

BOOK REVIEW SECTION

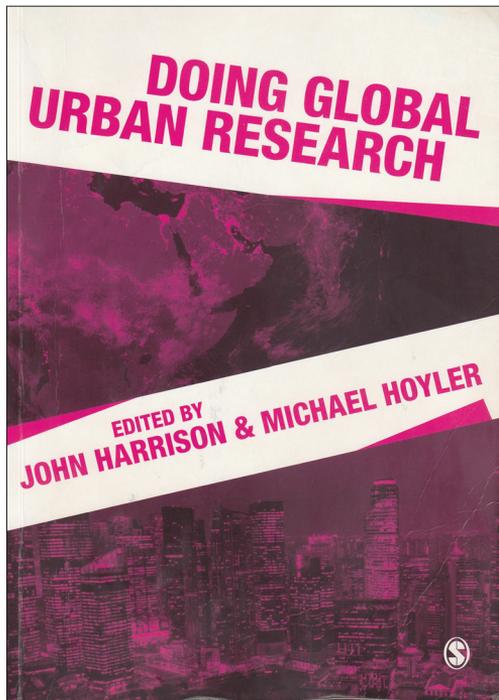
Harrison, J. and Hoyler, M. (eds.): Doing Global Urban Research. London–Thousand Oaks–New Delhi–Singapore, SAGE, 2018. 264 p

Urban world occupies a small percentage of the surface of the Earth but it is the area where the majority of the population and economic activities concentrate. According to “The New Urban Agenda” (UN Habitat, 2016), cities cover no more than 2 per cent of the total land area but host more than 54 per cent of population and contribute to around 70 per cent of the global GDP. At the same time, the urban world absorbs over 60 per cent of global energy resources and it generates more than 70 per cent of greenhouse gas emission and 70 per cent of global waste. It is no wonder, therefore, that urban research enjoys global interest. This popularity has led to the appearance of many related interdisciplinary publications, and nowadays it is extremely difficult to produce a book which contains original material and complements existing studies. Yet, John HARRISON and Michael HOYLER as editors of the book have achieved this goal very well in my opinion.

The volume contains 16 chapters by both emerging and established scholars, which represent different disciplines and attitudes toward urban research. The level and depth of the content varies, but each part follows the same structure. Every chapter begins with an introduction outlining the authors’ motivations. Section One helps then identify the key theories, ideas and concepts that are shaping this area of urban research. Section Two highlights some main challenges of contemporary research, both conceptual and practical. In Section Three, the authors focus on available analytical techniques. Section Four always provides a case study giving insight into research practice. Finally, Section Five contains individual reflections from each author on their experience of doing global urban studies. I find the adoption of this structure in every chapter a good idea, because it makes easy to find the links between various parts of the book, even if they discuss different topics.

The editors of the book provide an introduction in the first chapter (*Making Sense of the Global Urban*). They define the goals and main research questions of the volume and identify the most popular research topics in contemporary urban studies. As they underline, the main inspiration for writing this book were questions from students about how to conduct research on urbanisation around the globe. It turned out that the answer is not easy at all and there is not a single right solution. Hence, they decided to examine more deeply planetary urbanisation, planetary sub-urbanisation and mega-regions. They found that new theories and concepts on global urban research have developed at far faster pace than empirical tools and analytical techniques. Besides, there is a relative lack of works that give insight into the opportunities and challenges, tools, techniques and theories of global urban research. This book was created as an answer for the aforementioned needs.

The second chapter by Nikos KATSIKIS discusses possible ways of *Visualizing the Planetary Urban*. The author stresses that is very difficult to grasp the complexity of urbanisation, as long as it is based on, and constrained by, a particular conceptualisation of the urban world (e.g. morphology based approaches to urban agglomerations, such as cities, metropolises etc., which primarily focus on socio-spatial configuration [growth, expansion, economic and demographic performance] and their mutual relationship [networks, polycentric urban regions]). This



paradoxically leads, according to the author, to that the importance of relations between cities is widely recognised but poorly understood, and too much attention is paid to the ‘unproductive binarism’ (p. 13) of ‘urban’ and ‘rural’ worlds. The most important challenge is that researchers too often concentrate on a kind of ‘meta-geography’ (p. 15–16), the conceptual pre-assumption that the urban can and should be delineated spatially. KATSIKIS aptly underlines that the effort to find spatial boundaries becomes especially elusive for diffusion, the emerging polycentric structure of cities, and densification of infrastructural systems. The author also presents a few interesting examples of visualisation. I consider a promising idea to use density gradients to delineate urban areas, which one can determine by using a combination of particular thresholds developed from census statistics and remote sensing data. Unfortunately, maps, which add a lot to the text, are printed black and white, and in my view some parts of them are not fully readable.

The third chapter *Exploring the World City Network* by Peter J. TAYLOR and Ben DERUDDER relates to the internationally well-known research project conducted within the ‘Globalisation and World Cities Group’ (GaWC). Despite the large number of studies employing this approach, I read the chapter with great interest, especially the part about challenges and techniques of research. The chapter presents the subject in a comprehensive way, so I also recommend it to students who are interested in doing world network research.

Chapter 4 (*Analysing Cities and Networks*) by Zachary P. NEAL also deals with city networks but, unlike in the previous chapter, its author more concentrates on relationships than attributes. NEAL analyses city networks from the perspective of urban transportation networks, and he is particularly interested in how airline transportation links cities to national and global networks. Although this study may not seem to be a novel one at first sight, the author provides very strong arguments for the approach he presents, and he well illustrates its challenges and opportunities.

Chapter 5 (*Examining Global Urban Policy Mobilities*) by Cristina TEMENOS and Kevin WARD differs significantly from the previous chapters as it concentrates on policy mobilities. It discusses two interrelated and overlapping notions. The one focuses on the mobility of policy and associated expertise and knowledge, whereas the second one concentrates on the actors and practices through which policy is rendered mobile and is travelling. The authors highlight four elements of urban policy mobility, which are related to the mobilisation of knowledge, people, materials and politics, and require different research techniques. As a case study, the authors describe a unique project examining the role of transnational advocacy networks

in mobilising an alternative policy model (focusing on activism and public health and drug policies) in cities across the Caribbean, Europe and North America. The main focus of the study is the link between globally operating and interconnected social movements and policy change along with their local implementation, which brings a new perspective to global urban research.

In Chapter 6 (*Tracking the Global Urbanists*), Donald MCNEILL and Andrea POLLIO are “tackling the apparently monolithic power of the global firm” (p. 81). Their approach might be surprising for regarding technology firms as urbanists. Typically, this term is applied to sectors with a direct interest in the creation of the built environment of cities, e.g. property developers, architects, engineers and urban designers. But the authors argue that one has to take into consideration much more actors today, including the economically most competitive ones, the software-driven firms. They focus on two companies, IBM and Uber, scrutinising them as global urbanists which are trying to influence urban policies and markets worldwide. I found noticeable the authors’ survey about how apparently global actors ‘landed’ or got territorialised at different places, with different outcomes, and how they were acting experimentally and simultaneously, reviewing their centralised corporate strategies.

Chapters 7 and 8 address the very important concept of sustainable development. In Chapter 7 (*Engaging with Global Urban Governance*) Michele ACUTO underlines the increasing global importance of urban policymakers, which is reflected by the rise of what he calls global urban governance. ACUTO refers to the Habitat III Conference in October 2016 in Quito, Ecuador, which turned the global public attention to cities as places where a global agenda for sustainable development can start. Cities and networks, notably C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group (C40) and United Cities and Local Governance (UCLG), are on the front stage, with visible performances, commitments and interventions. They can be effective actors, taking part in the dynamics of global governance. In the next chapter on *Evaluating Global Urban Sustainability*, John LAUERMAN suggests that cities and perhaps only cities can save the planet from an environmental catastrophe. He concentrates on cities that act as ‘urban laboratories’, spaces for testing new technologies and design practices to change urban socio-technical systems. In the ‘experimental city’, urban development projects can be used as spaces for innovation. The author employs as case study some cities that hosted the Olympic Games, where experimental architecture, smart urban management and a variety of technologies for minimising the environmental footprint can be introduced.

Chapter 9 (*Scrutinizing Global Mega-Events*) by Christopher GAFFNEY, Sven Daniel WOLF and Martin

MÜLLER describe how mega-events like the Olympic Games or the Football World Cup have become global urban forces. Mega-events meant for many cities which hosted them forced (and fast) reshaping of both urban politics and the built environment. I enjoyed that authors recognise mega-events as global urban phenomena, but also that they reveal why mega-events come along with as many contradictions as globalisation itself.

Chapters 10, 11 and 12 discuss topics like gentrification, right to the city, and suburbanisation, which are not associated at first glance with global urban research. Of course, gentrification and suburbanisation are global processes, but studies usually investigate them on the local level, not within a global urban research framework. Chapter 10 (*Studying Global Gentrification*) by Hyun Bang SHIN is a strong manifesto emphasising that despite business-oriented approaches which try to depict gentrification as a positive urban process, it remains a phenomenon that highlights the looting and destruction of homes and neighbourhoods in order to promote the interests of the rich and powerful. SHIN argues that gentrification research should have displacement along with its causes and consequences as its main focus, not only in the Global North, but also in the Global South.

David WACHSMUTH takes a slightly different approach in Chapter 11 (*Researching the Global Right to the City*) along Henri LEFEBVRE'S well known concept on "Right to the City" (LEFEBVRE, H. 1968). WACHSMUTH stresses that the adjective 'global' can be used as a modifier of the right to the city. The concept is generally interpreted with regard to 'local' struggles over social reproduction and daily life. One has to understand the global right to the city, however, in the context of uneven spatial development: even 'global' processes take concrete forms in highly differentiated ways. The chapter provides a very interesting case study about the housing market in Vancouver, where the spectrum of 'right to the city' kind of housing claims ranges from the right to shelter to the right to property ownership and to the right to property investment.

In Chapter 12 (*Constructing Global Suburbia, One Critical Theory at a Time*) Roger KEIL concentrates on worldwide processes that involve a large variety of phenomena from gated communities to suburban high-rise hubs with integral suburban ways of life.

Chapters 13, 14 and 15 emphasise the need for ethnographic, long-term and historical research within global urban research. In Chapter 13 (*Comparative Ethnographic Urban Research*) Tim BUNNELL stresses the importance of ethnographical approaches in global urban research, for they can attach socio-cultural meanings and human experiences to the results of the burgeoning mix of research on urban studies. Kathrine V. GOUGH presents in Chapter 14 (*Doing*

Longitudinal Urban Research) why research conducted over a longer time period has remarkable advantages over short-range projects, and how they can increase the explanatory power of empirical analysis. GOUGH takes an interesting case study of urban research in Pereira, Columbia, which very convincingly reveals the power of longitudinal studies.

Chapter 15 by Marina DANTAS and Emma HART (*Historical Approaches to Researching the Global Urban*) underline the significance of taking an historical approach in research. I fully agree with the authors that a more sophisticated understanding of human history helps produce novel research findings not only on empires and nations, but also on supra-national communities and networks formed by trade and intellectual exchanges. Historians recognise that the current process of globalisation has its own 'idiosyncrasies', mostly related to technological and financial development characteristic to the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Nonetheless, they reject the assumption that we live in an exceptional era of global connectivity, and highlight patterns in past global contexts that are similar to certain global phenomena of the present day.

The last chapter (*Advancing Global Urban Research*) by the editors summarises the main findings of the book. It gives an overview of the most important research approaches presented in the book and reflections on them.

In fact, the authors of the volume barely make any direct reference to Central and Eastern Europe (for a few exceptions, see p. 44, for example). Still, this book can be really useful for Central and Eastern European researchers, especially if they are seeking inspiration to scrutinise urban complexity in an increasingly globalised world. Moreover, its studies are not only based on qualitative data, which are sometimes either not available or unreliable, but the authors use quantitative and mixed method approaches as well, which give more possibilities to integrate Central and Eastern Europe perspectives, and the predominant research approaches and methods in the region, into global urban research.

The volume is not an easy piece to review and as a reviewer I was a little disappointed at some points that the authors do not give me straight answers to the questions they put, so sometimes I felt confused and was wondering whether scholars are actually doing global urban research. However, after finishing reading the volume, I realised that I should not treat it as a 'normal academic textbook'. The aim of the authors is not to suggest a single viable solution or to give a definite answer to every question, but rather to share with us different approaches and also to stimulate further questions. Hence, this volume is a cohesive and conceptually rich interdisciplinary insight into the emerging field of global urban research.

It is a provocative guide about what has already been done and, which may be even more valuable, it also lets us better see what is possible in terms of scientific analysis. The book is a great reading for students and researchers who think about the urban, and research it, at the global scale. I recommend it especially to those who want to get inspiration and also to get involved in one of the many exciting research themes of global urban research.

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