - 16H30	Questions and discussion Moderator: Nick Clarke, University of Southampton
16H30 - 17H00	Concluding roundtable and publications plan

Workshop venue:

Room D65 (2nd floor)

Faculté de Droit

Av. du 1er-Mars 26

2000 Neuchâtel

http://www2.unine.ch/droit/secretariat_et_conseils (No 14, on the map at the bottom of the page)

Abstracts

Shane Ewen, Leeds Metropolitan University

From the Megalopolis to the City of Bits: Approaches Towards the History of the Model City

Scholarly interest in approaches towards the genealogy of urban models has accelerated since the late 1980s and early 1990s. Much of it has focused on inter-disciplinary research done in the fields of urban geography, anthropology, sociology and political science. There is also a growing historical literature, which seeks to explain the continuities in the creation and dissemination of urban models and transfers over the long durée of some 150 years or more. In so doing it is beginning to rival a much earlier period of intensive interest that coalesced between the 1890s and 1930s, wherein social scientists from Max Weber to Patrick Geddes to the Chicago School of Robert Park, Louis Wirth and Ernest Burgess were inspired by the gamut of social problems associated with rapid urban growth and the challenge in creating a normative vision of a future westernized city. This re-emergence of urban studies corresponds to a revival in municipalism in Europe and beyond, which, as shown by Patrick Le Galès (2002), owes much to the growth of the European Union and its efforts to revitalize public interest in cities by fostering greater autonomy for local governments across the continent. With accepted strengths and a comparative advantage over increasingly remote national governments incapable of controlling the localized impacts of globalization, the city as collective actor has revitalized municipal government through a congeries of networked institutions and actors who work together to reinforce local autonomy and distinctiveness.

It is interesting to take a longer term approach to provide a historical perspective to counter-balance the contemporary context of globalization and regionalization studies. The institutionalization of urban networking has formalized mutually co-operative relations between cities across national borders, but many of these are based on older relationships, some of which (city-to-city exchanges, for instance) had a richer historical depth than have hitherto been realised. This paper seeks to chart the origins and history of the ways in which cities and municipal governments have established cross-national connections and relationships through which models of urban governance have been diffused and exchanged. Focusing predominantly on European examples, though drawing on extra-European networks where applicable, it will show how the logic behind such exchanges has always centred around reciprocity. It will also pay attention to the ways in which urban and supranational authorities, such as the International Union of Local Authorities and the Council of Municipalities, started to address the urban variable as a universal condition, the discussion of which increasingly took place across national borders from the first third of the twentieth century onwards.

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Jennifer Robinson, University College London and MOVE Network-UNINE

The topological spaces of policy learning: how urban policy ideas circulate

This paper will explore the spatialities of urban policy circulations, with an emphasis on the ways in which ideas shape policy outcomes in cities. It aims to move beyond a trajectories or network model for thinking about the circuits of global policy, to think about how influence and localisation operate in more topological dimensions. Examples will be drawn from South African cities.

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Kevin Ward, Manchester University

Relational Comparisons: the Assembling of Cleveland's Waterfront Plan

This paper uses the ongoing attempts to redevelop the Cleveland waterfront to reveal the relational comparative geographies that underpin contemporary urban revalorization strategies. It draws on archival papers, semi-structured interviews, and the local grey literature to make three contributions to the existing urban-global studies literature. First, the paper argues that many contemporary waterfront and other similar redevelopment schemes are inherently comparative, with a significant amount of seemingly territorial politics and urban policy making characterized by actors' engagements with places elsewhere. Second, it shows that the framing of urban policy through relational comparisons is an established practice in cities such as Cleveland, and that current redevelopment plans should be understood as informed by previous rounds of relational and territorial policy making. Third, it points to the importance of consultants – as examples of actors of transference -- in shaping not only redevelopment plans but also the framing of the city in relation to other cities.

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Andy Thornley, London School of Economics

Olympic model meets real cities

Under conditions of globalisation city politicians feel the need to ensure their cities compete with others. They become concerned with external image and orient many of their policies to outside interests such as international companies and tourists. As part of this process they enter city competitions such as for the 'European City of Culture' or for hosting sports events. The Olympic Games is probably the most prestigious of such competitions. This paper will explore the degree to which the Olympic bidding process creates a particular framework or 'model' which therefore constrains the actions of host cities. The Barcelona 'model' is often mentioned as good practice. The focus

will be on the 'urban legacy' dimension. The Olympic bidding process sets rules and conditions within which all cities compete yet each host city has its own political cultures, governmental institutions and local community needs. The paper raises some questions about the implications of integrating a fixed framework into the political realities of the city.

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Emeline Bailly, Université Paris Est

Cross-cultural Urbanism

Globalised urbanism imposes itself on the world where there are urban standardised reference points or objects (gated communities, shopping centres, airports, etc). However, alongside these global "models", urban projects also develop from local, inherited influences. Taking this into account, which receptions international models take hold? How do urban spaces develop amidst this fabric of international and local reference points? Using urban regeneration plans for 125th Street in New York and Navab district in Tehran, I will first examine numerous mobilising influences, then draft an urban plan from a cluster of past, imported or imagined references; the aim being to explore how the hybridisation of these multiple views leads to the reinvention of urban spaces and to a "cross-cultural urbanism".