

“Plotting urbanism: a comparative analysis”

Ozan Karaman

Lindsay Sawyer

Tammy Kit Ping Wong

Pascal Kallenberger

Christian Schmid

© by the author(s)

(* Author(s) Address and/or contacts

Ozan Karaman (ozan.karaman@glasgow.ac.uk)

Lindsay Sawyer (sawyer@arch.ethz.ch)

Tammy Kit Ping Wong (wong@arch.ethz.ch)

Pascal Kallenberger (kallenberger@arch.ethz.ch)

Christian Schmid (schmid@arch.ethz.ch)

Paper presented at the RC21 International Conference on “The Ideal City: between myth and reality. Representations, policies, contradictions and challenges for tomorrow's urban life” Urbino (Italy) 27-29 August 2015.
<http://www.rc21.org/en/conferences/urbino2015/>

This paper presents findings from a collective comparative project.¹ The complexity and scale of contemporary urbanization pose various theoretical challenges. There seems to be a widespread agreement on the need for epistemological and methodological innovation. While a strong case has been made on the value of comparative work across “a world of cities” (Robinson 2011) there are many unresolved methodological questions pertaining to the procedure, criteria, and units of comparison, when comparing across vastly different urban development trajectories and configurations. In addressing this challenge, our project proposes a grounded and experimental approach, in which specific urban processes across a wide range of case studies are analyzed in relation to each other to develop new conceptual tools, and to propose research agendas in global urbanism.

By way of illustrating our conceptual experimentations the paper introduces the concept of ‘plotting’, which refers to the piecemeal, speculative and largely informal development or densification of residential areas. There are existing studies on ‘urbanized villages’ in Shenzhen, and apartmentalization of *gecekondus* in Istanbul. In Howrah old bustee areas have been undergoing dramatic redevelopment and verticalization. In Lagos, plotting is seen as just the ordinary way of urban development in its ever-expanding, and densifying urban fabric. Plotting typically occurs in the presence of multiple claims to land and overlapping tenure regimes. The ambiguity is exploited by the urban poor, building contractors and various authorities in the pursuit of largely individual gain. Here the production of housing for rent plays a key role. With the term plotting we seek to capture both the plot-by-plot logic of development (as different from urban renewal, or wholesale (re)development), and its informal modalities (c.f. Roy 2009). Plotting allows rapid population increase, and usually results in highly dense spaces with low urbanistic qualities. Because of its piecemeal nature and the prioritization of individual gain over public good the resulting living environment is deficient in common facilities, and public spaces.

References

- Robinson, Jennifer. 2011. “Cities in a World of Cities: The Comparative Gesture.” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 35 (1): 1–23.
- Roy, Ananya. 2009. “Why India Cannot Plan Its Cities: Informality, Insurgence and the Idiom of Urbanization.” *Planning Theory* 8 (1): 76–87.

¹ Conducted within the Urban Sociology research module of the Future Cities Laboratory (FCL) at the Singapore-ETH Centre for Global Environmental Sustainability (SEC). The team members are: Christian Schmid, Ozan Karaman, Naomi Hanakata, Pascal Kallenberger, Lindsay Sawyer, Monika Streule, Tammy Kit Ping Wong, Rob Sullivan, and Anne Kockelkorn. Our research examines eight metropolitan areas: Tokyo, Hong Kong/Shenzhen, Kolkata, Istanbul, Lagos, Paris, Mexico City, and Los Angeles.