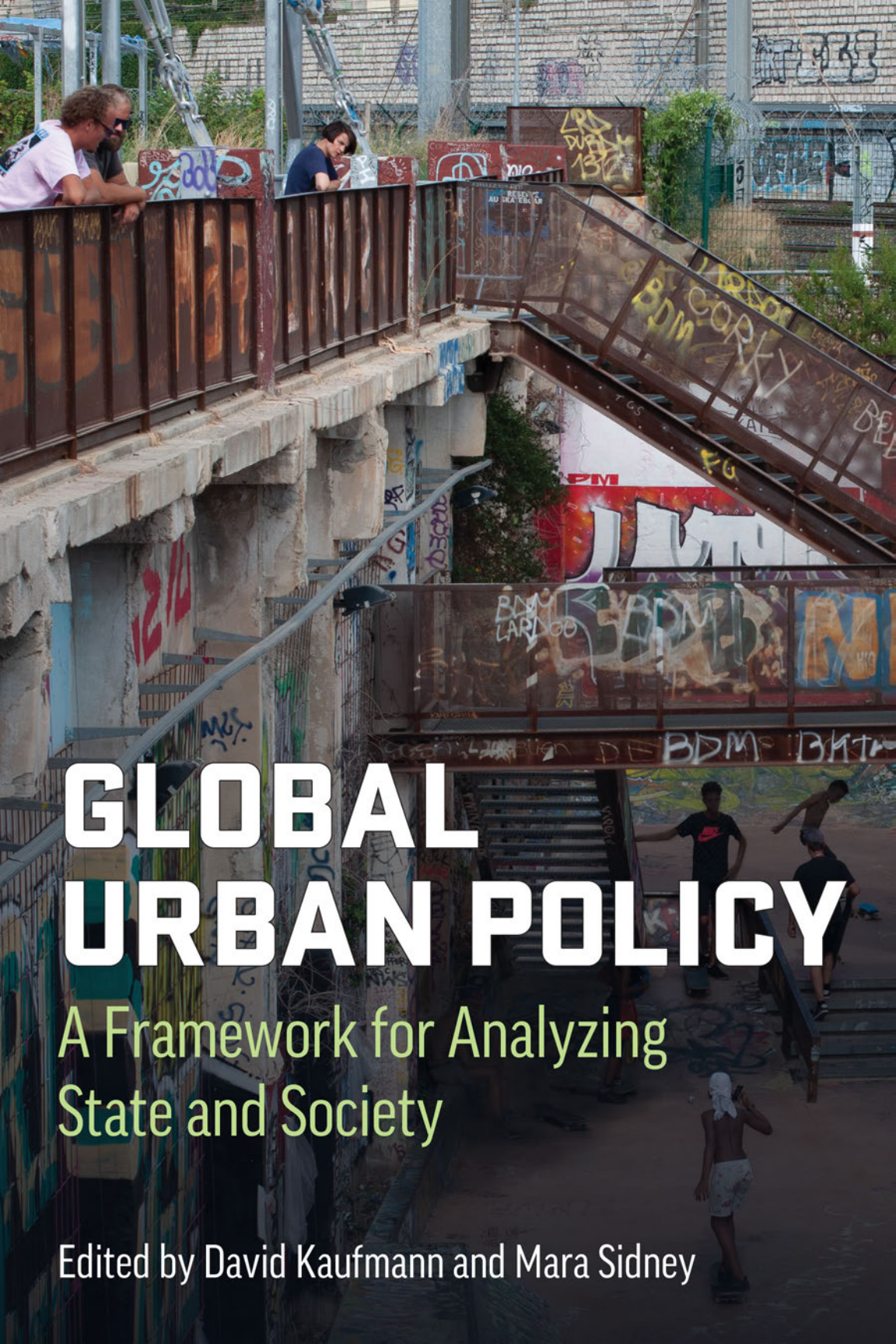




# GLOBAL URBAN POLICY

A Framework for Analyzing  
State and Society

Edited by David Kaufmann and Mara Sidney

## Global Urban Policy



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*A Framework for Analyzing State and Society*

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University of Michigan Press  
Ann Arbor

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## Preface

This book and the type of urban policy analysis we propose have a lot to do with our academic journeys and backgrounds. In this preface, we, as the editors, reflect about our single and mutual journeys and the positionalities that led us to work on this project.

### David's Journey

I am trained as a political scientist, one might say as a mainstream political scientist. I underwent extensive training in political behavior, comparative politics, and international relations as well as in quantitative social science methods. At the same time, I took a minor in anthropology with a focus on political anthropology. These two disciplines study similar phenomena but from two very different starting points, employing distinct epistemological frameworks and methodologies. It felt a bit schizophrenic, but somehow productive for questioning and deconstructing academic knowledge and disciplines, although I didn't realize it at the time.

I have always been interested in tangible policy questions, with a particular focus on migration and asylum policies. After my studies, I worked for half a year for the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). I then applied for a PhD position on a project that combined elements of public policy and geography, focusing on secondary capital cities. In the first year of my PhD, I was reading a lot about urban politics and urban

studies (mostly from geography or urban sociology). This was highly formative. This interdisciplinary, conceptually and methodologically more diverse literature opened up intellectual possibilities. It was a new kind of academic literature for me, but I started to realize that an urban perspective on public policy could integrate different academic views. It was liberating. And it was my intellectual starting point for this conceptual and empirical journey to better understand urban policy.

In early 2018, I reached out to Mara, despite having no prior contact with her. I only knew her from her contributions to the literature, in particular her chapter “Poverty, Inequality and Social Exclusion” in the handbook *Theories of Urban Politics*.<sup>\*</sup> I was looking for an intellectual partner who could help me formulate what urban policy analysis could be. I needed a partner who was also positioned at the intersection of public policy and urban studies. Fortunately, Mara agreed to collaborate with me in organizing a workshop, despite my inexperience as an early-career researcher from Switzerland.

### Mara’s Journey

Like David, I did my doctoral work in political science, and that discipline has been my departmental home for more than twenty years at Rutgers University–Newark. But the disciplinary label masks the interdisciplinary orientation that is my intellectual foundation. From my undergraduate major in journalism to my master’s training in housing studies to the public policy concentration in my doctoral program, I encountered multi- and interdisciplinary research, concepts, and theories. The interdisciplinary Urban Affairs Association is just as much home as the American Political Science Association. My interests and approach were “problem-oriented,” long before I learned that phrase in graduate school; a problem orientation is by necessity interdisciplinary.

David reached out to me with a question to explore: What is “urban” about urban policy analysis? His invitation was intriguing and came at a time when I was specifically looking for more collaboration in my work, and when I was creating a new interdisciplinary doctoral program in Global Urban Studies with sociologist Jamie Lew. I had presented remarks at a Comparative Urban Politics working group event at the 2018 APSA conference, emphasizing the

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<sup>\*</sup>Mara Sidney, “Poverty, Inequality and Social Exclusion,” in *Theories of Urban Politics*, 2nd ed., ed. Jonathan Davies and David Imbroscio (Sage, 2009), 171–87.

importance to me of integrative research, creative comparisons, and normative commitments in urban and policy studies. Convening a workshop to explore David's question sounded interesting, fun, and timely.

### Our Collective Journey and the Urban Policy Project

This collective intellectual journey began in June 2018 with a three-day workshop at the International Public Policy Association Workshops on Public Policy in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. We gathered about twenty international experts in policy studies, urban studies, and planning. Some of them became chapter authors in this book, including Raffaele Bazarli, Maureen Donaghy, Allison Bramwell, Loren Landau, and Annika Hinze.

Following the workshop, we were invited to coedit a symposium, "Towards an Urban Policy Analysis," in *PS: Political Science & Politics*.<sup>\*\*</sup> To prepare this collection of essays, we built on our workshop to specify the features of urban policy analysis. Essentially, we formulated the first principles that we now propose and develop in this book. We propose *seeing like a city* as an important conceptual starting point that allows us to urbanize the field of policy studies. We then conceptualized multilevel governance and the policymaking participation of a wide array and broad diversity of actors as the specific markers of an urban policy analysis.

We continued this agenda by organizing a panel at the 2019 American Political Science Association conference in Washington, DC. As a result of these activities, and motivated by senior colleagues (*thank you*), we started working on this book in 2020. And here we are; this book is our proposal.

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<sup>\*\*</sup>David Kaufmann and Mara Sidney, "Symposium: Toward an Urban Policy Analysis," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 53, no. 1 (2020): 1–32.



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We are grateful to the many people who have supported our project over the years—the scholars who participated in the 2018 workshop, those who contributed to the *PS: Political Science & Politics* symposium, and of course the authors who share their conceptual and empirical knowledge in this book. They were generous with their time, peer-reviewing each other's work and participating in an online symposium and brainstorming session in 2021.

Other scholars encouraged us and expressed enthusiasm along the way, including Susan Clarke (who also reviewed the project for *PS*), Ron Vogel, Meghan Joy, Richard Dilworth, Fritz Sager, Eduardo Marques, and Patrick Le Galès. Three anonymous reviewers helped us improve the manuscript.

Fritz Sager has been David's academic mentor and supporter from day one, providing him with the inspiration, freedom, and trust to combine urban politics and public policy in his doctoral work and beyond. Susan Clarke was Mara's dissertation advisor and continued for two decades to offer feedback, advice, and friendship to her and to so many urban scholars, including many whose work is featured here. She has generously demonstrated the value and the joy of building intellectual community.

Mala Walz at ETH Zürich helped to organize and keep track of the first version of this book manuscript, while Mona Gairing at ETH Zürich helped with the final stages of copy editing and page proofs. Joshua McWhirter, Gilbert Nuwagira, Adam Straub, and Tamara Velasquez Leiferman at Rutgers–Newark's Global Urban Studies doctoral program provided editorial and research assistance.

Elizabeth Demers, our first editor at the University of Michigan Press, and Madison Allums managed the review and production process, along with other staff, including Haley Winkle, Delilah McCrea, Danielle Coty-Fattal, Scott Ham, Daniel Otis, Kevin Rennells, and Shiraz Abdullahi Gallab. Thanks to Devon Thomas for creating the index. We know that we are forgetting important individuals who have helped us along the way over the past nearly eight years. We apologize for our oversight and are grateful to this generous and broad community.

# Introduction





## A New Framework for the Analysis of Urban Policy

David Kaufmann and Mara Sidney

In our urban and urbanizing world, cities everywhere are designing and implementing policies of global importance that affect millions of people. Like other public policies, urban policies reflect balances and asymmetries of power, political conflicts, and diverging problem definitions; they reshape social, material, economic, and ecological environments. Urban policies may advance equality, decarbonization, and democratization, addressing problems relevant to many people around the world. In other instances, they (re)produce inequality by following the interests of the powerful and allowing renters to extract value from the city, its land, and its residents. Therefore, when we assess their prospects for contributing to a just, democratic, and sustainable future, we find that the policies that cities enact can be deeply ambivalent (Boudreau 2016; Enright and Rossi 2018; Kaufmann and Sidney 2020).

In this book, we offer ideas about how to study urban policies, and thus how an urban policy analysis could be conceptualized and carried out. In its chapters, urban scholars examine the politics of policies, urban policymaking processes, and policy implementation in cities around the world. With these studies, and informed by urban studies literature, we offer direction for urban policy analysis and develop an adaptable conceptual framework with a global orientation.

Our conceptual framework relies on the premise that if we take the *urban* component of urban policy analysis seriously, we should *see like a city*. This means that we understand the urban as a distinctive political ontology and as a set of contemporary conditions with global significance. To *see like a city* has consequences for how we conceptualize the state and its operations. We propose both to decenter the role of the state when researching urban policy-making, and to consider the likelihood of multiple rather than singular state actions. We think about the state as one among many policymakers, and about state action as originating in multiple locations across scales. Consequently, we also consider a wide diversity of actors and organizations to be relevant in urban policy processes. In this book, contributing authors study this diversity of actors, from the usual suspects (government officials, corporate and business actors, nongovernmental organizations, foundations, neighborhood organizations, etc.) to everyday, marginalized, and sometimes seemingly non-political actors such as immigrants, squatters, criminals, or spiritual leaders. An urban policy analysis studies these actors, their relationships, their policy perceptions, their varying resources, and the strategies they use to shape urban policy.

In this introduction, we set out our project and our premises and reflect on the process and conceptual underpinnings of an urban policy analysis developed over time and in conversation with urban scholars. We explain why we conceptualize urban policy as a global phenomenon, and we describe a conceptual framework that we see as fruitful for analyzing urban policy with a global orientation.

### The Global Nature and Reach of Urban Policy

We can point to numerous examples that illustrate the global reach of urban policy. Cities worldwide, from Los Angeles to Seoul, have worked to advance ambitious plans to curb CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in the face of deadlock at the international level; such policies sometimes directly challenge national policies (Bulkeley 2013; Cho 2019; Hughes 2019). In Europe, several cities designed proactive asylum policies that differed from the European asylum policy regime during the so-called “refugee crises” in 2015–16 (Bazurli and Kaufmann 2022; Özdemir 2022). In the United States, officials in “sanctuary cities” have refused to cooperate with national immigration enforcement agencies (Gonzalez, Collingwood, and El-Khatib 2019). Cities have been at the forefront of harm-reduction strategies, helping to pioneer heroin maintenance treatments

and providing clean syringes in the 1990s (Kübler and Wälti 2001), and they enacted living-wage ordinances responding to low-wage worker organizations (Milkman, Bloom, and Narro 2010; Joy and Vogel 2021). São Paulo is gradually and incrementally advancing redistributive policies and social participation in urban development, despite setbacks, disputes, and pervasive sociospatial inequalities (Marques 2021). In Latin American cities such as Curitiba, La Paz–El Alto, and Bogotá, new integrated transport systems such as bus rapid transit or cable cars have been built (e.g., Hidalgo and Gutiérrez 2013). Local economic development experiments have spread in European cities from Naples to A Coruña and Preston, with the goal of democratizing economic production and channeling economic development through local nonprofit networks (Russell 2019; Thompson 2021). In Berlin, the water infrastructure has been largely remunicipalized (Becker et al. 2015), and a local referendum called for remunicipalization of large segments of the housing stock (Kusiak 2024). Participatory budgeting, the practice of opening part of a municipal budget to citizen input, was adopted in Porto Alegre and diffused to other cities in Brazil and throughout Latin America, as well as to cities in other world regions, including New York, Paris, and Chengdu (Baioocchi 2005; Wampler 2010; Yi 2019).

These examples represent a partial list of urban policies. They refer exclusively to local government policies, and to policies with which we have become familiar. The list, therefore, could be expanded to include hundreds of political and policy alternatives developed and implemented by social movements, neighborhood collectives, and opposition parties in cities worldwide. And unsurprisingly, while many of these policies originated from bold progressive ideas, their outcomes are mixed when evaluated based on their contributions to a just, democratic, and sustainable urban future.

Given the importance of cities for global economic and societal relations, the international community of scholars and policymakers alike acknowledge cities as central global policy actors (e.g., Parnell 2016). This strengthened role of cities is also reflected in current international policy agendas. All major global sustainability and climate-change frameworks (e.g., the Sustainable Development Goals [SDGs], the New Urban Agenda of Habitat III, or the Paris Agreement) stress cities' central role in global sustainable development and global policymaking (Watson 2016). The international discourse has shifted from perceiving cities as the main drivers of environmental destruction and social inequality, to appreciating cities as sites of possibilities for more sustainable and just futures (Parnell 2016; Angelo and Wachsmuth 2020). These progressive policy actions frequently have challenged national and suprana-

tional governments, for example by not aligning with migration control efforts or by contradicting market-economic orders (i.e., through support of irregular migrants or alternative economic agendas) (Wittwer et al. 2023).

Yet, the set of policies cities enact is deeply ambivalent. Cities adapt to and comply with the needs and interests of global capital, allow corporations and rentiers to extract value from the city, and implement policies that slight the well-being of everyday residents, especially the most vulnerable. Cities are not saving the planet, nor are they eradicating global injustices (Angelo and Wachsmuth 2020). The above-mentioned policy examples might have had progressive intentions, but some of them became diluted into “best practices” detached from their place-based histories and the original radical ideas of their creators. Some of these policies have been mobilized and adapted by elites in global circulations of urban policy discourse and solutions (Peck and Theodore 2015; Montero and Baiocchi 2022). Thus, any analysis of urban policy and politics must consider these ambiguities and the complex global roles of cities, which are hardly surprising given the complexity of states and the multiplicity of state actions.

We use the adjective *global* in the title of this book. We do not call urban policies global only because of the global importance of urban policymaking or because we live in a so-called urban age (as about 56% of the global population lives in cities [UN Habitat 2022, 9–10]). We also do not want to suggest that our book represents *the* global set of policies or the only ideas about how to conduct an urban policy analysis. We refer to *global* urban policy because, like other urban scholars, we perceive the urban as a social, economic, and political condition of global relevance (Boudreau 2016), and as both a local and a global way of life (Magnusson 2014). Capitalist accumulation and circulation, along with uneven development—once primarily urban conditions—have accelerated and become global phenomena connecting centers and peripheries, a situation also described as “extended urbanization” (Monte Mór 2004; Castriota and Tonucci 2018) or “planetary urbanization” (e.g., Brenner and Schmid 2012). Urban lifestyles, habits, and philosophies are present, shared, and discussed around the world (Boudreau 2016). Urban policies and policy discourses also travel the globe. For example, leaders in Porto Alegre, Brazil, and Mexico City discuss and assist mayors in Chicago and New York; mayors act in concert on the world stage, through organizations such as C40; and international organizations such as the World Bank act as disseminators of urban policies through their loan requirements (Peck and Theodore 2015; Stren and Friendly 2019). At the same time, local opposition and advocacy movements connect with one another, and claims of “rights to the city” are

made locally but also in tandem with movements worldwide (Purcell 2014; Huchzermeyer 2018; Kaufmann and Strebel 2021). These developments mean that we must talk about the *global* phenomenon of urban policy.

The global penetration of urbanization and capitalism does not mean that urban policies are necessarily converging, but rather that global discourse, structural economic pressures, and networks are interdependent and can be simultaneously present in different cities around the world. Local actors—with locally anchored traditions, path-dependent institutions, and place-based resources—navigate, negotiate, and translate these broader developments as they codevelop policies (e.g., Marques 2023). The global nature of urban policies therefore emerges from the rescaling of global processes and the interdependencies and relations of multiple actors, including politicians, public administrators, corporations, residents, migrant diasporas, student networks, NGOs, and criminal organizations, among others.

### Conflicts and the Political Foundations of Urban Policy Analysis

Given the prevalence of urbanization across the globe, we propose that it is time to better conceptualize urban policy analysis, because an urban lens on policy processes allows us to understand contemporary societal transformations and their surrounding conflicts. In an edited symposium, we suggested that

cities are “burning glasses” of our society that show societal and technological transformations most clearly in their speed, intensity, and relentlessness; they reveal everyday conflicts over exchange and use value and the diversity of actors and groups that try to exert authority in policy making. An analysis of cities, therefore, is relevant for more broadly understanding processes in society at large. (Kaufmann and Sidney 2020, 3)

These societal, economic, and technological transformations and disruptions take physical form in cities and bring along confrontations of high contemporary relevance: between public and private property; power and justice; participation and exclusion; wealth and poverty; and emerging technology and existing economic, social, and political structures. Given the density of people and infrastructure, problems and emergencies in cities have acutely felt societal and economic impacts. Therefore, urban problems and

the surrounding conflicts and policy processes are essential objects of study; they allow us to understand political and policy processes more generally, and highlight dimensions of political life that are more visible within cities but that also operate at other scales.

As many authors in this book point out, struggle over land is often at the heart of urban conflicts. At least half of our chapters centrally examine policies relating to housing and urban development, and many others involve these issues indirectly. Diverse actors with diverse visions for how land should and could be used, and with competing claims on the land, are involved in these uneven conflicts. The most marginalized residents tend to lose these fights, with severe consequences for their lives and futures (see in this volume, Hinze and Smith; Beveridge and Koch; Paller; Wong; and Zhang). This is unfortunately neither a new nor a surprising finding, as we know that the exchange value of land usually trumps its use value in urban policymaking (e.g., Logan and Molotch 1987).

Like other disease outbreaks over time, which tend to happen in cities because of their density and embeddedness in global relationships, the COVID-19 pandemic amplified preexisting sociospatial urban inequalities (Ali and Keil 2008). While some people were able to work from home, others had to step out and step up, becoming what we now call “essential” workers (Kabeer et al. 2021). Intersectional burdens, expressed in the overlapping of race, class, and gender, were reproduced in the pandemic as essential care and maintenance work fell disproportionately on the shoulders of women, ethnic minorities, and migrants (Bahn et al. 2020; Hu 2020; Ho and Maddrell 2021).

Residents of informal settlements had to cope with the pandemic in overcrowded situations with inadequate access to water and sanitation and limited infrastructure and services. This environment made following guidelines and protective measures such as social distancing and frequent handwashing extremely difficult (UN Habitat 2020; Zhang, this volume). In addition to a higher risk of infection, these communities have suffered severe economic hardship and police repression. The chapter by Yue Zhang (this volume) describes path-dependent government responses to the pandemic that resemble and reinforce their pre-pandemic policies and governance approaches to informal settlements. In New York City, lifting the pandemic-related eviction moratorium demonstrates the need for more fundamental policies and visions of housing justice beyond crisis governance (see Wong, this volume). The chapter by Bazurli and Verhoeven (this volume) describes how the situation of the most vulnerable urban populations deteriorated significantly during the pandemic in Barcelona, as documented by the sharp increase in unhoused individuals and unaccompanied minors without assistance (e.g., Zapata-

Barrero 2024). Barcelona's proactive practice of registering as many residents as possible, regardless of legal status or housing situation, served as a lifeline for the city's most marginalized populations during the pandemic. However, similar to the eviction moratorium in New York City, the current city government has put this practice into question since 2024, which emphasizes the importance of developing new and stable forms of immigrant solidarity and activism (Özdemir 2024).

Given these problems and conflicts, the urban arena can also be a place of resistance, emancipation, and democracy. Cities provide resources for organizing, claim-making, and involvement in urban policy processes, and thus become sites of struggle and political agency (Beveridge and Koch, this volume). Protest movements often arise in cities and are globally connected to similar movements. Examples include Occupy Wall Street, Black Lives Matter, immigrant rights movements, climate strikes, and movements against the negative impacts of tourism.

### Why an Urban Policy Analysis?

Despite the global reach and importance of urban policy and its surrounding conflicts, a specifically *urban* policy analysis has not yet emerged. This book demonstrates how an urban policy analysis could be conceptualized. Rather than seeing the urban exclusively as the lowest level within a hierarchical arrangement of state jurisdictions, or as a scale nested within or below "larger" scales, we develop our approach to urban policy analysis from the premise that "the urban" is a set of contemporary conditions that have global significance. We draw on the theoretical developments of Magnusson (2011) and Boudreau (2016), among others, to propose a process for urban policy analysis. That is, if we *see like a city*, we are attuned to the presence of diversity, complexity, chaos, flexibility, and ongoing change.

The lens of *seeing like a city* emerged in urban scholarship partly in response to James Scott's historical analysis of the failures of *seeing like a state* (1988). In his seminal book *Seeing Like a State* (Scott 1988), Scott detailed the human costs of state policies premised on standardizing and simplifying societies and problems. Simplification and standardization, he found, made populations, land, and problems legible in order to count, measure, monitor, control, and extract resources. Scott argued that high-modernist and large-scale national state interventions (such as collectivized agricultural reform, compulsory villagization, and new capital-city design and construction) ignored "the indis-



pensable role of practical knowledge, informal processes, and improvisation in the face of unpredictability” (Scott 1988, 6).

With their admonition to *see like a city*, instead of *like a state*, urban scholars identified these undervalued, underrecognized characteristics as quintessential to urban spaces, urbanization, and urbanism (e.g., Amin and Thrift 2017; Boudreau 2016; Magnusson 2011; Valverde 2011). That is, knowledge-in-practice shapes everyday residents’ problem-solving efforts; the informal coexists with formal actions and decisions, with varying interactions and impacts; and the continuing unfolding of circumstances provokes actors to improvise and requires a provisional, contextual orientation to urban policy analysis. These elements point to an analysis that includes a wide range of potential actors, and a wide range of policy-relevant actions that may or may not originate from the state.

Starting with the premise *to see like a city*, we focus our proposed framework for urban policy analysis on questions about the state’s role and the diversity of actors that, we suggest, should be asked when researching urban policy. The book’s conceptual framework could be summarized like this:

**Premise:** *To see like a city*—i.e., to understand the city as a distinctive political ontology and as a set of contemporary conditions with global significance

**Research question 1:** *Where is the state in urban policy processes, and how does it operate?*

**Research question 2:** *Who are the actors in urban policy processes, and what are their perceptions, resources, and relationships?*

We believe that this premise and these questions together can frame a distinctly urban understanding of public policy. We thereby propose to build and link theories, concepts, and empirical accounts stemming from urban studies, policy studies, and urban politics toward the development of an urban policy analysis framework.

Rather than adapting theories and concepts developed for the study of public policy writ large, our book aims to build an *urban* policy analysis from the ground up. That is, we argue for *urbanizing* the study of public policies and *seeing like a city*, decentering the state within public policy analysis and building theoretical foundations for urban policy research directly from urban empirical and theoretical work.

### Conceptualizing “Urban”

We are inspired by theoretical accounts of urban studies that propose the urban to be not only a specific site, scale, or administrative entity, but also a distinct political ontology that allows us to understand and appreciate the complexity, unpredictability, and “thrown-togetherness” of everyday political life (Magnusson 2011; Boudreau 2016; Amin and Thrift 2017; Darling 2021). In this line of thinking, Julie-Anne Boudreau (2016, 43) draws on earlier urban theory to describe the political relevance of urban life as marked by a constant and overwhelming condition of perturbation:

This discourse on perturbation has long served to describe urban life [. . .]: unpredictability, ephemerality, newness, fluid identities, over-saturation or overstimulation. The multiple temporalities and rhythms of urban life affect the political process in many ways.

Although “urban” can be understood as a characteristic, or set of dimensions, marking a context, it does more than designate a site: It indicates a mode of life. An urban mode of life is one marked by diversity, complexity, chaos, flexibility, and ongoing change. This way of thinking about “urban” has implications for policy analysis.

We suggest that an urban policy analysis invites scholars *to see like a city*. This means that scholars notice and bring attention to a wide variety of experiences and processes that may be shaping policy, and employ a broad definition of what constitutes policy. *To see like a city*, as a policy analyst, thus means an orientation that expects complex, changing, and place-based relationships that exist within a complex and chaotic society, one that incorporates space into policy analysis, to see which issues are addressed, how they are addressed, and how they are socially constructed. It is also attentive to how diverse actors—including everyday and marginalized, less-visible actors—identify and articulate policy problems, how and whether they engage the state, and whether the state takes notice. State actors may not be the center of the analysis, but they might be intentionally, institutionally, or inadvertently supporting or hindering actors in processes initiated within and evolving from society rather than directly from the state. In a sense, *seeing like a city* invites a society-centered and place-based analysis that examines the state alongside other institutions, actors, and arenas.

Although urban policy analysis will probably identify patterns, it is not expected that these patterns would necessarily hold firmly across time and place: The possibilities of stability, persistence, and generalization are empirical questions. That is, an urban policy analysis is understood as open-ended, ongoing, and subject to change, like the urban itself.

### Where Are the States? How Do They Operate?

The fields of policy analysis and urban politics are embedded within the discipline of political science, which is biased toward considering as political only state actions, and individual or group interactions with the state (Kaufmann and Sidney 2024). While most public policy theories derive from analysis of the national state, urban politics research tends to focus on the local state, its government entities, its relations with states at other scales, and state-sponsored processes. Transformative urban governance and policymaking are mostly imagined through the state—that is, through the legitimation, power, and capacities of state institutions. Our book challenges this state focus. The book contributes to an urbanization of the fields of political science and public policy by relaxing the implicit or explicit focus on the state and its institutions, or what is called “decentering the state.”

Decentering the state involves, first, recognition of the multiple rather than unitary state, and second, recognition that elements of the state may not be centrally involved in all instances of urban policymaking, or in all aspects of urbanization. We thus argue that precision is needed in urban policy analysis to locate which parts of which states are present and how, with the expectation that different parts of different states will operate jurisdictionally at different scales and places in a site of study. Urban policy analysis also involves looking for, identifying, and analyzing individual and group actions that address urban problems without making claims on the state, or even actively avoiding the state. This is what scholars variously call “self-governance,” “informality,” or “everyday politics.” Such a decentered view of policymaking is conceptualizing power as lacking any center (Foucault 1982; Torfing 2009), and thus policymaking power appears within, but also beyond, the state and its action (Bevir 2022). This means that there is no absolute distinction among the roles of constructed entities such as the state, society, or the market, nor is the state the unique or central authority tasked with or capable of steering and guiding our future.

### Locating Multiple States

When analyzing urban policy, researchers need to discover where and how state actors, institutions, and agencies operate. Drawing on conceptions and theories of governance and multilevel governance, as well as notions of statecraft, this process would work from the possibility that networks of government and nonstate actors operate across multiple scales without the presence of a single structuring authority (Hooghe and Marks 2003). Cities tend to be embedded in complex institutional entanglements, and actors based in cities often operate beyond city boundaries. Urban policymaking therefore may emerge from interactions between state and nonstate actors operating at multiple scales. Policies issued at the urban scale are likely to be the product of deliberations, advocacy, and compromise among actors from multiple scales and spaces, both state and nonstate (e.g., Marques 2021).

Conceptualizing the state as multiple and present, but not always central, allows scholars to consider that a range of channels or opportunity structures exist to engage with the state. As Graham (2020) puts it with her concept of the differentiated state, groups of people within the same location, concerned about the same policy issues or problems, may experience literally different states. She examines how, in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy in New York City, residents living in social housing had to make claims for repairs and emergency assistance on the national government's social housing agency in tandem with the city's social housing authority, whereas homeownership residents made claims on the city government and local elected officials.

In general, state-sponsored meetings and processes may intentionally or inadvertently include some organized political groups and exclude others, who then create their own spaces of participation (Hofer and Kaufmann 2022). This is reflected in the distinction between state-sponsored *invited* spaces and the more ad hoc, informal, and even insurgent and counter-hegemonic *popular* spaces of participation (Cornwall 2004). Insurgent participatory practices can also be woven into state spaces of participation—for example, through protest or by using formal spaces to stage and express dissent—and by doing so, delay state action on urban policymaking (Miraftab 2004; Hilbrandt 2017).

The concept of statecraft draws attention to states as works in progress (Cirolia and Harber 2022). States are considered both as tools and objects of reform simultaneously; multiple actors “within and without the state, in frequently shifting configurations, are all working on the state at once” (Cirolia and Harber 2022, 2437). Identifying these configurations and examining the

policies emerging from them, along with their implementation and/or ongoing contestation, is part of the process of urban policy analysis.

### *Self-Governance and Urban Informality*

Policymaking also occurs at the margins of the state, separate from the state, and without direct interaction between city residents and state actors (Beveridge and Koch 2023). This is sometimes described as informality, self-governance, popular urbanization (Streule et al. 2020), or self-provisioning (Kinder 2016). Policymaking can occur in the gaps between state rules and the capacity or willingness to enforce them. The ever-looming possibility of state action creates uncertainty for those within these spaces or sectors (Tucker and Devlin 2019); the specter of the state dismantling an “informal” unregulated, and therefore “illegal,” space is ever present (Marx and Kelling 2019; Tucker and Devlin 2019).

For example, informal policymaking practices arise in spaces where the state has withdrawn or chooses not to act, such as informal settlements where people claim land and build their homes and businesses without government regulation or infrastructure, though these sometimes follow. In her work on Calcutta, Roy (2002) shows that formalization processes of squatter settlements challenge the fragile prevailing order and can lead to conflicts, given various competing property claims. These conflicts can end by consolidating and formalizing gender, class, and ethnic divisions and hierarchies. Kinder’s (2016) study of Detroit shows how residents respond to disinvestment by intervening in the devalued landscapes around their homes, sometimes interacting with formal organizations and government agencies, and sometimes not. Informality thus arises from continuous processes of state-society negotiation or contestation in the production of order (Hilbrandt et al. 2017, 947). Urban studies scholars dismiss the idea that informal spaces are disordered, finding systems and processes in place that residents develop to meet their needs for work and housing (such as Zhang, this vol.; Auerbach and Thachil 2023).

Sometimes, alternative or informal policymaking and problem-solving processes emerge because of limited state capacity. Landau and Bule write in their chapter that policy analyses of sub-Saharan African cities

raise epistemological, ethical, and practical challenges around the governance of space, rights, and representation[. . . ] [T]he range of alternative modes of local and trans-local regulation at work in African cities often mean[s] states are only of secondary, practical concern. [. . . ] Like

cities elsewhere in the global south, urban population's demographic dynamism often outstrips the capacity or interests of state regulators.

All these self-governed or informal activities can be analyzed in relation to the state. Koch and Beveridge (this volume) conceptualize everyday policymaking by societal actors as occurring in ambiguous spaces and in negotiations and tactics with, through, and without the state. Thus, urban policymaking practices can often be found in so-called urban interstices: the ambiguous spaces between visibility and invisibility, formality and informality, that offer strategic opportunities but also dangers for activism (Swerts 2017; Wong, this volume). Distance from the state might also be desired by activists and social collectives, given that practices of radical urban democracy need such interstitial separation from the multiple operations of states (Beveridge and Koch 2023).

Although studies of informality and everyday politics may have originated as means to understand cities in the Global South, research makes clear that, like other sites and forms of policymaking, these occur in cities around the world (e.g., Miraftab 2016; Roy 2005; Haid and Hilbrandt 2019). The Southern urban studies strand of literature (e.g., Robinson 2006; Roy 2005, 2016) helps us, as scholars born and raised in Switzerland and the United States, better understand the nuanced, shifting, and temporary relations and processes of self-governance and state actions (and inactions) to analyze urban political processes across the world.

### **Diverse and Shifting Actors in Urban Policy Processes**

As discussed, the call to decenter the state implies that researchers must consider multiple actors and their relationships when analyzing urban policy. Urban governance and urban political economy studies highlight a range of government and nongovernment actors interacting to produce and implement urban policy. More recently, studies of everyday politics and Southern urban studies expand the scope of analysis by examining how marginalized residents and social groups considered “nonpolitical” also play a role in urban policy.

### ***Drawing from Governance and Political Economy Research***

Classical studies in the urban politics literature (e.g., Molotch 1976; Stone 1989) studied the interaction between local governments, local business actors, and, a bit more recently, civil-society organizations. These political-

economic perspectives on urban governance were influential in questioning the primacy of (local) state actors, and they critically examined and exposed urban business actors as an important force in governing cities. The type of business actors that scholars identified as relevant for urban coalitions also shifted and expanded. More recent urban governance studies have emphasized that stable business-government coalitions are no longer the norm in the US postindustrial city, while there is an emergence of the “ed and med” sector, NGOs, and philanthropic foundations in urban governance (Stone 2015; Reckhow et al. 2020). Yet business still has visible footholds in cities, as amplified by city centers developing innovation and tech hubs, prioritizing tourism, and fostering development of luxury housing and shopping districts. The business or corporate sectors remain powerful forces in urban politics, but have grown more dynamic, fluid, heterogenous, and unstable compared to their roles in the US industrial city (e.g., the role of CEOs of local corporations as described in Atlanta by Hunter 1953 and Stone 1989). Today, multinational corporations often aggressively buy and develop city land, and extract assets from local property and infrastructure through processes of financialization (Slater 2017; Christophers 2022). They also engage in their own visioning, urban planning, and development processes, such as Alphabet Inc.’s plan to redevelop Toronto’s waterfront into a techno-utopian city district (Carr and Hesse 2020).

Our book examines the shifting, heterogeneous, and sometimes indirect influence of business actors in urban policymaking. Hinze and Smith (this volume) focus on developers and other private actors that seek to profit from urban development in Chicago and Berlin. Bramwell (this volume) shows that businesses are sometimes not directly involved in shaping policy, even in policy agendas that directly relate to their interests. Corporate actors may also try to exert influence through deceptive strategies. For example, they may create what seem to be grassroots organizations to further their goals, making use of the place-based legitimacy of local residents; they also may operate through philanthropic foundations sponsored by individual CEOs (Hinze and Smith, this volume; Reckhow et al. 2020).

Nonprofit actors such as community-based organizations, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), foundations, and other civil-society organizations have emerged as key governance forces. These civil-society organizations can be important partners for local governments, especially in policy fields in which conflicts between the urban and supralocal levels of government occur, such as environmental and migration policy (Bazurli and Verhoeven, this volume). The influence of nonstate actors is especially visible in cities like

Detroit or Flint that suffer from public-sector austerity and a concomitant reduced government capacity. A type of “nonprofit governance” has emerged in these cities, where foundations and philanthropies have stepped in to guide urban policy, sometimes with limited input from elected officials or residents (Reckhow et al. 2020; Wilson, this volume). Like the business sector, non-profit actors encompass a wide range of organizations with varying goals and levels of resources, such that detailed analysis is needed of which types of NGOs, foundations, and community organizations can participate, sustain participation, and have influence (Clarke 2017).

Local party organizations can also play an important role in policy formulation and implementation. For example, Zhang (this volume) examines the differential influence of party organizations in urban China and India. Auerbach and Thachil (2023) highlight the case of local brokers in urban India who interact with citywide party machines to demand development and provision of services for their settlement. Interesting, also, is the context of southern European cities in which social movements have started to organize themselves into parties and influence urban policymaking through institutionalized political channels, even winning major offices, as in the well-known example of Barcelona en Comú and its leader Ada Colau (Bazurli 2019). A bit different example is the political rise of Joko Widodo, who grew up in an informal settlement, became mayor of Surakarta (2005–2012), governor of Jakarta (2012–14), and Indonesian president (2014–24). He was never part of the Indonesian traditional political elites, and party organizations or political movements can only partially explain his rise. His politics seem to rest on the importance of, and a political agenda around, Indonesian urbanization and the Jakarta-centric nature of Indonesian media and politics (Lee 2021).

### *Everyday Actors in Urban Policy Processes*

We argue for a deliberate expansion and diversification of the actors and practices that the public policy and urban politics literature normally consider to be relevant to policy. While urban governance studies have developed to account for arrangements between state and what we might call *elite* nonstate actors (as described above), fewer studies and theories consider the political activities and experiences of everyday and marginalized actors in urban policy. Beyond the worlds of elite actors, a much wider set of urban experiences matters for urban policymaking and for shaping the city. Indeed, the urban site allows—or demands—that urban-policy research be attentive to the grassroots level and to everyday political actions. Everyday, marginalized, and seemingly



nonpolitical actors such as undocumented immigrants, squatters, sex workers, caregivers, criminals, spiritual leaders, and others leave a mark on urban policy alongside more powerful actors.

Examining marginalized actors in urban policymaking shows how they are able to shape policy processes through creative modes of political activism, and allows us to more fully account for urban power dynamics and different urban political experiences (e.g., Jones-Correa and Wong 2015; Michener 2019; Wong, this volume). Decentering urban elite actors encourages attention to actors and actions long placed at the periphery of urban political studies:

In urban studies research, a focus on elite politics has eclipsed the voices of those in the margins who hold situated knowledge and obscured a kind of grassroots politics capable of shifting the power structure in cities. To conceive of the peripheries as grassroots spaces of refusal, resistance, and reclamation makes legible alternative modes of politics that are rooted in the material conditions and freedom dreams of those most impacted by chronic disinvestment and urban dispossession. (Wong, this volume)

Thus, a common thread in several chapters is to reveal the policymaking agency in everyday forms of politics by historically marginalized populations (along race, class, gender, and other lines of discrimination) to counter the hegemony of formal political processes in so much of political science and public-policy literature.

Housing is one policy field in which everyday and marginalized residents are particularly active, given the challenges to access and affordability for many people worldwide. Evictions and other threats of displacement have the potential to politicize a wide range of everyday residents. Adequate housing is a basic right, and a precondition for sustaining personal life, work, leisure, and other daily activities (Madden and Marcuse 2016). For-profit urban development and real estate speculation threaten to uproot residents and disrupt their life-sustaining social and economic networks. Centrally located low-income neighborhoods offer the highest profit margins, and so members of these communities are often forced to become housing activists. “This intersection of poverty, inequality, and housing precarity is one of the primary sources of vulnerability for urban immigrant communities but there has been limited research that prioritizes these areas of focus” (Wong, this volume). Beveridge and Koch (this volume) study diverse political activities of hous-

ing activists in Berlin with the goal to remunicipalize parts of Berlin's housing stock. Wong (this volume) accompanies immigrant women activists in Chinatown who fight for their communities and against multimillion-dollar housing developments.

Other, less researched actors in urban policy include spiritual leaders, chiefs and traditional leaders, and criminal organizations. Landau and Bule (this volume) highlight that in "South Africa and Kenya, those with the most de facto power in regulating urban spaces are often not municipal officials but self or community appointed leaders." Traditional leaders and chiefs are mostly associated with rural areas, yet expanding urban areas may come to encompass the people and land of traditional communities. Some of these leaders are very influential, especially those who own land and profit from urban development (Paller, this volume). Criminal organizations can control whole urban neighborhoods and act as self-appointed community leaders (Moncada, this volume). When they do not primarily rely on violence, their basis of authority and influence is often economic or social, not formally political (see Landau 2015). Religious organizations and spiritual leaders also take up important functions in the secular urban realm. Landau and Bule (this volume) remind us that almost all the migrants they study across Africa were part of religious organizations. Pentecostalism, in particular, is one of Africa's and Latin America's most muscular social forces (see also Landau 2014).

### *Perceptions, Resources, and Relationships in Urban Policymaking*

We discussed diverse actors who engage in and shape urban policy. Given their unequal resources and access to power, their political strategies differ. Different channels or opportunity structures exist for groups, depending on their identities and resources, which shape their ability to achieve policy goals (Baumgartner and Mahoney 2008). For example, institutional channels for residents differ from those for corporations, even if they want to influence the same project or policy (Hinze and Smith, this volume; see also discussion of the differentiated state, above).

Urban policy analysis should explore if and how these diverse actors interact with one another. Interactions could take shape as cooperation, conflict or confrontation, noninterference or circumvention, or nonengagement; actors could seek to persuade or to manipulate one another. We can witness diverse examples of coalition-building between social movements and the state, especially in progressive urban policy advocacy and implementation (e.g., Joy and Vogel 2022; Bazurli and Kaufmann 2023). Belonging to the same

city can be a glue for political alliances that blur the boundaries between civil society and government (Nicholls 2016). Social movements and NGOs often engage in venue-shopping to identify how to collaborate with state actors. As the state is multiscalar and fragmented, societal actors can exploit different policymaking venues (Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Sapotichne and Jones 2012). These alternative venues give societal actors “an opportunity to go over the heads of, or around, a policy elite” (Pralle 2003, 236). Sidney (2014), for example, discusses the versatile strategies of NGOs in US cities and their ability to navigate fragmented, multilevel government landscapes to advocate for rights of marginalized migrants. Kaufmann and Strebel (2021) examine different strategic-venue shopping activities of civil society organizations in Swiss cities that helped to challenge the exclusionary status quo of migration policy.

We can also observe confrontations between civil society organizations and state actors. We have witnessed multiracial protests, led by Black and other racialized community members, rally against police brutality, first in US cities and then around the world. There are increasing urban protests against climate crises and evictions, and for the acceptance of refugees. The goal is to directly protest state actions or to put pressure on local governments to push forward certain policy issues. Insurgent participatory practices, protest or otherwise, use carefully chosen public or private spaces to stage and express dissent in order to hinder, delay, or force state action. These practices can also be considered as engaging with urban policymaking (Miraftab 2004; Hilbrandt 2017). Such bottom-up forms of policymaking might also take the form of everyday practices deployed by people to shape their surroundings with “minor political acts that undermine and disrupt seemingly consensual planning” (Hilbrandt 2017, 542).

Community members such as spiritual leaders, chiefs and traditional leaders, or leaders of criminal organizations may not often be identified in policy analysis, but they employ alternative governing strategies that are deeply political. For example, they govern settlements and neighborhoods through patronage and protection; through such services, they access urban development funds, or generate supportive voting blocs (Paller, this volume; Zhang, this volume). State agents may officially (or unofficially) endorse the authority of informal neighborhood leaders, whose actions are nonetheless extralegal (Landau and Bule, this volume). Moncada (this volume) studies how security in Medellín is jointly produced between elected authorities, criminal actors, and everyday citizens in ways that advance their different interests, such as political reelection, profit-making, and everyday economic survival. Churches and spiritual leaders often see the state as the symbol of the secular world and

may choose not to officially engage with government officials. Even when they make demands on cities, they locate themselves “in an ephemeral, superior and unrooted condition in which they can escape localized social and political obligations” (Landau and Bule, this volume).

Self-governance refers to activities of individuals and groups who work to solve immediate problems, and appropriate and shape urban transformations (Beveridge and Koch 2023). Self-governing strategies, everyday and informal activities, and small-scale and intermittent interactions and conversations are not always considered to be “political” (Landau 2014; Beveridge and Koch 2019). But they are also activities that connect individuals to one another or to state actors, in pursuit of daily life and to solve problems. Examples include squatting practices or other collective struggles for decommodifying housing; self-protection from criminal activities; and creation of alternative businesses or cooperatives, community gardens, or collectives of unhoused people.

While we focus on the policymaking agency of marginalized actors, it is important to note that not engaging with the state is also a political strategy (Landau 2014). Sometimes residents faced with exclusionary political opportunity structures experience frustration and cynicism after repeated efforts to influence urban policies. The limited decision-making power felt by poor, racialized, and marginalized people gives rise to serious doubts about the usefulness of their participation in urban democratic processes (Nuamah 2021). Migrants in some cities may have little interest in investing in the city, as they see their future elsewhere, but still want to have a chance to earn money under precarious conditions (Landau and Bule, this volume). These studies challenge the often implicit assumption that people want to be heard by state actors, and that participation is the key mechanism for realizing democratic local government.

### **The Organization of the Book**

This book features eleven empirical chapters, framed by our introductory and concluding essays. The empirical chapters encompass a range of geographic sites and city types, including large and midsized cities in Africa, Asia, Europe, North America, and Latin America. In doing so, the book and its chapters mostly examine policymaking processes in cities rather than urbanization processes in city regions or metropolitan areas, although these processes are intertwined. The chapters analyze the politics of a range of urban policy issues, from affordable housing, evictions and gentrification, mega-development in

city neighborhoods, informal housing settlements, and land rights, to environmental protection, public safety and security, migration, and the governing challenges of the new economy of technology and artificial intelligence.

While almost all the authors hold academic positions in either European or North American universities, our authors are diverse in terms of their biographies, their disciplinary backgrounds, and their specific research interests. We wanted to represent a diversity of urban experiences and interpretations of and engagements with urbanization processes. Yet we are aware that a further expansion of voices and perceptions, and a decentering of the importance of Global North cities with regard to theory and practice, is an important task for all of us urban scholars.

All authors engage with the three components of the framework that we set out for urban policy analysis, although with different emphases and in different ways. Threading through the book is the question of how to theorize the city, and how scholars' theorizations manifest in empirical work. Therefore, each chapter considers how the urban context influences their policy analysis: that is, how they integrate state actions and the set of complex, diverse, and changing conditions and policy-relevant actors. We have grouped the chapters into thematic sections, focused on (1) the role and the scale of state actions in cities, and (2) the diversity of actors who engage in urban policymaking.

The first thematic section analyzes the role of the state(s) and the overlapping scales at which urban policymaking occurs. Bazurli and Verhoeven study scale-crossing, comparing how local activists join local officials to challenge national immigration and environmental policies in Europe. Donaghy focuses on policy implementation, showing how national housing policies are diluted and disregarded over time by local activists and the private sector in São Paulo, Brazil. Zhang analyzes how two multilevel governance structures shape the development of informal settlements in urban China and urban India. Bramwell compares midsize city coalitions formed to adapt to the digital economy in Europe and North America. Wilson shows how structures of racial hierarchy infuse policy implementation to breed financial instability in US cities. Koch and Beveridge examine cases where the state is absent and urban residents gather to make their own policies in European cities.

As these authors analyze and locate the state in policymaking processes, they also identify actors and strategies. Bazurli and Verhoeven unpack collaboration as a strategy for civil-society organizations and city government leaders who move beyond city geographic boundaries and jurisdictions to confront unwanted supralocal environmental and migration policies. Beveridge and Koch write about squatting as a form of immediate political action that

bends or transgresses state-protected property rights and therefore directly engages with the production of urban space (see also Vasudevan 2017). Bramwell describes how coalition members from local government, foundations, universities, and other nonprofit organizations take a leading role negotiating economic development issues around digital economic restructuring, with business representatives remaining largely absent from the policymaking work. Zhang compares the operation of local political parties in informal settlements, showing that in Chinese cities, the local party is crucial for policy and its implementation, and for organizing policy compliance (see also Ren 2020), but that the local party in India competes for urban populations, especially the many urban poor, who are used as “voting banks” in the Indian multiparty system (see also Auerbach and Thachil 2023).

The book’s second thematic section focuses on who participates in policymaking. Landau and Bule analyze how variations in the mobility of urban residents in African cities shape their interest in political participation, with consequences for policy outcomes. Migrants in South African cities, for example, may have little incentive to invest in the city, because for them engaging with the city is “about . . . the ability to live in and extract from the city without being bound by it—as they see their future elsewhere” (Landau and Bule, this volume). Wong explains how everyday residents become policy activists through daily experiences of interacting with landlords in a gentrifying US neighborhood. She shows a more subtle form of everyday urban policymaking; urban resistance testimonies and organized 311 hotline dispatches, for example, are practices that immigrant women used to challenge existing policies, make claims to the city, and constitute themselves as political agents. Moncada shows how city leaders over time negotiated with criminal organizations to achieve public safety in Medellín, Colombia. Hinze and Smith analyze how institutions structure the influence that neighborhood and corporate actors have in large-scale urban revitalization projects in Berlin and Chicago. Paller compares how residents contest housing policy implementation in three African cities. He describes how local housing organizations can serve as power brokers between residents and the city government.

About half of our chapters’ authors examine policies related to housing and urban development; several other authors examine policy issues that have implications for urban development and housing. As we argue above, housing and land are central aspects of cities and urban life. While some chapters cover other important policy issues, such as environmental protection, security, migration, economic development, and digitization, they might not be as well represented among the chapters. Some important urban policy issues

are absent from our volume, such as social services, public health, education, poverty reduction, transportation, and planning for climate adaptation. One book cannot include everything, but we hope our volume, with its conceptual framework and cases, will inspire other scholars to use and to adapt our approach to examine equally pressing urban policy issues. As this occurs, the work of developing an urban policy analysis will continue and deepen.

## Conclusion

This volume presents our own and our contributing authors' perspectives on how to develop a specifically urban policy analysis. The framework we propose directs attention to (1) theorizing the urban explicitly, or *seeing like a city*; (2) locating state(s) action; and (3) locating the actors. We aim to express an expansive and inclusive approach to each of these elements, rather than setting them out with strictly bounded definitions.

When we open to a broad conceptualization of policy and of "the urban," we think in terms of and beyond geographic space and toward the experiences of inhabiting and shaping that space. We can sense that the urban refers to frames of mind, perspectives on power and social order and disorder, ways of life, and ways of interaction that are marked by diversity, complexity, chaos, flexibility, ongoing change, and even ungovernability that perhaps defies policy analysis as conventionally construed (Simone 2004; Magnusson 2011; Kaufmann and Sidney 2020). With this volume, we hope to inspire knowledge-, theory-, and practice-building research about urban policies and policy processes in a global perspective.

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## PART I

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# What State(s)?

*The Role and Scale of State Actions in Urban Policy*



## Contentious Governance and the City

### *How Urban Alliances Contest National Authority over Climate and Migration Policy*

Raffaele Bazurli and Imrat Verhoeven

State and nonstate players at the city level can be observed to forge collaborative efforts to resist unwanted policies coming from higher territorial scales. They may resist the construction of fracking wells, processes of municipal amalgamation, the siting of mobile phone antennas, and international trade deals (Verhoeven 2020; Verhoeven and Duyvendak 2017). These instances of joint resistance problematize ideas of local authorities as “policy-takers” at the bottom of multilevel governmental hierarchies where coordination and consensus prevail. Also, they problematize classic distinctions between state and civil society where contestation is performed by nonstate players only. To make sense of these collaborative forms of contestation we employ the concept of *contentious governance*, which focuses on resisting policies across multiple spatial and political scales through collaborative efforts by governmental and nongovernmental players (Verhoeven 2020).

The study of contentious governance is crucial to advance our understanding of multilevel governance (MLG) and urban policymaking. MLG perspectives question the idea of government as a unified system by showing how myriads of players inside and outside government interact across geographical scales (e.g., Bache and Flinders 2004; Hooghe and Marks 2003). These analytical endeavors have opened much-needed avenues for research, but also



encounter significant limitations. Interactions are too often assumed to be of a coordinated and consensus-driven nature—a bias that reflects a normative-laden conception of MLG, conflated with the idea of “good governance” or, as Alcantara and Nelles (2014) put it, of a “negotiated order” among state and nonstate actors.

Bridging literatures of MLG and contentious politics, the concept of contentious governance allows us to analyze conflict as a constitutive feature of policymaking processes. Also, its focus on collaborative resistance sheds light on the urban scale as an arena in which the boundaries between government and civil society, as well as between insiders and outsiders of the political process, tend to blur (e.g., Bazurli 2019; Kaufmann and Sidney 2020; Beveridge and Koch, this volume). In fact, urban alliances involving state and nonstate players are essential to transform cities into powerful agents of policy change, even beyond their immediate local realm—in spite of their limited competencies and hierarchical subordination in intergovernmental systems (Bramwell, this volume). The study of contentious governance thus feeds the overall aspiration of this volume to decenter the nation-state from (urban) policy analysis, notably unveiling the interactions among assorted actors mobilizing across geographical and institutional scales (Kaufmann and Sidney, this volume).

In this chapter we focus on two policy domains that belong to the enduring collective issues of the coming decades and that are especially prone to city involvement in contentious governance—climate and migration policies. The implementation of national climate policies presents cities with tensions between contributing to the long-term national interest and contributing to local interests, as wind farms, solar fields, or biomass power plants may produce economic and life-quality consequences for their communities. When such tensions arise, cities face the dilemma of choosing between the two interests. In cases of contentious governance, city governments choose local interests and team up with citizen action groups to resist national policies (Verhoeven 2020). Thus, climate policies are likely to breed contestation across multiple scales of decision-making, mostly on the basis of practical—rather than normative—reasons for disagreement. In times of closed borders and restrictive immigration laws, cities worldwide are on the front line to support migrants residing in their jurisdiction regardless of legal status (e.g., Bauder 2017). Grassroots activists and sympathetic local officials are the crucial forces driving these city sanctuary policies, which in fact disrupt the monopoly of nation-states over immigration and citizenship. Multilevel conflicts tend to arise precisely because actors at different territorial scales disagree on the very normative foundations of their own policies—that is, on the question of

who deserves to belong to the political community (e.g., Caponio and Jones-Correa 2018; Kaufmann and Strebel 2021). We thus compare these two policy domains to illustrate how contentious governance can vary across different arenas of urban policymaking.

The main question guiding our analysis is: How do city officials and their nongovernmental allies create alliances, upscale their contention, and deal with strategic dilemmas in processes of contentious governance on climate change and migration policies? We study strategic interactions (Jasper 2006, 2011, 2015) between city officials, their nongovernmental allies, and their governmental or private business opponents. More specifically, we focus on three strategic processes: (1) alliance-building between city and civil society players, (2) attempts to upscale political mobilization to the regional or national levels, and (3) dealing with strategic dilemmas (see theoretical background below). To illustrate these points, the chapter compares the city of Barendrecht in the Netherlands resisting the national plan to store carbon dioxide from the nearby port of Rotterdam under their soil, with the pursuit of sanctuary policy for undocumented and forced migrants in Barcelona in opposition to Spanish national mandates. In spite of the different policy sectors and spatial settings, we identify similar patterns of strategic interaction. Yet significant differences can be also observed. While the case of Barendrecht can be interpreted as a *moderate* variety of contentious governance because of its pragmatic, reactive, and episodic character, urban allies in Barcelona have more ideological, far-reaching, long-term aspirations guiding their confrontation with central authorities—thus giving a *radical* shape to this case of contentious governance.

## Building Urban Power Through Contentious Governance

### *Contentious Governance as Multilevel Political Dynamics*

Due to globalization and decentralization, national states have increasingly ceded shares of power to supra- and subnational authorities (Agnew and Crobridge 2002). In the European Union this leads to nonhierarchical modes of governing and negotiated institutional relations between EU institutions and subnational governments in member states (Pierre and Peters 2020). Such processes of MLG apply increasingly to intergovernmental relationships within states where processes of rescaling have boosted the autonomy and economic self-reliance of subnational governments (Brenner 2004; Pierre

and Peters 2020). As a consequence, subnational governments are less submissive to the national level and less inclined to wait for cues from that level (Pierre and Peters 2020, 86). Aside from such reconfigurations, MLG can be also observed in the increased involvement of nonstate actors in producing public goods (Alcantara, Broschek, and Nelles 2016; Kaufmann and Sidney 2020; Bramwell, this volume).

The growing assertiveness of subnational governments is reflected in policy conflicts where they closely collaborate with citizen action groups, NGOs, or social movement organizations (SMOs) to resist unwanted national policies. Their collaborations can be seen as governance networks, in the sense of governmental and nongovernmental players joining forces on a policy issue (Klijn 2008), but we cannot see them as guided by network-level or multilevel governance as a collaborative mode of governing.

The problem with most conceptualizations of network- or multilevel governance is that they perceive governance as a “negotiated order” (Alcantara and Nelles 2014) in which processes of consensus-building prevail. We see this in the emphasis on collaboration, deliberation, and negotiation (Ansell and Gash 2008; Pierre and Peters 2020). Such conceptualizations of governance lead to an underestimation of conflict and resistance performed by governance networks (with exceptions in the field of migration studies; cf. Caponio and Jones-Correa 2018; Bazurli and Campomori 2025). Hence, we should *conceive of governance as not only consensual but also as contentious*. For this purpose, we can turn to the suggestion in contentious politics literature to see governmental players not only as “targets” or “third parties” to claims, but also as “initiators” of claims. Initiating claims is common for governmental players as a strategy to *seek legitimacy* for their policies (Hilgartner and Bosk 1988). However, the contentious-politics perspective suggests that they also make less common claims, such as “strident demands” or “direct attacks” to *contest the legitimacy* of policy claims made by others (Tilly and Tarrow 2015, 8).

Bridging literatures of (multilevel) governance and contentious politics, the concept of contentious governance opens up a conceptual space to understand governmental and nongovernmental players collaborating in the contestation of policymaking or policy implementation initiated by other governmental players or their business partners (Verhoeven 2020). This definition leaves open whether governmental or nongovernmental players instigate contestation, which forms their contestation may take, whether they target policy proposals or ongoing implementation, and who their target is. This study primarily focuses on specific instances of contentious governance, namely those crafted locally by cities and civil society players with the aim of resisting national policy mandates.

### *Contentious Governance and the City*

Cities often find themselves in the paradoxical situation of having to cope with policy problems that affect their communities while lying beyond their jurisdiction due to narrow mandates (Bazurli 2020, 28). Yet cities are not condemned to be passive receivers of policy conditions imposed at a higher scale. City governments can convert the conditions constraining their prerogatives into opportunities for policy change. For instance, mayors can draw on their visibility and credibility as political figures to influence national policymaking, by enacting strategies of issue definition, conflict expansion, and venue shopping (Sapotichne and Smith 2012; Stren and Friendly 2019). NGOs, SMOs, and other civil society players can also use the urban space to weave networks of solidarity that enhance the viability of their claims (Nicholls and Uitermark 2016; Beveridge and Koch, this volume). The city works for them “as a *relational incubator*, facilitating complex relational exchanges that generate a diversity of useful resources for campaigns operating at a variety of spatial scales” (Nicholls 2008, 842, *italics in original*). Cities also provide the breeding space for alliances between political leaders and activists, as for instance happens in the new municipalist movement that aims at “bolstering the capacity of societies to govern themselves” (Russell 2019, 996).

Reflecting on the constraints and opportunities of cities allows us to better theorize collaborative resistance against national policy mandates and their quandaries and nuances. Indeed, contentious governance can take the form of local authorities and civil society organizations mobilizing to confront supra-local powerholders—a “common front” challenging a “common foe” from the bottom up. Belonging to the same geographical community thus works as a glue for crafting political alliances that blur the boundaries between government and civil society, as well as between insiders and outsiders of the political process (Bazurli 2019, 363). To capture these political alliances in processes of contentious governance, we need an analytical perspective that accounts for their underlying dynamics.

### *Analyzing Contentious Governance in Cities*

James Jasper’s (2006, 2011, 2015) work on strategic interactions offers relevant insights to understand the multilevel dynamics of contentious governance between cities and higher tiers of government. From this perspective, individual and collective players—including state authorities, citizen action groups, NGOs, SMOs, and businesses—are embroiled in constant interactions, during which they act strategically. Over time, players create and recreate their

strategies during their interactions by making sense of their own and other players' goals and actions, projecting how future interactions may be affected by events and changing circumstances, such as political scandals, procedural mistakes, changes to plans, new players entering the situation, or new forms of action (Jasper 2011). Hence, aims and outcomes are not permanent, but constantly remodeled based on the interpretation of past experiences and future expectations.

From this perspective, local officials and activists engage in *alliance-building*—that is, “the creation of new, visible, and direct coordination of claims between two or more previously distinct actors” (Alimi, Bosi, and Demetriou 2015, 8). Alliance-building is a strategy to strengthen their position in an arena where the balance of power is structurally unfavorable to them. Being constitutionally subservient to the national level, city governments cannot preempt, override, or buy off the plans of their adversaries—leaving a few viable options to shape policymaking from below, such as persuasion, decoupling, and venue-shopping (e.g., Verhoeven 2020; Oomen et al. 2021; Caponio and Jones-Correa 2018). Civil society players can be functional to these oppositional strategies, as they have a knowledge of social problems “on the ground,” a sterling reputation among their reference constituencies, as well as the ability to fuel public controversy and allocate blame (Hutter, Kriesi, and Lorenzini 2019). Hence, city governments are incentivized to be responsive to activists who presumably belong to their voter base and who can provide resources to be invested in higher-level arenas. In turn, activists are prone to mobilize when they perceive that institutional allies can support the viability of claims that would otherwise remain unheard.

On the grounds of strategic considerations, city governments and their activist allies may look for the support of more powerful allies by employing *upscaling* strategies to get regional or national governmental players, NGOs, or SMOs on their side (Verhoeven 2020). Scaling up is “an intensive networking process characterized by building relations between actors in different geopolitical worlds” (Nicholls 2016, 304), thus transcending the specific local realm from which urban mobilization originates (cf. also McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001, 331). Due to the inclusion of more powerful regional or national allies, processes of scale shift increase the chances that national policymakers will be successfully influenced.

Collaborating in resistance to unwanted policies inevitably involves *strategic dilemmas*, which manifest themselves during unfolding strategic interactions. Strategic dilemmas can be seen as situations where choices need to be made between two or more options that hold their own risks, costs,

and potential benefits, while there is no single right answer (Jasper 2006). For governmental players these strategic dilemmas are informed by the fact that they are not single-issue in their orientation, and consequently need to weigh the impact of their contention on existing relations with governmental opponents (Verhoeven and Duyvendak 2017). Activists, instead, need not submit to such institutional rationales. They are normally committed to a single issue and enjoy greater room to maneuver in their repertoire of action (Verhoeven and Bröer 2015). But their collaboration with governmental players may involve the risk of being coopted and becoming less effective as change agents (McAdam 1982).

### **Context: Contesting National Authority over Climate and Migration Policy**

Our analysis focuses on two different instances of contentious governance: the case of carbon capture and storage (CCS) in the city of Barendrecht (the Netherlands), a flagship project in the national government's campaign to mitigate climate change, and the case of policies in support of undocumented and forced migrants in Barcelona (Spain), widely considered to be one of the most advanced sanctuary-city experiments in Europe. In both cases, the national governments face high political stakes that clash with local political interests. Our study draws on assorted qualitative data, including interviews with key governmental and nongovernmental stakeholders, policy documents, media reporting, and secondary literature. Data were collected in the context of two separate research projects, which were brought together and compared precisely to illustrate how strategic interactions among players engaging in contentious governance unfold across different urban policy arenas.

The most important differences across these cases are related to policy domains and governmental systems. The policy domains of climate change and migration are suitable, since we can expect national attempts to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> and exclude undocumented migrants to be contested. Related to climate change policies are many governance networks of industries and national governmental players, which may be contested by "ad hoc" alliances of cities and civil society allies, as for instance happens with wind farms (Verhoeven 2020). The contentious politics of migration is a more long-standing, persistent process across Western societies (van der Brug et al. 2015; Ataç, Rygiel, and Stierl 2016). Contention is not limited to material issues, such as social welfare, labor, and security, but also touches on cultural and religious aspects

of the social fabric, especially with respect to the integration of immigrants with a Muslim background (Eggert and Giugni 2015). Within this context, city governments together with NGOs and SMOs increasingly incite contentious local experiments in support of undocumented migrants, possibly stretching, countering, or circumventing national exclusionary provisions. Based on the differences across these two policy domains, we uncover a wide variety of insights on alliance-building, scale shift, and strategic dilemmas that current city governments face when teaming up with action groups or other civil society players against unwanted policies.

We also expect contentious governance dynamics to be affected by the type of governmental system in which urban players oppose their national counterparts. The Netherlands is a decentralized unitary state in which the national level has considerable power over lower tiers of government. Local governments are important implementers of national policies, with cogovernance in some policy domains and limited autonomy in others (Steen and Toonen 2010). In such a rigid intergovernmental system we expect cities to seek allies at the highest possible levels to put pressure on the national government. As for Spain, the transition from dictatorship to democracy in the late 1970s marked the end of a highly centralized institutional system. The 1978 Constitution establishes that municipalities are the basis of the territorial organization of the state, a statutory provision also aimed to acknowledge the long-standing tradition of self-government at the regional and local level. Since the late 1990s, various reforms have further increased the power of Spanish mayors and their executives, as well as the autonomy of large cities (e.g., Tomás 2017). Central authorities, however, have a formal monopoly over immigration issues. We expect these opposing trends to be a fertile ground for the emergence of contentious governance in cities.

Overall, both our cases neatly epitomize the conditions for contentious governance to arise, but also display significant differences that allow us to analyze different varieties of this phenomenon.

### The Barendrecht Case: Contentious Governance as a Form of Pragmatism

#### *The Policy Context*

One of the most important topics in environmental politics is the reduction of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions. In 2007 the Dutch national government set

the goal of 30% reduction by 2020 (Tweede Kamer 2008–2009), and in 2017 the goal was upped to a 49% reduction by 2030 (VVD, D66, CDA, and ChristenUnie 2017, 37). To reach these goals, the government saw carbon capture and storage (CCS) as a promising technology for short-term gains. CCS traps CO<sub>2</sub> emissions at the source and stores them underground in empty gas or oil fields (Meadowcroft and Langhelle 2009). To stimulate commercial implementation, the national government put out tenders for demonstration projects. Shell won by proposing to store CO<sub>2</sub> from their oil refinery in Rotterdam harbor in two depleted gas fields under the municipality of Barendrecht, which is part of the larger Rotterdam–The Hague metropolitan area (Verhoeven 2020).

Early in 2008 Shell instigated an environmental impact assessment by organizing two information evenings, during which residents and local politicians did not get satisfactory answers about safety and technical details (Feenstra, Mikunda, and Brunsting 2010; Cuppen et al. 2015). Between December 2008 and February 2009, the responsible deputy mayor and politicians from the municipal council of Barendrecht tried to get more clarity on the proposed project, and answers to their many questions and those of their residents. Contentious governance took off in March 2009 when the environmental impact assessment report concluded that CCS could be safely implemented in Barendrecht. Political parties in the municipal council gradually turned against CCS, which culminated at the end of June 2009 with the municipal council unanimously rejecting the project. From this moment onward, the municipality criticized knowledge put forward by the national government, mobilized residents for protest events, collaborated with citizen action group CO<sub>2</sub>isNee [CO<sub>2</sub> is No], and sponsored a legal citizen action group (Verhoeven 2020).

### *Alliance-Building Dynamics*

The construction of an anti-CCS alliance began in the municipal council of Barendrecht, as the deputy mayor took a depoliticized and technocratic approach that created space for the political majority of liberal, religious, and conservative parties in the municipal council to draw their own conclusions about the CCS project. During the fall of 2008, the Christian Democrat party (CDA) leaders managed to convince other parties that they needed to gather facts and pose questions related to the project. Hence the responsible deputy mayor developed a “review framework” comprised of ninety questions and fifty-five demands, which took the lead in the municipality’s assessment of the project (Interviews #1 and #3). Abiding by the review framework was not enough for the GreenLeft party, a progressive environmentalist party, which



was suspicious about how seriously national policymakers took the risks of storing CO<sub>2</sub> under residential areas (Interview #12). In March 2009 GreenLeft politicized the issue by attracting media attention, organizing a “walk against CO<sub>2</sub>” attended by about 300 residents, and mobilizing about 1,570 residents to file a viewpoint against the environmental impact assessment report that was open for inspection (Interview #12). For a few months GreenLeft stood alone in its open resistance to the project, while some parties were critical and some were in favor. When many of the questions posed in the review framework could not be answered and when there were not enough guarantees that safety demands could be met, the alliance of political parties against the CCS project grew rapidly (Gemeente Barendrecht 2009a), leading the municipal council to unanimously decide against the CCS project on June 29, 2009 (Gemeente Barendrecht 2009b).

Beginning in spring 2009, a group of worried citizens met several times about the CCS project. At the end of October 2009, they founded CO2isNee, a citizen action group that organized one small playful action and then focused on lobbying and substantive arguments as the basis for their resistance against the CCS project (Interviews #2 and #6). The municipality and CO2isNee did not strategically coordinate their resistance, but kept each other informed and sometimes shared information. CO2isNee explicitly stated that they were independent from political parties while also collaborating with the board of the mayor and aldermen: “As an independent organization, CO2isNee works in addition to the possibilities available to the Municipal Executive” (CO2isNee 2009). Although CO2isNee also focused on lobbying, the deputy mayor saw them as complementary in how they could present arguments: “They can protest, and they can also say things from the underbelly [based on their emotions]. I stick to the facts and figures” (Interview #3).

### *Upscaling Dynamics*

After the municipal council decided against the CCS project in June 2009, it became important for them to convince the provincial authority that they should not issue an environmental permit, and to convince the two national ministers and parliament that they should not decide in favor of the project. They started to lobby the two ministers on the national level, but first focused on lobbying the provincial authority. All municipal political parties contacted their fellow party members in the Provincial Council and invited them to visit the proposed site of the CCS project. Several chairmen of the local parties and the deputy mayor were given speaking time during a meeting of the Provincial

Council Committee on Green, Water and Environment (Interviews #1, #7, #11, and #12). During all these lobbying activities the local politicians pointed out the lack of answers on safety questions related to the storage of CO<sub>2</sub>, several critical technical reports, and the lack of local support among the population (Interview #3). A few core members of action group CO2isNee also got speaking time during the same Provincial Council committee hearing. On top of technical and risk arguments, the CO2isNee activists contended, “CCS is not sustainable”; “CCS creates a burden for future generations”; “CCS as treatment of symptoms of the global illness of fossil fuel use”; “Barendrecht as a new Niger delta for Shell”; “the polluter gets rewarded for waste dumping”; “the population had little say and was poorly informed”; and that there was a “lack of local support.” The activists also underscored the heavy responsibility for the Provincial Council of “weighing up costs against human lives” (activists’ speaking notes).

On November 11, 2009, the Provincial Council turned against the CCS project and called on the national ministers to reject the project. They ordered the provincial executive to communicate this request to the Ministerial Council and to parliament (Provincie Zuid-Holland 2009). The local politicians and CO2isNee had succeeded in shifting the scale to a higher tier of government, with provincial politicians certifying their claims. Immediately, lobbying of the ministers and the parliament intensified, since the ministers would decide on the project on November 18, 2009. On that date the ministers disregarded the local and provincial claims by deciding in favor of the CCS project, followed by a positive decision in parliament on January 28, 2010. However, on the night of February 19, 2010, the Dutch cabinet resigned, leading to a postponement of the project until after national elections. This opened a window of opportunity for the local politicians to revamp their lobby campaign on the national level, this time with professional support by a specialized lobbying firm. They focused their argumentation on procedural critique of the decision-making process, and in the end the entire focus was on lacking local support (Interview #10). When push came to shove, the new incoming government decided to cancel the project due to lack of local support. Enabled by the fall of the cabinet and ensuing elections, the local politicians had successfully managed another scale shift, with the Ministerial Council certifying the local support argument.

### *Strategic Dilemmas*

After the cabinet resigned in February 2010, the outgoing minister of economic affairs tried to move full speed ahead with the project. In addition, in

mid-March 2010, parliament adopted the Crisis and Recovery Act, which preempted municipal legal action against planning proposals. The municipality felt cornered by the ministers' actions and the new Act. In this process the local politicians faced a naughty-or-nice dilemma (Jasper 2006). For them this meant the choice between becoming more activist to put pressure on parliament with the risk of alienating themselves from national politicians, or playing a more subtle political game via lobbying with the risk of being neglected.

At first, the deputy mayor and other politicians turned into activists, without collaborating with CO<sub>2</sub>isNee this time, by calling on citizens to protest and to submit responses to the ministerial planning proposal: "The Hague [seat of national government] rumbles on: take action now!" and "Local politics has been side-lined. It's your move!" (Gemeente Barendrecht 2010a). But soon these politicians discovered that this gave them the image of a small Gaul village that resists the Roman empire (Interview #10). Hence, they chose to switch to intense lobbying of parliament. It took them a while to create sympathy for their arguments against the project. What turned the tables was the fact that they commissioned a survey that indicated that 86% of the population was against the plan to store CO<sub>2</sub> under Barendrecht. This lack of local support became the core message of their lobbying campaign, which they repackaged and repeated time and again (Interview #10). In the end their lobby campaign proved to be the right choice. When a new government coalition was formed, they even had influence on the text of the coalition agreement that the CCS plan would be discontinued if public support in Barendrecht was lacking (Interviews #7, #8, and #10).

## The Barcelona Case: Contentious Governance for Radical Policy Change

### *Policy Context*

The Spanish Constitution establishes that the central state has "exclusive jurisdiction" over immigration and asylum policy.<sup>1</sup> Faced with a growing and unplanned number of arrivals, the approach of central authorities over the decades has fluctuated between highly restrictive laws producing massive illegalization and "exceptional" regularizations to cope with it (Gonzalez-Enríquez 2009). Undocumented immigrants were thus subjected to severe forms of exclusion, including the risk of deportation.<sup>2</sup> Such a restrictive orientation is evident also when it comes to asylum policy (Garcés-Mascreñas

and Moreno Amador 2019), whose nexus with irregularity is especially close. For instance, while the verdict on asylum requests takes up to three years, integration programs last up to twenty-four months. Thus migrants may finish an integration process while their applications are still pending—possibly becoming undocumented if the request is eventually rejected.

Within this highly centralized and restrictive policy framework, support for undocumented immigrants became one of the highest priorities of Barcelona's administration since 2015 (Bazurli and de Graauw 2023). The city government has promoted an inclusive model of urban citizenship that contradicts Spanish immigration laws and intends to fill in for their lacunae. In addition, local officials together with immigrant rights activists have crafted far-reaching policy alternatives. The policy program entitled "Government Measure for Encouraging Access to Regularisation and Preventing Lapsed Regularity" (Ajuntament de Barcelona 2017) entails five action guidelines: (1) securing universal access to municipal services; (2) smoothing regularization procedures; (3) detecting and preventing "lapsed regularity"; (4) preventing detentions and expulsions; and (5) driving policy change at the Spanish and EU levels. Activists also played a decisive role in formulating and implementing the "Barcelona, Refugee City" plan,<sup>3</sup> which aims to boost local services and resettle asylum-seekers across Europe *regardless* of the central state (Bazurli 2019, 360). These policies have become an essential lifeline for immigrants, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their living conditions worsened significantly during this critical time, as evidenced by the dramatic rise in unhoused individuals and unaccompanied minors lacking assistance (e.g., Zapata-Barrero 2024). Against this background, conflicts across government tiers have escalated—with Barcelona's local officials and civil society organizations catalyzing contestation through sustained forms of contentious governance.

### *Alliance-Building Dynamics*

Barcelona's alliance for immigrant rights is the offspring of long-standing processes of political mobilization. The first municipal elections in 1979 saw the beginning of an enduring engagement between city government and urban movements. The PSC-PSOE (Socialists' Party of Catalonia), which uninterruptedly ruled the city until 2011, consolidated its hegemony by answering demands coming from neighborhood committees—especially through the expansion of welfare provisions and the establishment of democratic forms of policymaking. Yet this model of governance—commonly referred to as the "Barcelona Model"

(Blanco 2009)—gradually eroded and eventually vanished in 2011 when the conservative CiU (Convergence and Union) took over city hall.

In that year, however, Spain was also witnessing the emergence of the 15M/*Indignados* movement. Amid economic crisis and austerity, the 15M protesters demanded a deepening of democracy and social justice while pointing an accusing finger at political and economic elites. As participation in demonstrations began to deflate, social-movement organizers across the country forged local coalitions to compete in municipal elections and deliver change “from the inside.” Among the most prominent instance is BeC (Barcelona in Common), a left-wing platform founded precisely to funnel the aspirations of urban social movements into the electoral arena (Blanco, Salazar, and Bianchi 2020). In the 2015 municipal elections, BeC obtained the biggest share of votes (25%) and started ruling in a minority government. Because of its leftist agenda and persistent attempts to subvert national domination over a variety of policy domains, the BeC administration has been praised as the spearhead of a new municipalist movement at a global level (Thompson 2021).

Thus, activists became policymakers themselves. Immigrant rights advocates buttressed the emergence of BeC to a significant extent, foremost because of their massive participation in housing struggles. Also, the activist organization TeC (We Will Close the CIE)—whose mission is to shut down the Barcelona’s CIE (Immigrant Detention Center)—was among the first to join the BeC’s platform in 2014. From this angle, Barcelona’s alliance for immigrant rights has not been crafted by local officials and sympathetic civil society organizations; rather, it is a reconfiguration of a previously existing alliance whose constituents succeeded in taking public office.

The collaboration between local officials and civil society organizations has allowed them to pose a sustained challenge to central authorities. One flagrant example is that of the “Volem Acollir” (We Want to Welcome) campaign, culminating on February 18, 2017, when some 500,000 protesters marched in solidarity with migrants and in opposition against the Spanish government and the EU for their lack of commitment to refugee protection (Bazurli 2019). Local incumbents joined the demonstration, but also used more conventional lobbying tactics, such as public letters to the Spanish executive. Even more exemplary has been the attempt to shut down Barcelona’s CIE. Jaume Asens, deputy mayor of citizen rights, had a long career as civil rights attorney and was a renowned activist in pro-immigrant and anti-austerity campaigns. Once in office, he unilaterally ordered the closure of the CIE by drawing on a rights-based interpretation of municipal prerogatives. As central authorities refrained from complying, he thus took the lead in a legal proceeding against

the Ministry of Interior. Hence, Asens enacted a movement-like strategy *from within the municipality*. As one TeC's activist put it, "[He] wants to take on the role he had outside [of the municipality] from the inside so as to confront the [central] state" (Interview #28). The COVID-19 pandemic also paved the way for new alliances and initiatives, such as the Union of Women Caregivers Without Papers and the "Regularización Ya" campaign, advocating for the general regularization of undocumented migrants (Özdemir 2024).

### *Upscaling Dynamics*

To scale up mobilization against their national opponents, urban allies have persistently sought to leverage regional, national, and transnational arenas. The massive mobilizations for Catalunya's secession from Spain intersected with questions of immigration and asylum.<sup>4</sup> Since 2012, the regional government has been led by pro-independence parties that range from the radical left to the center-right, galvanized by the common prospect of secession. Notably, this coalition has embraced the demand to close Barcelona's CIE and other pro-immigrant causes—possibly for the sake of articulating a line of conflict between Catalan and Spanish authorities. As one immigrant rights activist put it, "we profited from a juncture of rising tensions between Catalunya and Spain, which succeeded in putting our issue on the agenda, and obtaining a favorable positioning by [regional] institutions" (Interview #12). Against the background of this polarization dynamic, city and regional officials have sometimes cooperated to jointly oppose national authorities. The Catalan government has even brought the Spanish executive to Madrid's High Court of Justice to reclaim competencies over immigrants' integration—eventually winning the lawsuit (Garcés-Mascreñas and Moreno Amador 2019, 3).

City officials have tried to put pressure on the Spanish executive's unreceptiveness by establishing a network of cities with similar policy agendas. On August 28, 2015, during the most tragic juncture of the "refugee crisis," the newly elected mayor of Barcelona, Ada Colau, launched the "Ciudades Refugio" (Cities of Refuge) network to pressure Spanish and European policymakers. In the following days, fifty-five Spanish left-wing municipalities joined the initiative, including Madrid, Valencia, and Zaragoza. Also, in September 2015, Colau wrote a letter entitled "We, the cities of Europe" (Ajuntament de Barcelona 2015). Prepared with other prominent left-leaning European mayors, it denounced the humanitarian emergency in the Mediterranean Sea, calling on European institutions "not to turn their backs on the cities, to listen to the outcry coming from them" in their attempt to welcome migrants. Activists,

too, have engaged in various transnational actions for establishing safe passage to Catalunya. The city government has intervened as a facilitator by providing financial support and assuring foreign authorities of the reliability of activist organizations.

### *Strategic Dilemmas*

City officials have faced acute dilemmas while collaborating with civil society organizations. They have felt compelled to demonstrate their “loyalty” to their militant past by embracing the demands coming from below and even by mimicking social-movement strategies—yet ultimately depriving civil society organizations of their *raison d’être* to some extent. One local official commented that “as we come from these [activist] circles, we struggle in positioning as an institution. [. . .] [W]e are de-radicalizing some movements for an excess of relationship with them” (Interview #21). The strategic deadlocks can be described as “accidental cooptation” dilemmas. Barcelona’s local officials have not sought to manipulate their activist allies for their own purposes, but still (unintentionally) weakened them through the process of institutionalization.

Interestingly, civil society organizations have faced symmetrical predicaments, which can be described as “collaborate or perish” dilemmas. They have been torn between the chance to exploit sympathetic local officials to push their demands onto the institutional agenda and the risk of being patronized and disempowered precisely because of such “friendly ties.” According to one activist, for example, “some members of the cabinet think that—as they *come* from social movements—thus they *are* the social movements. But, when you are inside institutions, you are not” (Interview #13). The mobilization capacity of immigrant rights advocates has been, in fact, undermined by the absorption of prominent leaders into the local administration. As one local official put it, some sections of these organizations have been “beheaded” (Interview #11). This switch has made them less resourceful, as well as less capable of deciphering and affecting institutional dynamics. Within this context, the city government has received increasing criticism from sections of Barcelona’s immigrant rights movements, such as the vocal street vendors’ union (Bazurli and Delclós 2022).

Dilemmas and challenges have only intensified since a new administration, led by socialist mayor Jaume Collboni, replaced the BeC-led government in 2023. Since then, the city has pursued the exclusion of unhoused individuals from critical municipal services, justifying the move on the grounds of the immense pressure placed on these services during the COVID-19 pandemic

(Colell 2024). Additionally, the new administration adopted a harsh law-and-order approach toward street vendors, mostly West African undocumented immigrants selling counterfeit products in the city's tourist areas. These moves sparked widespread criticism, marking a departure from decades of inclusive urban citizenship practices in Barcelona.

## Conclusions

In this chapter we contended that the concept of contentious governance is best suited to capture how governmental and civil society actors at the city level may collaborate to oppose national policy mandates. By exploring climate change and migration, we offered a glimpse into policy domains in which cities engage in processes of contentious governance. We theorized that these processes are propelled by strategic interactions, which involve the strategic processes of alliance building, upscaling, and dealing with strategic dilemmas. Based on our analysis of the Barendrecht and the Barcelona cases, we draw conclusions on each of these processes.

On alliance-building we can conclude that it makes a great difference if a policy intervention by a higher tier of government is experienced as a sudden threat (Barendrecht) or as a continuous threat (Barcelona). A sudden threat requires the formation of ad hoc alliances between political parties within cities and presents challenges of convincing a political majority that rather unconventional action against the national government is needed. Also, forging ad hoc collaboration with citizen action groups can be a rather ambiguous process, since citizens may be eager to avoid being coopted and politicians may not see the added value of working together with citizen activists. A more or less continuous threat may at its outset require ad hoc alliance-building, but over time these alliances develop into more stable and sustained relationships. Such alliances, as in Barcelona between city politicians and SMOs, allow for a natural collaboration in which all players are comfortable with jointly engaging in lobbying and lawsuits, creating policy alternatives, and protesting. For the BeC administration, contentious governance was the continuation of activism by other means from within the political system.

Our conclusion on upscaling of contentious governance is that it may involve conventional or unconventional approaches. A conventional approach moves up through the various levels of governance until it reaches the highest level at which final decisions are made, as in the Barendrecht case. An unconventional approach seeks to skip levels of governance and even circumvent



the national level by appealing to supranational governments (the EU in the Barcelona case) to put pressure on the national level. Another unconventional element in the Barcelona case was that the city first crafted alliances with like-minded cities across Spain and in other European countries to put more pressure on the EU. Both cases also indicate that political circumstances (the cabinet resigning, the secession movement) can influence the upscaling of contentious governance.

On the strategic dilemmas we can conclude that they are tactical and relational. They are tactical in the literal sense of having to decide between using protest tactics or more subdued lobbying tactics, as in the Barendrecht case. They are tactical as well in the symbolic sense of demarcating the boundaries between government and social movement, and in the practical sense of deciding which issues the government picks up and which the social movement picks up (the Barcelona case). The strategic dilemmas are relational to the extent that they are informed by dependency on the goodwill of the national government (as with the naughty-or-nice dilemma in Barendrecht), or informed by the density of ties between the city government and social movement activists (as with the accidental cooptation dilemma in Barcelona).

Taken together, our conclusions on alliance-building, upscaling, and strategic dilemmas suggest that we have come across a more *moderate* and a more *radical* variety of contentious governance in cities. As highlighted in the introduction to this volume (Kaufmann and Sidney), urban policymaking might indeed serve ambivalent purposes, ranging from mitigating or redressing the status quo and unequal power relationships, to replacing them (see also Verhoeven, Strange and Silles-Brügge 2022; Enright and Rossi 2018). The Barendrecht case can be interpreted as a moderate instance of contentious governance with an alliance built on the basis of mutual convenience rather than ideological commitment. The alliance is driven by a pragmatic rationale, which is apparent in the choice of a technocratic strategy to achieve broad consensus within the city council and to contest the CCS project based on facts. Contentious governance has been reactive and episodic, based on actions and decisions by the national government. Conducting an opposition in a technocratic and nonideological way that fitted with the policy approach of national politicians increased the odds of successfully blocking the CCS project compared to a more full-blown protest strategy.

The Barcelona case can be seen as a radical case of contentious governance rooted in deep ideological commitments by city politicians and movement activists. Immigration is, in fact, only one of the policy domains in which the city government has confronted Spanish central authorities. Barcelona is the

most exemplary expression of a new municipalism movement (Thompson 2021), which attempts to use different elements of the state apparatus *against itself*, with the aim of “bolstering the capacity of societies to govern themselves” (Russell 2019, 996). Such ideological features are mirrored in the ultimate objective of urban actors, which is not the mere mitigation of unwanted national policies, but the prospect of radically transforming a whole range of policy issues through far-reaching policy innovations. This is why the success of contentious governance has been quite limited in the case of Barcelona. In the short term, only marginal gains can be achieved if the aspiration is to dismantle the citizenship regime of a nation-state.

These findings buttress the aims of this volume and advance the research agenda on global urban policy through three interrelated contributions (cf. Kaufmann and Sidney, this volume). First, our analysis of contentious governance sheds light on the *multiscalar relations* behind urban policymaking. Most conceptualizations of network-level or multilevel governance overly emphasize the role of consensus and coordination in the production of public good. We show that conflict across tiers of government is also the “bread and butter” of policymaking in liberal democracies, as specialists of migration governance have increasingly acknowledged (e.g., Scholten 2013; Caponio and Jones-Correa 2018). Second, our chapter highlights the distinctive character of *participation dynamics* unfolding in urban policy arenas. City politics indeed challenges conventional understanding of state-society relationships, favoring the emergence of alliances between sections of local political elites and civil society organizations that jointly oppose national policy mandates. These findings echo the burgeoning debate on new municipalism as a strategy of urban actors to subvert state-centrism (e.g., Russell 2019; Thompson 2021). Third, the analysis of contentious governance helps us decenter the nation-state from policy analysis by “*seeing like a city*” (Magnusson 2013; Kaufmann and Sidney 2020; Beveridge and Koch, this volume). Cities are more than the lowest level of policymaking; they are distinctive political arenas, where global-scale collective problems and far-reaching policy innovations tend to concentrate.

Our explorative analysis of the Barendrecht and Barcelona cases has produced valuable first insights on cities and processes of contentious governance—an understudied phenomenon that should be theorized as an important part of contemporary politics at the city level and beyond. To be sure, more comparative research with other cases is needed to further confirm or reject our findings on alliance-building, upscaling dynamics, and strategic dilemmas. We expect cities to be struggling with national climate change and migration policies in the decades to come, so we will have an ample number of

cases of contentious governance to take into account. But also in other policy domains that stretch across multiple levels of governing, cities may find civil society players on their side to protect local or regional interests against those of national authorities. Long ago, Michel Foucault said, “When there is power, there is resistance” (Foucault 1978, 95). As long as national governments exercise power over urban areas and their populations, cities may stand up and resist through processes of contentious governance.

#### NOTES

1. Article 149.1.2

2. It is worth noting that Spain also offers some opportunities for integration, such as stable pathways for the regularization of undocumented immigrants who can demonstrate their integration into the country after three years of residence and/or work. In November 2024, the national government, led by socialist Pedro Sánchez, announced a plan to further enhance regularization opportunities (Santos 2024).

3. <https://ciutatrefugi.barcelona/en>

4. Barcelona is the capital city of the Catalunya region.

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### THREE

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## The Politics of Implementation in São Paulo

### *Why Low-Income Housing Policies and Programs So Often Remain Promises Rather than Reality*

Maureen M. Donaghy

Across countries the challenges of providing secure, affordable housing for low-income residents lead governments at the national, state, and local levels to devise programs to meet diverse needs. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we saw the devastating health effects felt by those who did not have a secure home, as well as the economic reality that access to decent housing is increasingly beyond the means of many citizens in cities around the world. Housing is viewed alternately as a human right for all or a market good to be allotted based on the ability to pay. Government programs for housing generally mediate between these two opposing dynamics by aiming to provide housing to those who cannot afford market rates while working within the system of housing finance and development. In Brazil, successive governments at the federal, state, and municipal levels have tried with varying levels of commitment and success to implement programs to construct new housing units, upgrade existing informal settlements, and grant land titles through the process of regularizing existing units. More recently, municipal governments have also turned to rental subsidies, particularly for emergency situations in which residents are living in unstable conditions and subject to removal.



Based on these efforts over the last two decades, Brazil developed a global reputation for innovation in housing policies, programs, and participatory institutions to address the extreme shortage of affordable, decent housing for low-income residents. But despite international accolades, significant implementation gaps exist, particularly at the city level. By “implementation gaps,” I mean the disconnect between what government officials promise and the resulting interventions on the ground. In fact, Brazilian government officials, private-sector actors, and social-movement leaders regularly refer to what is “only on paper” vs. what comes “off paper” when discussing the unmet promise of policies and programs. To a certain extent, implementation gaps exist in all cities in every corner of the globe. But in Brazil, and in the city of São Paulo in particular, these gaps between promise and implementation prevent significant progress in reducing the housing deficit, leaving millions of residents living with insecurity. The lessons of this chapter, therefore, are relevant both to addressing the urgent issues of housing in São Paulo and to providing insights into why other cities face similar problems.

This chapter explores why this mismatch occurs so frequently in São Paulo, examining the institutions and political processes that impede policies from crossing scales successfully from national to local, and from effective local execution of state-led solutions. The problem is not only one of multilevel governance, but of lack of accountability and transparency at the city level. To assess the impact of this cycle of promise and inaction on urban politics and policy outcomes over time, I draw on an extended case study of São Paulo. The extended case study method, as developed by Michael Burawoy (1998), begins with studying key questions in a particular setting. Here I draw on participant observation, interviews, and primary source data, collected over fifteen years, to understand how people experience and shape their own environments. Revised theory is then constructed by identifying the inconsistencies between existing theoretical expectations and what is actually happening on the ground (Samuels 2009).

I argue that in many ways the municipal government of São Paulo is actually not at the center of policymaking around housing in the city, though that is the expectation of existing theories of policymaking. As Kaufmann and Sidney argue in the Introduction to this volume, São Paulo represents a case in which decentering the state in public policy analysis leads to greater understanding of the processes on the ground. Business leaders and social movements often play leading roles, with the city government sometimes acting as mediator and sometimes as absent landlord. In the absence of the state, social movements

coordinate residents for autoconstruction and other autonomous governance and support, while real estate companies and developers provide new housing according to their own interests, rather than participating in government housing schemes. As mediator, the city government negotiates between the interests of social movements and the private sector, but it is slow to act without significant pressure from either side. The continued expectation that the municipal government will be the principal implementer of housing programs may actually hinder effective and efficient provision of secure housing to low-income residents.

The analysis highlights critical areas for reform to strengthen urban policymaking in favor of the interests of residents and the forces that may enable change. It identifies three sets of interlocking factors that work against an effective role for local government: (1) the incongruity between the goals and regulations of federal programs and the capacity of local governments to share costs and manage program implementation; (2) the temporal disjuncture between the short-term priorities of political actors across levels, the length of time needed to implement housing programs, and the long-term effects of programs and policies; and (3) the relationships between social movements, municipal bureaucracy, and the private sector and how they may either effect or impede policy implementation.

Adapting theories of public policy from the national level to a multi-level context, this chapter contributes to our understanding of how policy-implementation gaps function at the city or municipal level in the Global South. As Zhang and Paller also identify in this volume, multilevel governance, state-society interactions, and party politics engender a different policymaking process at the city level. For São Paulo—and other cities—to effectively and efficiently address the housing needs of millions of residents, the cycle of promising policies followed by incomplete implementation needs to be disrupted. As this case demonstrates, either the city government must take on a stronger role in providing housing support, or the locus of resources and authority must shift to enable other actors to more effectively close the housing deficit. Neither literature by scholars of public policy on implementation gaps nor literature on urban politics regarding policy change fully captures the ambiguity of the policies and programs we see in São Paulo. Instead we need to move toward a framework on urban implementation that does not merely meld existing theories of the policy process, but adapts to the sometimes chaotic realities we see in cities of the Global South. In particular, an urban policy framework must account for nonlinearity and constant conflict in implementation.

## Housing Policy and Continuing Challenges in São Paulo

On the face of it, the municipal government of São Paulo has had numerous interventions to address housing insecurity over the last three decades. And, it is true that the city has had a greater diversity of policies, programs, and institutions to address housing access and insecurity than almost any other municipality in Brazil. In this megacity, the scale of the challenges and a thriving construction and real estate sector, combined with active social movements for housing and a highly competitive political environment, have shaped the evolution of programs over the past several decades at the local level. Still, in a population of about 12.5 million, at least 10% of citizens lack access to secure, decent housing (João Pinheiro Foundation 2020). This means that despite the apparent attention paid to housing by various municipal, state, and federal administrations over the course of several decades, approximately 1.5 million residents of São Paulo still need secure housing (João Pinheiro Foundation 2020).

One way the municipal Secretariat for Housing has tried to manage the demand is to maintain a registration list for families seeking housing support. As of the middle of 2025, about 346,000 people were registered (COHAB 2025). Residents must update their registration annually, and a quick review of the list online shows that even with the requirement to re-register annually, many people have been on the list for nearly two decades. There is also a separate registration process for residents removed from areas of risk, though the list is not publicly available online. There remain 1,732 registered favelas (informal settlements), containing about 400,000 dwellings, another 431 neighborhoods that await regularization but have received basic services, and about 1,500 tenements (overcrowded, unlicensed units) in the city center registered with the Secretariat for Housing (SEHAB 2021). Traditionally, informal means of housing, including in the favelas, are the primary solution to the lack of affordable, formalized units.

In the 1980s, housing movements gained strength through the process of democratization, participating alongside allies from the Workers' Party (PT) in establishing new governance arrangements and housing policies. With the election of PT mayor Luiza Erundina in 1988, housing movements worked with government officials to implement projects for self-management (*autogestão*), in which associations manage the construction of new housing units for low-income residents, most often with the involvement of future homeowners themselves. In the 1990s, as more conservative administrations came into office, programs shifted away from *autogestão* toward large-scale housing

projects located in the largely unserved urban periphery. In the early 2000s, the administration of PT mayor Marta Suplicy initiated several new projects for low-income housing in the central zone of the city, and the early part of the decade also brought greater funding from the federal level under PT president Lula da Silva to support urbanization of informal settlements. The municipal government moved toward regularizing untitled properties to provide security of tenure to residents through formalized ownership, and these regularization programs have continued as a low-cost intervention over two decades.

In 2009, the administration of President Lula da Silva announced the Minha Casa Minha Vida (MCMV—My House My Life) program, which sought to leverage federal, state, and municipal resources to construct millions of new housing units for low- and middle-income families across the country. The initial program was launched in response to the global financial crisis of 2008 as a means of strengthening the construction industry in Brazil. By 2020, a total of almost six million units across the country had been constructed or contracted through MCMV (Ministério do Desenvolvimento Regional 2021). In 2009, a separate program under MCMV, called Minha Casa Minha Vida Entidades (MCMV-E, My House My Life for Associations), was created in response to criticism from housing movements that people in the lowest income bracket were not being served by MCMV, or were being relegated to peripheral and isolated tracts that were cheaper than centrally located, well-served areas close to employment opportunities (Carvalho 2016; Stiphany and Ward 2019). Housing movements, including the União Nacional por Moradia Popular (National Union of Housing Movements), headquartered in São Paulo, lodged complaints with the Ministry of Cities and advocated for a program based on the principles of *autogestão*, in which local associations manage the projects. As of 2020, however, only about 1% of all MCMV projects were part of the Entidades program (Ministério do Desenvolvimento Regional 2021). While a number of MCMV-E projects were contracted in São Paulo in the latter half of the 2010s, most had not been completed as of 2021 due to lack of continued funding. In 2021, the federal budget for MCMV was decimated by President Jair Bolsonaro's administration in what amounted to the end of the program (Giovanez 2021). The administration began a new program called Casa Verde e Amarela (Green and Yellow House—per the colors of the national flag), which used the federal financing system for housing to guarantee thirty-year mortgages for low-income citizens, but cut financing for those at the bottom of the income scale under MCMV. In April 2021, news outlets reported a stoppage in construction for over 200,000 units nationwide as a result of the budget cuts to MCMV (Estadão 2021). With President Lula da Silva back in office

as of 2023, both the MCMV and MCMV-E programs were reinstated by the administration.

In the past decade or so, to leverage funding for low-income housing units, the city of São Paulo turned toward public-private partnerships, particularly through the Casa Paulista program with the São Paulo state government and the Casa da Família program with the federal government. To date, according to the Casa Paulista website, though a number of projects in partnership with the federal government were completed in the beginning of the 2010s, no units were produced in partnerships between the state and municipal governments (Governo do Estado de São Paulo 2021). Though the state government is transparent about the lack of projects implemented through the program, it clearly demonstrates a lack of capacity for coordination across municipal and state governments.

In general, official publications make it quite difficult to discern exactly how many residents in São Paulo have received some kind of housing assistance over the past few decades. But by piecing together data from previous housing plans and official online data, a picture begins to evolve. In fact, the housing plans, conducted roughly every four years, are quite important for understanding the vision for housing benefits over time, if not necessarily for detailing accomplishments. The Local Plan for Social Interest Housing (Plano Local de Habitação de Interesse Social), as these plans are officially known, is required for membership in the National System for Social Interest Housing, defined by Federal Law 11,124/2005. The purpose is to promote collaboration in planning across the federal, state, and local levels, in relation to the national plan. Starting in 2008, the Secretariat for Housing sent a draft plan to the participatory Municipal Housing Council, which established a working group for revisions. In 2010, the plan went to the discussion phase with civil society and housing movements. The mayor then sent the text to the City Council, and it was approved on June 20, 2012. A subsequent plan underwent debate and similar preparation before approval in 2016. A new planning process was underway in 2018, but a plan had yet to be finalized as of 2025.

At issue throughout the years is the level of funding allocated for housing by the municipal government. In the 2012 Plan for Housing, developed under the administration of center-right mayor Gilberto Kassab (DEM), the Housing Secretariat completed an extensive data-mapping project to identify where resources were needed for urbanization of favelas. As a result, the authors of the plan reported, the budget for housing projects went from R\$256 million in 2005 to R\$2 billion in 2012, accounting for federal, state, and municipal funds. With these resources, the administration reported that 360,000

families benefited from projects that were completed or in progress between 2005 and 2012. Of these, about 180,000 seem to have involved regularization of land titles or urbanization projects. According to the report, about 41,000 new housing units, most in conjunction with the state, were “finished, in construction, hired, or awaiting beginning” (SEHAB 2012). The plan includes numerous pictures of brightly colored, clean spaces and buildings along with tables to demonstrate the number of families who benefited in neighborhoods throughout the city.

In reality, spending levels never meet the pledges of officials or planning documents, and are certainly never enough to make a significant dent in the supply of low-income housing. To sufficiently address the problems of insecure housing and assist 1.2 million families, the plan recommended an increase in the housing budget to R\$3.6 *billion* per year. In reality, the approved budget was R\$471 *million* for 2019 and R\$452.5 *million* in 2020 (SEHAB 2020). In fact, between 2012 and 2020, the state of funding for housing became increasingly grim. The 2016 Municipal Housing Plan reports that in 2015 the city invested R\$695 million in housing, with an additional R\$393 million from the federal level (MCMV), and R\$53 million from the state (for Casa Paulista) (SEHAB 2016). The city’s investment fell from 3.9% of the total municipal budget in 2009 to 1.4% in 2015. During these years approximately 16,000 families benefited from urbanization programs in favelas and 28,000 received temporary rental assistance under the *Auxílio Aluguel* program. Even so, in 2016 the authors estimated that over 1.4 million families were in need of new housing units, interventions where they lived, or assistance with excessive rent or density. Funding shortages continue to hamper efforts to address these needs, which begets the question of why promised resources are not invested in actuality.

Still, the promises continue. From 2017 to 2020 the Municipal Housing Secretariat created three objectives (“metas”), as required by law. Two programs, Casa de Família and Locação Social, sought to construct or renovate 25,000 housing units. Another 210,000 families were to benefit from regularization of property titles, and urbanization programs were to benefit 27,500 families. Nowhere on the website or elsewhere that I could find is there a report of how many units were actually built or improved, but the housing deficit remains roughly the same, if not worse.

Despite stated intentions for housing assistance, it is abundantly clear that budgetary commitments do not reflect prioritization of housing in the city. Decreasing funds, however, do not tell the whole story about why plans do not come to fruition. Lack of political will, of course, also plays a major role.

To take one example, in December 2019, the administration of Mayor Bruno Covas announced the launch of a program titled *Pode Entrar* (You Can Enter) with funds allocated by the legislature to construct new units. But in July 2020, the Covas administration gathered the housing movements to tell them that the program would not “come off paper” (UMM-SP, 2020). Over a year later, following local elections and considerable pressure from housing movements in the city, the city legislature passed another bill deemed necessary by the administration to regulate *Pode Entrar*. It was not until the end of 2022, with the city under a new mayor following the untimely death of Mayor Covas, that the Housing Secretariat returned to planning for the program.<sup>1</sup>

The numbers indicate that after three decades of housing interventions since democratization, though thousands of families have benefited from improvement in their homes and neighborhoods or received access to new units or rental assistance, there has been little impact on the overall number of families in need in this megacity. There are certainly many reasons for this outcome—surging property values, an economy in crisis, low wages—but the challenges of prioritizing government intervention in housing and the actual implementation of proposed policies and programs across time remain significant barriers to reducing the housing deficit. I argue below that a new urban-focused framework for policymaking is needed to explain these implementation challenges and provide much-needed solutions.

### Public Policy and Urban Politics

When government seems to agree on and even legislate housing policies, why do we not see these policies implemented on the ground? This is the essential question for this chapter, but neither policy nor urban politics literature alone provides a satisfactory description of the reality in São Paulo.

In truth, scholars of public policy have long studied how problems arise between the decision-making and the implementation phases of the policy process. Pressman and Wildavsky (1973) argued that implementation is the “interaction between the setting of goals and actions geared to achieve them” (xv). They contend that the primary challenge to implementation is whether bureaucratic resources and authority were adequate to carry out the decisions of leadership above. In this linear top-down approach, Pressman and Wildavsky found that the number of “clearance points” in the implementation process would determine whether policy objectives were achieved. Basically, the top-down approach posits that principal actors make decisions, and



then rely on lower-level agents to put those decisions into practice. Failure to implement policy objectives comes from lack of resources or authority flowing to those agents.

Rejecting the elite-based focus of the top-down approach, subsequent scholars turned toward bottom-up theories to explain implementation, arguing that we cannot assume there is a causal link from original policy objectives to outcomes. Instead, we should start at the bottom, with networks involved in policy delivery, assessing why implementers, who Lipsky termed “street-level bureaucrats,” may or may not stick to the original policy objectives (Lipsky 1971, 1980). In the mid-1980s, then, scholars, including Elmore (1979), Sabatier (1986), and Goggin et al. (1990), turned toward hybrid theories of implementation, which as the name suggests blended the top-down and bottom-up perspectives for a more dynamic account. Elmore (1985) proposed a process of both “forward mapping” to consider the policy instruments and resources available, and “backward mapping” to determine the motivations of the policy targets and those in charge of implementation at the ground level. The advocacy coalition framework similarly emphasizes the dynamics between the public- and private-sector actors across levels, taking into account economic and political conditions (Sabatier 1986).

These three approaches to policy implementation all originated in the United States, and though as Pülzl and Treib (2007) describe in their assessment of this research, implementation theory has also been tested in the European context, there appears to be little explicit application to developing countries or cities as a level of analysis. One key exception to this is Merilee Grindle’s edited volume *Politics and Policy Implementation in the Third World* (1980), in which she asks how the content of public policy and the political context of administrative action shapes its implementation. Grindle begins by emphasizing the distinction between policies and programs, which she says “implies that policy implementation is a function of program implementation and is dependent upon its outcome.” She continues, “As a consequence, the study of the process of policy implementation almost necessarily involves investigation and analysis of concrete action programs that have been designed as a means of achieving broader policy goals” (Grindle 1980, 6). The stated policy offers goals, but programs put these goals into practice. She sees as critical to policy implementation the capacity of administrators to put programs into practice as designed, the level of controversy engendered by the content of the policies themselves, and the “power capabilities” of key actors to control activities (8–11). More recently, Shomon Shamsuddin (2020) added to these explanations, particularly in the context of resilience in cities, arguing that



fatigue, complacency, and overconfidence among program implementers also increase resistance to implementation among bureaucrats and target groups.

Essentially, these authors together find that implementation gaps result from a lack of resources, authority, will, and incentives to move policy objectives to reality. These arguments boil down to a lack of capacity and responsiveness across levels of government involved in the decision-making and implementation of policies and programs. While all of these variables are probably reasonable explanations for the experience of implementation gaps in São Paulo, how the urban impacts the direction of these variables remains a question.

In fact, urban politics literature offers somewhat similar explanations for why implementation gaps exist. For example, Clarence Stone's urban regime theory (1989) posits that when coalitions of private-sector and government actors break down, that is when change is likely, including cancellation of policies and programs already decided on. While this is true in the abstract, urban regime theory does not then explain why policies and programs are announced but not concluded by the same regime, nor does it predict what backlash might occur from canceled policies and programs.

Mobilization of civil society and participatory governance institutions has also been cited as a mechanism for either halting or motivating implementation. The Municipal Council for Housing in São Paulo is an active venue for discussion and policy decision-making, as well as an accountability mechanism, though it by no means functions as effectively in practice as in theory due to constant conflicts among members and limited authority and resources (Donaghy 2013).

Several scholars writing on Brazil (Abers 2019; Marques 2023) argue that significant overlap between actors with multiple affiliations inside and outside of government may also affect implementation of policies and programs. When actors aligned with housing movements are embedded in bureaucratic positions, policies tend to shift toward redistribution. But the impact of the presence of these actors is difficult to untangle from the presence of a leftist administration in charge of city government. And, as I have heard from several actors with multiple affiliations over the years, the challenge is that when the left is in power, the movements feel they can ask for everything, but the reality of finance and diverse interests prevents the administration from complying with demands. The fact that a government is leftist, therefore, does not always guarantee the enactment of progressive housing policies.

Recently, Eduardo Marques set out to assess the path of urban policies from decision-making to implementation in São Paulo. He argues that urban

policy in the city can be characterized by four events: “program creation, continuity, interruption, and return from latency” (Marques 2023). He reviews the trajectories of programs for urbanization and cooperative self-help housing in the city and finds that new mayoral administrations, visibility, international funding, and networks of civil society actors responsible for implementation triggered a self-reproducing path in which programs were devised, lay dormant, and then came back again over time. He finds that, for housing programs in particular, leftist mayoral administrations generated and renewed the most redistributive urban policies over the course of three decades in an incremental fashion, rather than one administration being fully responsible. Party politics are certainly key to housing policy implementation across cities (Zhang, Paller, this volume). But Marques does not explain the role of multi-level governance, the nonlinear trajectory of policies, or the outright lack of follow-through on policy promises.

In sum, drawing from all of the above but recognizing that no perspective captures the full dynamic, I argue that issues of accountability and transparency must come into play when assessing why programs are announced but never come “off paper,” as is often the case in São Paulo. The focus of past research on governments themselves, without attending to the roles of civil society and the private sector in formulating their own informal “policies” that influence the entire city and policy context, misses the dynamic of the unique urban policymaking environment.

Compared to these national-level theories of top-down or bottom-up implementation gaps, the responses we see on the ground in São Paulo and elsewhere are sometimes messy, often ambivalent, and always insufficient. Policy implementation simply does not work in the linear fashion that these US-centric theories imagined. Below, I argue that implementation gaps result from a combination of inconsistencies in commitment to policies across levels of government, an inability to commit sufficient resources, lack of political accountability, and the institutionalization of conflict among social movements, government bureaucrats, and actors in the private sector.

### Implementation Gaps in São Paulo

In the following sections I provide evidence on several key reasons for the lack of commitment and the resulting lack of responsiveness to the massive housing challenges in São Paulo. These explanations result from the extended case study method, through which, during the course of a number of separate

research projects, I observed over time the process of housing policy in the city and formed interpretations from the ground up. I then look back to understand how these three factors reflect explanations for the implementation gaps and change in public policy and urban politics literature discussed above.

*1. The Incongruity Between the Goals and Regulations of Federal Programs and the Capacity or Will of Local Governments to Share Costs and Manage Program Implementation*

In line with the top-down approach identified in policy implementation literature, a mismatch in the policy goals from the federal level and capacity at the municipal level certainly shapes implementation gaps in the city. Marta Arretche (2004) argues that the Brazilian Constitution of 1988 decentralized resources but not responsibilities. One result is that centralized responsibility for the implementation of social policies often meets resistance from local leaders who are reluctant or unable to carry out direction from above. The primary instrument for financing housing construction and purchase, developed under the former military regime, is the Fundo de Garantia por Tempo de Serviço (FGTS), the rules for which are still determined at the federal level. As Arretche argues, the federal government retained the role of principal financier and coordinator of intergovernmental relations, without giving the municipal government instruments to raise revenues to be used locally. At the same time, the municipal government is expected to share in the costs of federally directed programs, most notably MCMV. Here the traditional policy literature regarding federally centered implementation gaps does begin to explain why the municipal government is unable or unwilling to carry out programs devised at the central level.

But there is more to the story than lack of will or capacity. The norms of budgeting in Brazil also provide an unstable environment in which to ensure that plans become reality. As noted by Evaniza Rodrigues (2021), a leader in the União Nacional por Moradia Popular (UNMP—National Union for Popular Housing), budgetary resources allocated by the federal, state, or municipal legislatures are contingent and are always subject to change. As Rodrigues relayed to me, “In practice, legislatures at all levels of government approve funding, but the amount actually available depends on revenues, and governments can still choose what they will and won’t do. Many times they [government officials] launch a program just to appease some demand, but they don’t really have the interest or the political will in seeing it through.” The forces of resource capacity, political will, and control work together to enable programs

to slip off the implementation agenda even after officials have agreed on the substance of the policy objectives. This norm of budgetary uncertainty makes it difficult for bureaucrats to confidently plan for programs and for citizens to follow when policies are or are not put into practice.

To take this point further, the attitude of principal agents plays a primary role in implementation. Writing about bureaucratic discretion in Brazil, Bonelli et al. (2019) argue that the actions of agents are shaped by the society in which they live as well as the role that they themselves envision for public servants. The authors find that bureaucrats regularly adopt what March and Olsen (1983) deemed the “logic of appropriateness” when deciding what actions to take in carrying out prescribed regulations. Given what bureaucrats know to be true about the fluid nature of institutional decision-making across levels of government, they, too, adapt by using their discretion regarding what is appropriate in the moment. If they know that there is no money for implementation or that a given program is not well planned, they may simply shelve the idea with little fanfare. As housing agency officials will readily admit, especially in closed interviews, there simply is not the money to put into practice all of the programs announced from the mayoral or federal levels.

## *2. The Temporal Disjuncture Between the Short-Term Priorities of Political Actors Across Levels, the Length of Time Needed to Implement Housing Programs, and the Long-Term Effects of Programs and Policies*

Housing projects are long-term by nature and are therefore subject to changes in leadership, shifting priorities, and public support over time. From internal program discussions to budgetary approval, environmental studies, proposal solicitations, concessions for public services, contracting, and actual construction, housing programs can take many years. It is very common for a project to begin in one administration and continue into another. And, as Evaniza Rodrigues (2021) reported, both the outgoing and incoming administrations are apt to take credit for the number of units constructed, making it even more difficult to track how many people are actually served over time. For one administration to move from program design to “keys in hand” for construction of new housing units, they basically have to start on day one of their tenure.

Public policy literature often accounts for change in policy goals in terms of the results of democratic elections in which the incumbent either is or is not rewarded by voters with another term based on their actions. The long-

term nature of housing, however, makes it difficult to sustain public support to hold leaders accountable at the ballot box. Because housing projects are visual representations of promises fulfilled, their conclusion would seem to be critical for reelection prospects, but in a city as big as São Paulo with such diverse interests, housing projects often seem to get lost among the competing priorities of voters. As mentioned above, a recent example of a program that did not “come off paper” was *Pode Entrar*, launched by Mayor Covas in 2019. Housing movements in the city had called for the program for several years; it would be similar to MCMV-Entidades, but run by the municipal government of São Paulo rather than the federal government. When the mayor announced the project late in 2019, he said that he would be visiting new projects by March 2020. In January the first regulations for the program were released, but no formal call for proposal followed. The government then announced that the program would not continue because new housing projects cannot be started in an election year, according to Brazilian election law. Given that the program was announced in 2019 rather than 2020, when elections were to be held, this justification appeared tenuous. Nonetheless, Covas was reelected in 2020 and the program remained defunct. In 2021, housing movements in the city reignited the fight for the program and were able to win legislative approval for a regulatory law needed for the program to begin, though by the end of the year the bill had yet to be signed by the mayor. The urban regime, as described by Stone (1989), remained in place, though the program was no longer the administration’s priority, even if it had been at one time.

Further, voters do not always know to whom they should attribute programs across levels of government. For example, when I visited a long-completed urbanization project in 2019, many residents praised former president Lula for the benefits to their community, without concern for which mayor was responsible for the construction. In this same community the majority voted for conservative President Jair Bolsonaro in 2018 and then leftist PSOL (Socialism and Liberty Party) mayoral candidate Guilherme Boulos in 2020. This is to say that political affiliations are often variable and do not always reflect what we might assume to be the rational interests of voters. It is also possible, as Rodrigues mentions, that people don’t often understand housing as a public policy, but rather think of housing as a product of the market. From this perspective, if people do not have access to secure housing it is a failure of the market or of people’s individual ability to work and pay for housing rather than a failure of public policy. The problem is then framed as the individual’s to solve, not as a societal challenge to be remedied by inclusive public policy. These ideals make it difficult to convince voters to prioritize gov-

ernment housing programs in their electoral choices and to hold politicians accountable for whether or not programs were implemented.

### *3. Norms of Behavior Among Social Movements, Municipal Government Leadership, and the Private Sector Either Effect or Impede Policy Implementation*

The relationships among key actors in the policy environment and the informal norms that have developed are critical to when and why programs come to fruition. First, bureaucrats in government agencies can significantly alter the implementation of programs based on their feelings toward social movements and their ideological positioning (Rich 2019). On the one hand, bureaucrats can be close allies of the movements, participating in advocacy networks and often blurring the boundaries between the state and civil society (Abers and Von Bülow 2011; Marques 2023). In São Paulo this type of relationship has been particularly strong under PT (Workers' Party) administrations, as the traditional housing movements in the city grew up alongside the party and maintain strong connections to individual party leaders and electoral politics. Bureaucrats can act as mediators between the movements and higher-level officials and can explain decisions coming down from superiors. When the PT has controlled the municipal administration, there is a stronger voice for the movements within the Housing Secretariat, which can keep their demands front and center. But as one former PT official once told me, the housing movements also have higher expectations for policies and programs under a PT administration, which sometimes conflict with other fiscal demands and the realities of governing in this massive city.

On the other hand, under more conservative administrations, bureaucrats may have less interest in working with the housing movements and associations. For example, in 2019, I observed a meeting between neighborhood-association leaders and Housing Secretariat bureaucrats to discuss roadblocks preventing residents in their neighborhoods from securing final regularization of land titles. Some of these residents had been waiting over a decade for the final stamps of bureaucratic approval. The officials in the room, from the centrist Covas administration, either dismissed the requests for action on the grounds that it was not within their control, or said that finalizing titles would require significantly more red tape. The ability of bureaucrats to either stall or promote progress in these cases demonstrated the power they hold in final implementation of policy goals from the top down. But it also showed the power of persistence from the bottom up as necessary to achieve any small

victories, as their presence in the meeting did remind the officials of their demands for closure.

By custom it has become quite commonplace for the government to stall in implementing projects, with the movements then taking to the street in protest to demand a meeting with officials and in that meeting receiving promises that the project will be put in motion. In fact, it seems to be expected that the government will not move forward with allocating funding and getting projects in place until such pressure occurs. This institutionalization of contentious politics as a means of getting things done clearly increases inefficiencies in the implementation process. Yue Zhang (2020) posits São Paulo as an arena of “contested governance” in which inclusiveness is high, but effectiveness is low. Housing movements, using a rights-based approach to their demands, promote a constant state of claims-making and negotiation to push elected officials and bureaucrats toward implementation of stated goals and programs, but in reality this conflict does not always result in progress because of the mismatch between distribution of resources and authority across agencies and lack of cooperation across partisan divides. The result is often stagnation, particularly as municipal administrations change frequently while housing projects take years to complete.

The União dos Movimentos da Moradia in São Paulo (UMM-SP) describes their role in housing-program implementation as “promoter.” They advocate that public resources for housing programs in general be increased, but for *autogestão* specifically, they take the lead in finding available land, composing project proposals, overseeing the execution of projects, and providing support to project beneficiaries. The 2019 program, Pode Entrar, came out of a proposal from the UMM-SP to the participatory Municipal Council for Housing (CMH), mentioned above, which consists of representatives from social movements, nongovernment organizations, and government and is responsible for allocating a portion of funding for housing and determining program regulations.<sup>2</sup> The CMH is meant to promote accountability and transparency in the allocation of resources and the implementation of programs. In the case of Pode Entrar, the CMH formed a working group with the participation of the administration and the movement, and they put together a project proposal that was approved by the plenary in the CMH and later ratified by decree by the mayor. The process represented a proactive role for housing movements in presenting and devising a new program within the Council that gained the outward support of a centrist mayor. That the program had yet to come off paper, though, demonstrates the roadblocks that occur once the movements have little power to affect its implementation.

In addition, any story of impediments to policy implementation would be incomplete without discussing corruption. Following the Lava Jato (Car Wash) scandal in Brazil, which implicated all of the largest private-sector developers in the country, it is particularly clear there have been instances of outright bribery in exchange for government contracts, which degrades accountability. But the problem of corruption in government programs continues, especially at the federal level, as policies tend to prioritize private-sector solutions to housing, giving these actors an outsized role in policy implementation. For example, the Bolsonaro government's Casa Verde e Amerela, essentially a housing-finance program first proposed by the real estate sector, benefited the private sector indirectly by allowing individuals to use money from the Fundo de Garantia to finance home buying.

Further, the current administration in São Paulo heavily promotes the use of public-private partnerships, in which the city provides the land and subsidizes construction carried out by private companies. In this way private companies have incentives to produce new housing units for people of various income levels without taking on risk or leveraging other sources of private capital. They execute the projects and sell the units on the private market. Many of these projects are located in Zones for Special Social Interest (ZEIS) that regulate the number of units that must be allocated to the low-income housing market. However, these projects tend to favor the middle-income and lower-middle-income markets, without attending to demand in the lowest-income population, and in a strong market, the private sector has fewer incentives to build for those with lower income (Izar 2021). Housing movements have worked for years to create and prioritize building and renovation for the low-income housing sector in the ZEIS, but there is no accountability for ensuring execution of these goals.

## Conclusions

The narrative above both adheres to many of the assumptions of existing theories of policy implementation and requires additional theorization to understand just how messy carrying out housing programs can be in a city such as São Paulo. The mismatch of funding and authority between the directives of the federal government and the capacity and will at the municipal level provides evidence of many blocked "clearance points" that deter policy and program implementation. But the difficulties that arise from the long-time horizons of housing projects and the inability or unwillingness of voters to



hold the local government accountable mean that there are few incentives for change among municipal-level politicians. And the relationships among government officials, social movements, and the private sector, solidified through informal norms of interaction, keep the pace of progress in slow motion.

Of course, São Paulo and other Brazilian cities are not alone in experiencing challenges to progress. A study from Ghana finds many similarities in the impediments to implementation and the reasons for the outright abandonment of projects. Akwei, Damoha, and Amankwah-Amoah (2020) find that partisan politics, particularly in an election year, lead to project initiation without follow-through after the election. Unrealistic promises not backed up by budgetary resources, outright clientelism, lack of stakeholder engagement, and corruption in contracting led to housing programs never reaching completion. The problem is not simply blockages in a linear chain of implementation of policies and programs from top to bottom or from the bottom up; rather, it is a lack of accountability, transparency, and responsiveness in the local government that keeps projects from serving the housing needs of millions of residents in cities worldwide.

The narrative above leads to two conclusions. The first concerns changes in governance and program structures to enable more action to address housing needs, and the second is related to how we theorize policy implementation in cities, particularly in the Global South.

First, what is to be done to improve the implementation of policies and programs in São Paulo and elsewhere? For many years the proposed solution by NGOs and social movements in Brazil has been to develop new, more democratic laws for urban development, such as the *Estatuto da Cidade* (City Statute) based around the right to the city, combined with the effectuation of participatory institutions across levels of government. And in fact, the City Statute and participatory councils for housing, in particular, have significantly affected proactive proposals from civil society, increasing regulations for programs that more closely align with the needs of low-income citizens, and creating more transparency in the policy process (Donaghy 2013, 2020). These institutions have enforced a measure of decentering of the state, in that there is a greater role for civil society and the private sector in policymaking. But ultimately, decision-making regarding resources and discretion in carrying out programs still mainly rests with the executive and the government bureaucracy. And this point is critical; the municipal government puts itself at the center of authority even knowing the importance of other entities in creating housing solutions, from both the private sector and from the initiatives of social movements.

Urban policymaking depends on decentering resources and ideas, but the institutions of governance have not kept pace. Housing policy in São Paulo and developing cities everywhere will never be entirely state-led, given that the need for shelter far outpaces government programs or what the market can provide to those with the lowest incomes. Out of necessity, individuals, social movements, and neighborhood associations act as proactive agents of programs and policies. In theorizing the role of the city in housing policy, and in urban development more broadly, scholars may wish to think of the role of the state more as a mediator of policies and programs than as the center of policy solutions, again decentering the state, as Kaufmann and Sidney suggest in this volume. If the mechanisms for accountability are weak and the need for investment of resources is high, urban governments may be unlikely if not unable to ever meet low-income citizens' need for housing. As São Paulo and other cities in the Global South already have booming informal settlements, often alongside strong neighborhood associations, the state could do more to strengthen the ability of these groups to improve existing communities. Though urbanization programs have existed in São Paulo and other cities for several decades, it may be more effective and efficient to give community-based organizations a larger role than municipal, state, or federal governments in managing these projects.

Second, the traditional policy process, in which policies move in a linear fashion from decision-making through implementation, does not capture the dynamism of policymaking and practice in cities such as São Paulo. Issues of multilevel governance, impediments to producing state accountability, and institutionalized norms of conflict among actors create complexities that cause chaos and inefficiencies. An urban policy process that responds to these complex dynamics across diverse cities recognizes the hurdles that exist and the back-and-forth process or discontinuation between the decision-making and implementation stages.

#### NOTES

1. Though Mayor Bruno Covas was reelected in October 2020, he died of cancer in May 2021, leaving Vice-Mayor Ricardo Nunes to take over his term.

2. For more information on the Municipal Housing Councils in Brazil, please see Donaghy (2013), *Civil Society and Participatory Governance in Brazil*.

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## The Redevelopment of Informal Settlements in China and India

### *Two Models of Urban Governance Compared*

Yue Zhang

As two of the largest emerging economies in the world, China and India have both experienced robust economic growth alongside rapid urbanization in recent decades. From 1980 to 2020, China's urbanization level increased from 19% to 61%, while India's grew from 23% to 35%.<sup>1</sup> Amid this large-scale urbanization, a substantial proportion of the two countries' urban population—approximately 25% in China and 35% in India—lives in various forms of informal settlements.<sup>2</sup> More importantly, the redevelopment of informal settlements has taken place in major cities of both countries in recent years, but the outcomes vary significantly. In Guangzhou, the redevelopment of urban villages results in upscale real estate development, which turns the villagers into a rich “housing class” but displaces tens of thousands of migrant tenants. In Mumbai, slum redevelopment provides in situ allocation for slum dwellers, so the rich and the poor end up living in close proximity, but the contrast in the quality of their housing, infrastructure, and services is striking. What explains the different outcomes of urban redevelopment in the two megacities of the Global South?

This chapter argues that variations in the outcomes of urban redevelopment in Guangzhou and Mumbai are primarily due to the different models of

urban governance in China and India. While urban governance is coordinated-progrowth in China, it is fragmented-clientelistic in India. The two models mediate the relations among different actors and shape the urban policy process in distinct ways. A key aspect of “seeing like a city” in urban policy analysis is to decenter the state, which means to recognize the role of the state as a multiscale entity and to consider a wide diversity of actors in the policy process. The comparison between China and India illuminates this point by showing that the different outcomes of urban redevelopment are largely determined by the allocation of authority across governmental levels, and by the interactions among various state and nonstate actors. It also highlights that urban policy analysis is at the intersection between formal structures and informal interactions. We need to pay close attention to the negotiation between the state and the informal housing communities to better understand how the policies of urban redevelopment are made and implemented.

China and India are not alone in experiencing the proliferation of informality. The shortage of affordable housing and the expansion of informal settlements is a challenge facing many developing countries (Donaghy; Paller; both in this volume). According to UN-Habitat (2016, 2), one-third of the world’s urban population lives in “slums,” the majority of them in the Global South, and the absolute number of slum dwellers continues to grow.<sup>3</sup> Given the prevalence of informal settlements, Roy and AlSayyad (2004) suggest that informality is not a separate sector, but rather a mode of urbanization. While traditional approaches tend to imply that informality is located beyond the reach of the state, recent studies question the binary between the formal and the informal (Marx and Kelling 2019; Davis 2018). They reveal the intricate entanglement between the state and informality, highlighting that the state plays a critical role in producing and institutionalizing informal settlements (Roy 2005; Haid and Hilbrandt 2019). This chapter builds on and advances this perspective. By comparing the redevelopment of informal settlements in China and India, it demonstrates that state intervention that aims to eliminate informality in reality reproduces informality and reinforces inequality.

While most comparative studies focus on cases in similar national contexts, this chapter presents a comparison of two substantially dissimilar systems. China and India have many national-level differences in aspects ranging from political institutions to social structure to history and culture. However, they have both experienced remarkable economic growth and rapid urbanization in recent decades, and their housing sectors have a high level of informality. While the state has intervened in the informal settlements of both countries, the outcomes vary drastically, implying that different modes of development and governance are at play. These conditions provide a foundation for com-

paring the two countries, and especially make their cities ideal sites for comparison. Using cities as the anchor of cross-nation, cross-regime comparison provides an opportunity to advance the “huge comparisons” proposed by Tilly (1984) (Zhang 2020; Read 2018). The chapter also echoes the call for moving beyond the traditional focus on North America and Western Europe and treating the Global South as “new geographies of theory” (Roy 2009; Robinson 2016; Roy and Ong 2011). In doing so, it hopes to expand the scope of urban policy analysis and contribute to the construction of a global perspective on urban studies.

Data presented in this chapter was collected from fieldwork and archival research in Guangzhou and Mumbai from 2016 to 2019. Trips to Guangzhou were on June 18–30, 2017, and December 15–22, 2019; trips to Mumbai were on January 2–16, 2016, and January 2–12, 2017. Fieldwork included interviews and participatory observation. In total, I conducted thirty-five in-depth, semi-structured interviews in Guangzhou and forty in Mumbai. Each interview lasted a minimum of an hour, and took up to three hours. Interviewees included public officials, party leaders, urban planners, developers, NGO activists, and residents. In addition to interviews, I visited eight urban villages in Guangzhou and eleven slums in Mumbai, during or after their redevelopment.

The chapter starts with a theoretical discussion of urban policy as a multi-level analysis and the contributions of this study to the scholarship on urban policy. The second section compares the two models of urban governance in China and India along three key dimensions—intergovernmental relations, party system, and nonstate networks. The next two sections provide a detailed analysis of how the two models of urban governance have shaped the redevelopment of informal settlements in Guangzhou and in Mumbai. Besides facing the challenge of urban redevelopment, the informal housing communities were extremely vulnerable during the COVID-19 pandemic. The subsequent section discusses how the urban governance models shaping pre-pandemic politics in China and India influenced their pandemic responses, and how such responses affected the informal housing communities in Guangzhou and Mumbai. The chapter concludes by reflecting on the relations between informality and inequality and discussing the implications of the research for urban policy analysis.

### Urban Policy as Multilevel Analysis

The concept of “multilevel governance” was introduced in the early 1990s to describe the system of negotiation among nested governments at several



territorial tiers in the process of European integration (Marks 1993). It was adopted by scholars of urban politics to examine political and policy processes in cities. Sellers (2002, 2005) proposes a networked, decentered analysis of urban politics where cities or urban regions are units of analysis, and variations of outcomes are analyzed as a result of both local strategies and nationally specific infrastructures of urban governance. Highlighting the rescaling of statehood, Brenner (2004, 2) suggests that urban policy “has become an essential political mechanism through which a profound institutional and geographical transformation of national states has been occurring.”

To see like a city is to understand the urban as a distinctive political ontology that exists in a complex, multilevel institutional setting. Hence, multilevel governance is an important component of the framework of urban policy analysis proposed in this book. According to Kaufmann and Sidney (2020), a relational and multilevel dimension of analysis is critical for urban policy, because policies issued at the urban scale are likely to be the product of interaction, negotiation, and compromise among state and nonstate actors from multiple scales and spaces. The perspective of multilevel governance improves our understanding of the state in urban policy analysis. While it does not deny the role of the nation-state, it challenges the generic notion of the state as a unitary entity and emphasizes territorial and institutional variations within a state. In other words, the national is considered an infrastructure for urban policy analysis in the context of multilevel governance (Sellers 2005; Snyder 2001; Heller 2017). This notion of the state is especially important for understanding the urban policy process in developing countries, where decentralization has widely taken place but the initiatives of nation-states are still central to local actions in many places.

Building on existing theories of multilevel governance, this chapter sheds new light on the following issues. First, while most of the studies are on developed countries and federalist systems, the chapter shifts the focus to developing countries and unitary states. In doing so, it tests the explanatory power of the theory and reveals the institutional complexity of these countries. Second, there is a consensus among scholars that nonstate actors have not received sufficient attention in multilevel analysis (Kübler and Pagano 2012; Tortola 2017). The chapter fills the gap by examining the roles of various nonstate actors and their interactions with the state in urban redevelopment. Third, the chapter demonstrates that multilevel analysis is not only about formal structures but also about informal exchanges. These theoretical propositions are elaborated in the following section through a comparison of the different models of urban governance in China and India.

## Comparing Urban Governance in China and India

There is an increased scholarly interest in analyzing the similarities and differences between China and India. For instance, Frazier (2019) investigates contentious politics and urban social movements in 20th-century Shanghai and Bombay. Kennedy (2017) examines state restructuring and subnational policymaking in China and India. In a volume edited by Duara and Perry (2018), scholars compare different aspects of state-society relations in China and India, such as labor relations, legal reform, public goods provision, and transnational migration. In one of the first efforts to systematically compare urban governance in the two countries, Ren (2020) argues that urban governance in China is centered on territorial institutions such as local governments and officials, while that in India is contingent on alliance-building among the state, the private sector, and civil society groups.

This chapter contributes to the dialogue by presenting two models of urban governance in China and India that highlight both the complexity within the state institutions and various formal and informal exchanges between state and nonstate actors. I argue that China has a *coordinated-progrowth* model of urban governance, characterized by strong local state capacity and effective intergovernmental coordination, high mobilizational power of the party system, and a close coalition between local officials and the private sector. India, on the other hand, has a *fragmented-clientelistic* model, whose main features are weak local state capacity and fractured intergovernmental relations, intense interparty competition, and clientelistic relations between politicians and their constituents. The functioning of the two models demonstrates that the variations in urban governance are beyond the formal government system (unitary versus federal) and regime type (authoritarian versus democratic), but are conditioned by the complex interaction among various state and nonstate actors. The rest of this section compares the two models of urban governance through three variables—intergovernmental relations, party system, and nonstate networks.

### *Intergovernmental Relations*

Even though China is a unitary system and India is a federalist system, municipal governments in China have more autonomy than their Indian counterparts. China launched decentralization reform in the early 1990s to incentivize local governments to pursue economic growth. Municipal governments have been empowered to make decisions on many critical urban issues, including

planning, housing, and infrastructure (Landry 2008). As a key component of the reform, a tax-sharing system was created in 1994 to replace the centralized fiscal management system, giving Chinese mayors substantial responsibilities and discretion to generate their own revenue (Bahl 1998; Wong 2013). In the context of administrative and fiscal decentralization, land becomes a major source of revenue for local governments. Local officials aggressively expropriate rural land for urban development and heavily rely on land leasing to generate revenue. The process of land financing has resulted in a model of land-centered urbanization in China, characterized by the spatial expansion of cities, large-scale real estate development, and an infrastructure boom (Lin 2014; Wu 2022).

In India, the weak autonomy of the local governments can be traced to the colonial era and has continued in the era of independence (Kohli 2004). State governments and their functional agencies control major urban policies, including land use and urban redevelopment. Municipalities receive limited financial resources from the upper levels of government, while their means to generate revenue on their own remain limited (Pethe 2013). The stringent controls of the central and state governments have resulted in insufficient investment in urban infrastructure and services, limiting the capacity of municipal governments to effectively address the challenges of urbanization. As one of the central government's efforts to empower local institutions, the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act of 1993 formally recognizes municipalities as a third tier of government and mandates the increase of local government autonomy. However, the decentralization reform failed to delegate sufficient power and resources to the local level due to resistance from the states (Kennedy 2017).

### *Party System*

China is a one-party state, and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is the founding and sole governing political party of the country. The CCP has a high mobilizational capacity and influences the urban policy process in two major ways. First, there are party committees at every level of government. The party committee enjoys a higher political superiority than the administrative division at the same level. The role of the party committees is not to make specific policies, but to ensure that urban policies follow the party directives. Second, the CCP controls the selection and promotion of public officials. Party membership is essential for one's recruitment to crucial positions and future promotion. Municipal officials are subject to the CCP's personnel manage-

ment system, so they have strong incentives to demonstrate their loyalty to the party leaders and to comply with the party's policy objectives (Landry 2008).

India has a multiparty system characterized by the proliferation of regional parties and intense interparty competition. Many regional parties actively pursue control over the state and local governments. While political parties in India are primarily vehicles for election, interparty competition plays an important role in shaping the urban policy agenda. Political parties make various campaign promises to voters during elections, and some of the promises become real policies once they win the election. Another major feature of party politics in India is that there is a strong clientelistic relationship between politicians and their constituents, especially the low-income population. Through these clientelistic ties, politicians provide their supporters with benefits and services while obtaining their votes in return (Chandra 2004; Deuskar 2020).

### *Nonstate Networks*

While the space for civic participation is limited in China under authoritarian rule, various intermediary agencies not only allow the state to penetrate the society but also provide channels for citizens to negotiate with the state. For instance, resident committees in urban areas and village committees in rural areas are the most important self-governing bodies at the grassroots level. Members of these committees are local inhabitants, and they are elected by people in their communities. Most committee members are CCP members, and some of them are retired government officials. Hence, the committees have the dual identity of being both the representatives of the local communities and the extension of the authoritarian regime (Tomba 2014).

In India, associational life has increased as the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act recognizes neighborhood associations, community-based organizations, and NGOs as new actors in urban governance (Appadurai 2002). However, civil society organizations are often suppressed, and their roles are largely conditioned by patronage ties. This is especially evident in India's urban slums, where patronage transactions are frequently mediated by local political brokers, known as slum leaders. As both community representatives and low-level party workers, slum leaders help residents demand public goods and services from political parties, ranging from water and electricity to new roads and sewage lines. They also help party leaders generate voter support from their communities. Slums with dense networks of party workers are more likely to receive more services (Auerbach 2020; Anand and Rademacher 2011).

IN SUM, China and India have different models of urban governance. China's urban governance is coordinated-progrowth in nature, characterized by strong local state capacity and effective intergovernmental coordination, the high mobilizational power of the party system, and close coalitions between local officials and the private sector. India's urban governance, by contrast, is fragmented-clientelistic, marked by weak local state capacity and fractured intergovernmental relations, intense interparty competition, and clientelistic ties between politicians and constituents. The two models have shaped the redevelopment of informal settlements in distinct ways. As several authors in this book point out, housing and land use are not only key urban policy issues, they are also at the heart of political and social conflicts (see Wong; Paller; and Donaghy). Comparing the politics of redevelopment in the informal settlements of China and India provides a fertile ground to explore larger issues, including the affordability and social inclusion of cities.

To demonstrate how the two models of urban governance work, the rest of the chapter analyzes the redevelopment of urban villages in Guangzhou and slum redevelopment in Mumbai. Both cities are important economic and commercial centers in their countries, and both have a high concentration of informal settlements. Given the rich regional variations in China and India, neither Guangzhou nor Mumbai is representative of other cities in their country in a statistical sense, but I have surveyed the literature and selected these cases as both a mirror and a microcosm to illustrate some of the urban processes and mechanisms of governance occurring nationally. Hence, we can obtain some national-level understanding of the urban policy process in China and India by investigating these cases.

### The "Housing Class" vs. The "Invisible": Urban Village Redevelopment in Guangzhou

A megacity with a population of 14.5 million, Guangzhou is the capital city of Guangdong Province and the most populous city in the Pearl River Delta, the frontier of China's economic reform. Following the creation of a special economic zone in Shenzhen, the central government designated the entire Pearl River Delta as an Open Economic Region in 1985 and gave it special tax and trade status (Seto and Kaufmann 2003). These policies led to a development explosion in the region. Between 1980 and 2001, Guangzhou's GDP grew eighteen-fold, with an average per capita annual growth rate of 12% (Guangzhou Statistical Bureau 2003). Over the years, Guangzhou has steadily ranked

in the top five among all Chinese cities and number one among China's provincial capitals in terms of the size of its local economy.<sup>4</sup> Economic opportunities have drawn many rural migrants from China's inner provinces to Guangzhou, especially to its labor-intensive manufacturing industry and service sector.<sup>5</sup> In 2017, nearly 6 million rural migrants—the so-called floating population—were living in Guangzhou, accounting for over 40% of the city population (Guangzhou Municipal Bureau of Urban Renewal 2017, 2).

Migrant laborers do not have access to affordable housing and other social services in Guangzhou due to their lack of local *hukou*.<sup>6</sup> As a result, most have settled in inexpensive rental housing in the so-called urban villages (Tian 2008; Zhang et al. 2003). Urban villages are a type of informal settlement produced by the municipality's selective land expropriation. In the process of urbanization, the city swallowed a significant amount of agricultural land from surrounding areas and converted it into urban land for new development, while leaving villagers' homesteads alone to reduce the cost of land expropriation. Villagers build multistory apartment buildings on their collectively owned homesteads and rent the units to migrant workers. Despite the chaotic land use, decayed housing conditions, and severe infrastructure deficiencies, urban villages house nearly 38% of Guangzhou's population and give rural migrants an entry point to the city (Guangzhou Municipal Bureau of Urban Renewal 2017, 2).

Every urban village has a complex set of self-governing institutions with overlaps between the leaderships. The village committee is elected by the villagers and makes decisions on all major issues in the village, from the management of land to infrastructure development. It also negotiates with public officials to obtain resources and preferential policies for villagers. The village party committee is a local-level CCP organization, whose members are also on the village committee.<sup>7</sup> This design ensures that the party maintains its influence on village affairs. Shareholding companies had been created in most villages by the mid-1990s, whose responsibility is to manage villagers' collective properties on the economic development land<sup>8</sup> and give them cash dividends every year (Lin et al. 2012). The chair of the village committee, the so-called village head, is also the president of the company. In addition to these formal institutions, clan networks play an important role in providing public goods to villagers and mediating their disputes. The president of the shareholding company and members of the party committee are often from the main clans in the village. The strong clan networks, as well as their overlap with the administrative (village committee), political (village party committee), and economic (village shareholding company) organizations, enhance

the collective bargaining power of villagers in the process of redevelopment (Wu, Zang, and Webster 2013).

The redevelopment of urban villages in Guangzhou started in 2009 under the support of central authorities, and the plan was to redevelop all 139 urban villages in the city. Since 2008, land supply has declined in all major Chinese cities, which motivated the real estate industry and local governments to redevelop existing built-up areas. Meanwhile, urban redevelopment was part of the central government's agenda of economic restructuring, which aimed to build high-tech and high-value-added industries and replace labor-intensive processing industries. Then party secretary of Guangdong Province, Wang Yang, who was also a member of the Politburo Standing Committee and one of the four vice premiers in Premier Li Keqiang's administration, played an essential role in promoting the restructuring. While the central government sets the agenda for redevelopment, the Municipal Bureau of Urban Renewal is in charge of approving and supervising the projects. There are also bureaus of urban renewal at the district level to facilitate project implementation.

Many developers are enthusiastic about urban village redevelopment because of the high profit. To be selected to redevelop an urban village, a developer must receive the consent of at least 80% of the villagers. The village committee plays a critical role in negotiating with developers on behalf of villagers. In reality, however, most redevelopment projects are monopolized by a few large development companies, and state-owned enterprises have special advantages because of their close ties with the government and state-owned banks.<sup>9</sup> A strong pro-growth coalition between local officials and developers is formed in the process, with state actors playing a dominant role. The general model of redevelopment is that developers would demolish the villages and build free housing for villagers on the land as compensation. They can build market-rate housing and commercial facilities on the rest of the land to finance the projects. The most challenging task for developers is to negotiate with villagers. Even though the municipality sets general standards of compensation, the real deal is made household by household. Since villagers collectively own the land and are supported by the village institutions, they have strong bargaining power. As a result, the negotiation is extremely contentious and time-consuming.<sup>10</sup>

Thanks to their hard bargain, villagers would receive multiple condo units whose property values were seven or eight times higher than those of their self-built apartments. Many villagers become multimillionaires overnight. Developers also build collective properties for villagers as part of the compensation, which includes office buildings, shopping malls, and hotels, so that

villagers continue to receive dividends by managing the properties. The first urban village being redeveloped is Liede Village, a 900-year-old historic village near the Pearl River New Town, the central business district of Guangzhou. With the completion of redevelopment in 2010, the annual personal income for villagers increased from 25,000 to 90,000 *yuan* (from \$US4,000 to \$15,000). The total income for the village collective went up from 100 million to 500 million *yuan* (from US\$16 million to \$80 million), which made Liede Village the richest community in Guangzhou (Lin 2015, 882).

Different from villagers who are enriched by urban redevelopment, migrant tenants—the majority of people living in the villages—are treated as an “invisible” population and completely excluded from the decision-making process.<sup>11</sup> Many return from work to find a notice on the wall saying that the village will be redeveloped and that they must evacuate their apartments within days. No compensation or relocation options are provided. Since they cannot afford the rent in the same area after redevelopment, most must move to villages in the more remote periurban areas where the rent is cheaper. Without the local *hukou* or the title to the properties, migrant tenants usually do not consider themselves to have the right to claim anything. Meanwhile, many are under pressure to make a living and have little time to organize themselves.<sup>12</sup> While urban redevelopment in Guangzhou has generated a plethora of luxury condominiums, global hotel chains, and upscale retail spaces, it has further marginalized the rural migrants and reproduced the urban-rural divide.

### “Slumdogs, Millionaires”: Slum Redevelopment in Mumbai

As the capital city of the Maharashtra State, Mumbai is the most populous city in India with a population of 12.5 million. Originally a port city at the periphery of the global colonial system, it experienced rapid industrialization in the 19th century and a boom in the textile industry during the interwar period (Patel 2007). Economic opportunities attracted migrants from all over the country, who belonged to different castes and had different religions. Between 1941 and 1971, two-thirds of Mumbai’s residents were born outside the city (Patel 2007, 69). Industrial production in Mumbai slowed down in the 1970s under a national policy to deconcentrate the population and industry from big cities to smaller towns. A satellite city named Navi Mumbai was built in the eastern harbor of Mumbai in this period (Pacione 2006). Deindustrialization in Mumbai was accelerated in the 1990s under the influence of globalization. While traditional industries such as footwear and garment manufacturing



remain in the city, the base of its urban economy has transformed from labor-intensive industry to capital-intensive, service-oriented industry, including finance, telecommunication, movies, and entertainment. A large share of the city's labor has shifted from the formal sector to the informal sector.<sup>13</sup>

Approximately 42% of Mumbai's residents live in squatter settlements, commonly known as "slums" (MTSU 2015, 11). These are unauthorized and illegal structures built on public or private land where inhabitants do not have a legal title to the land. The areas lack basic infrastructure and services and are characterized by unsanitary, squalid, and overcrowded conditions. Whereas urban villages emerged in Guangzhou due to the local government's selective land expropriation, slums proliferated in Mumbai due to a series of restrictive rent-control and land-use policies that disincentivized the private sector from creating rental and affordable housing (Zhang 2018). Similar to Guangzhou's urban villages, Mumbai's slums provide affordable housing to low-income urban dwellers and migrants. Meanwhile, they are an indispensable part of the urban economy, serving as the major incubators of Mumbai's micro-industries, including tanning and leatherworking, plastic recycling, and pottery. Dharavi, the largest slum in Asia with a population of over one million, is home to numerous micro-industries; the annual turnover of business is estimated to be more than US\$650 million.<sup>14</sup>

Everyday governance in slums is deeply shaped by clientelism. Since slum dwellers are large in number, politicians consider them as "vote banks."<sup>15</sup> On the one hand, all political parties have slum wings. Politicians focus on courting slum dwellers during campaigns, including promising them better amenities and offering them cash handouts to attend rallies. The allocation of special funds to improve slums and alleviate poverty also depends on how slum dwellers cast their votes. On the other hand, slum dwellers are enthusiastic voters. Aware that their votes are the only "weapon" they have, they have actively used politics and their electoral clout to demand better services. For decades, areas with large slum clusters have had higher voter turnout. It is common to see long queues outside polling booths near slums. The political exchange provides some degree of protection and incremental improvement in the slums, thus contributing to their stability (De Wit and Berner 2009; Anand and Rademacher 2011; Bhide 2009).

Slum redevelopment in Mumbai started in the mid-1990s. While urban village redevelopment in Guangzhou is a decision made collectively by the central, provincial, and municipal governments, slum redevelopment in Mumbai is a result of party politics. The major initiator of the project is Shiv Sena, a right-wing Marathi regional party and the longtime dominant party of Mum-

bai. In the Maharashtra state assembly election of 1989, Shiv Sena formed a coalition with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to challenge the dominance of the Congress Party. One of their major campaign promises is to provide free housing for slum dwellers (Mukhija 2003). The BJP-Shiv Sena coalition lost that election but won the following one in 1995, so they began to make their campaign promise a reality. The office in charge of slum redevelopment is the Slum Redevelopment Authority (SRA), a state-level agency chaired by the chief minister of the Maharashtra State.

The scheme of slum redevelopment is to let developers build free housing for slum dwellers on the original location of their slums, and in exchange, they can have market-rate development on the rest of the land, with extended height limits. The scheme of slum redevelopment has been followed by all political parties in power because they consider offering free housing an important strategy to win slum dwellers' votes. Slum redevelopment is also supported by the real estate industry as it enables developers to make a profit from slum land. The SRA requests that developers have the consent of 70% of slum dwellers to obtain the redevelopment permit; in reality, it is often the "builder-politician-nexus" that determines which developer can redevelop a slum.

While slum dwellers are marginalized groups, they have strength in numbers and have used their votes to influence the process of redevelopment. The most important feature of the scheme is that it provides free housing to slum dwellers and allows them to stay on the same land after redevelopment, so-called in situ allocation. This is because politicians do not want to lose their "vote banks."<sup>16</sup> To be eligible for free housing, slum dwellers must show documents to prove that they have lived in the area since a designated cutoff date. The date was extended from January 1, 1995, to January 1, 2000, so politicians could accommodate more slum dwellers and collect more votes.

Different from villagers in Guangzhou, who receive multiple condo units and become extremely wealthy through redevelopment, slum dwellers in Mumbai only get standardized compensation. Each family receives a rehabilitation unit of 269 square feet, regardless of the size of the family. In most cases, five or six family members have to squeeze into one small apartment. Many rehabilitation buildings are poorly designed and constructed, and some of them have become "vertical slums." Former slum dwellers are often discriminated against by local officials when they request services, so they still need to rely on party workers to call local officials to have their demands addressed more quickly.<sup>17</sup> Although slum redevelopment provides formal property titles to slum dwellers, it does not eliminate their dependence on political parties. The clientelist relations remain after redevelopment.

The scheme of slum redevelopment allows developers to build market-rate housing and commercial facilities after providing free housing for slum dwellers. As a result, some of Mumbai's most prominent real estate projects were built through this model on slum land. One signature project is the Imperial Towers, a twin-tower residential skyscraper complex in South Mumbai. The sixty-floor towers were the tallest buildings in India until 2012 and remain one of the most expensive real estate properties in the country. The size of the apartments in the towers ranges from 2,500 to 10,000 square feet, and each unit costs 25–85 crore rupees (approximately US\$3–11 million).<sup>18</sup> The real estate complex has its own recreational facilities and is supported by a vast system of backup power generators. Steps away from the multi-million-dollar homes and separated by a wall is the rehabilitation housing for slum dwellers, where buildings are deteriorating and infrastructure is limited. Thanks to slum redevelopment, the slumdogs and the millionaires have become next-door neighbors in Mumbai, but they live in two Indias that are a world apart.

### Informal Settlements in COVID-19 Times

The world was turned upside down by the COVID-19 pandemic starting in early 2020. Cities were the epicenters of the pandemic because of the size of their populations and their high level of global and local interconnectivity (United Nations 2020). More importantly—and as predicted by UN-Habitat (2020, 2) at the beginning of the pandemic—informal settlements in urban areas were disproportionately affected by the virus and suffered from more infections and deaths: “The impact of COVID-19 will be most devastating in poor and densely populated urban areas, especially for the one billion people living in informal settlements and slums worldwide.” The combination of overcrowded living conditions, inadequate access to water and sanitation, and limited infrastructure and services makes it extremely difficult for residents of informal settlements to follow such guidelines as social distancing and frequent handwashing. In addition to a higher risk of infection, these communities have also suffered from severe economic hardship and police repression. In China and India, while the informal housing communities faced similar challenges during the pandemic, state policies varied dramatically, demonstrating that the urban governance models shaping their pre-pandemic politics influenced their pandemic responses.

China implemented a zero-COVID policy in the early stages of the pandemic (Yang 2024). Leveraging its strong central planning and intergovern-

mental coordination, the Chinese state used mechanisms such as mass testing, health classification codes on cellphones, and grid-style social management (a surveillance system that divides an urban area into multiple grids and assigns several workers to monitor each grid) to meticulously trace infections. Areas with rising case numbers were identified as high-risk, after which draconian lockdown measures were enforced. In Guangzhou, local authorities invented the model of “enclosed management” in urban villages. At the entrances of every village, checkpoints were installed to check people’s health classification codes before they were allowed to enter. Every village also had a PCR (polymerase chain reaction) testing station. Village cadres were responsible for monitoring population mobility and reporting positive cases to the street affairs offices. During the city’s worst COVID-19 outbreak in November 2022, tens of thousands of residents were relocated from urban villages to quarantine centers within days. Some migrant workers were sent back to their hometowns by the local Guangzhou authorities.

Like China, India launched lockdowns to confine the spread of the virus, but its processes and outcomes were completely different. On the evening of March 24, 2020, with four hours’ notice, Prime Minister Modi ordered a nationwide lockdown for twenty-one days, which later was extended until the end of May. Despite the national decree of lockdown, lack of specific policy guidance caused enormous confusion and chaos across regions. Specifically, the Indian government designated areas with large outbreaks as containment zones and enforced strict quarantine, social distancing, and testing policies within them. A total of 490 containment zones were designated in Mumbai as of mid-April 2020, 90 percent of them inside or close to slums (Patranabis et al. 2020). While the national government announced a series of plans to help low-income citizens, studies show that slum dwellers’ access to these programs largely depended on the role of slum leaders (Auerbach and Thachil 2021). Slum leaders holding formal positions in local party organizations tend to have more information about government programs and can better help residents obtain aid from the political elite.

The comparison of COVID responses outlined above demonstrates that each country adopted policies consistent with its approach to the redevelopment of informal settlements. Perry (2021) describes China’s pandemic response as a “Maoist pattern of revolutionary campaign,” highly effective in mobilizing personnel and resources to impose heightened surveillance and control over certain elements of society and indicating that a coordinated-progrowth model of urban governance is at work. China’s zero-COVID policy prevented outbreaks from spreading, but had limited legitimacy in that it over-

stepped the boundaries of the law. The Indian state's pandemic response was significantly shaped by party networks. As the intermediaries between political parties and slum dwellers, slum leaders were key to distributing pandemic assistance. As with the informal settlement redevelopment process, this model of governance proved to be fragmented and highly subject to the discretion of politicians; it was unlikely to provide systematic poverty relief and welfare distribution to vulnerable citizens. These different pandemic responses demonstrate the importance of governance in crisis management.

## Conclusion

The chapter demonstrates that different models of urban governance in China and India have substantially shaped the outcomes of urban redevelopment in their megacities. While China's urban governance is coordinated-progrowth, India's is fragmented-clientelistic. In Guangzhou, redevelopment of urban villages is part of the CCP's progrowth agenda, which is overseen by the municipality with coordination between levels of government. Whereas villagers have used various intermediary agencies to bargain with the state and developers for better compensation, migrant tenants are excluded from the decision-making process and suffer from displacement. In Mumbai, slum redevelopment is a result of interparty competition and is implemented by the state government. Slum dwellers can receive free, in situ housing allocation by offering their votes to politicians, but the rehabilitation units are small and in poor condition, and residents still need to rely on political parties to receive services after redevelopment.

As an effort to eliminate informality, urban redevelopment in both Guangzhou and Mumbai has reproduced informality and reinforced spatial and social inequalities. The comparison raises the question of whether large-scale redevelopment is a good policy to manage informality. As Roy (2005, 155) points out, "the more fundamental issue at stake in informality is that of wealth distribution and unequal property ownership, of what sorts of markets are at work in our cities and how they shape or limit affordability." Instead of launching megaprojects to demolish existing communities and evict residents, it is important for policymakers to tackle the root causes of informality so they can make policies that better protect the interests of the informal housing communities and promote the "right to the city."

The comparison also demonstrates that models of urban governance not only influence the process of redevelopment, they play an important role

in shaping the two countries' pandemic responses. China's coordinated-progrowth model of governance allows the party-state to mobilize personnel and resources effectively and impose heightened surveillance and control over civil society, especially in urban villages. While the policy prevented outbreaks from spreading, it overstepped the boundaries of the law and undermined the interests of migrant workers. India's fragmented-clientelistic model of governance, by contrast, leads to a lack of coordination in national pandemic management. Meanwhile, the Indian state's pandemic response was significantly shaped by party networks and mediated by slum leaders, and therefore unlikely to provide systematic aid to slum dwellers.

Understanding the importance of the local state and the complex institutional context where it functions is a critical dimension of the "seeing like a city" urban policy framework. Building on the two models of urban governance, this chapter has the following implications for urban policy analysis. First, it demonstrates that what matters for urban policy analysis is not only formal structure, but informal exchanges. In both China and India, residents of the informal housing communities use various strategies to bargain with the state, and their efforts have major impacts on the outcomes of redevelopment. Second, the chapter brings political parties back into urban policy analysis. In contrast to the nonpartisan administration in many US cities, political parties play an important role in shaping the urban policy agenda in non-US contexts and should receive more attention. Finally, the two models presented in the chapter provide an analytical framework to examine urban governance beyond China and India. For instance, the progrowth coalition not only exists in China but has formed in other developmental states, including Japan, South Korea, and Singapore. India's fragmented-clientelistic model represents the key features of urban governance in many developing democracies, such as countries in Latin America, Africa, and Southeast Asia. Hence, the two models may help us better address the common challenges facing cities in different national contexts and facilitate the improvement of urban policymaking and implementation worldwide.

#### NOTES

1. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.URB.TOTL.IN.ZS>
2. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EN.POP.SLUM.UR.ZS>
3. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EN.POP.SLUM.UR.ZS>
4. [https://www.gz.gov.cn/guangzhouinternational/aboutgz/content/post\\_3012861.html](https://www.gz.gov.cn/guangzhouinternational/aboutgz/content/post_3012861.html)
5. The tertiary sector in Guangzhou underwent significant growth, whose contri-

bution to GDP increased from 37.4% in 1986 to 69.3% in 2012 (Guangzhou Statistical Bureau 2006, 2013).

6. *Hukou* is a system of household registration introduced in China in 1958. It categorizes each Chinese citizen as either an agricultural (rural) *hukou* holder or a nonagricultural (urban) *hukou* holder. Every citizen must be registered at birth based on their place of origin, and their social welfare benefits are strictly associated with the type of their *hukou*. For more information on the *hukou* system, see Chan (2018).

7. With almost 92 million members, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is the second-largest political party in the world—after India’s Bharatiya Janata Party. Anyone who wants to become a CCP member must submit a formal application to their local party organizations and go through an arduous multiyear process to determine their qualification. There are over five million local-level party organizations pervading every aspect of the Chinese society, from urban communities to rural villages, from schools to private companies. See <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3134071/why-do-so-many-people-join-communist-party-china>

8. To compensate villagers and reduce their resistance, the city government of Guangzhou introduced the economic development land policy, also known as the reserved land policy. It mandated that 8–12% of total expropriated agricultural land be reserved for village collectives for nonagricultural economic activities (Lin et al. 2012, 333). Centrally located urban villages usually lease the economic development land to other businesses and collect rents, whereas those in the urban periphery often use the land to develop small industries (Tian 2008, 286, 292; Lin et al. 2012, 334–35).

9. Interview with the former chief of the Haizhu District Bureau of Urban Renewal, 6/25/17, Guangzhou.

10. Interview with a project manager of a development company, 6/29/2017, Guangzhou.

11. Studies on the experiences of migrant tenants in urban redevelopment are limited, with a few exceptions (e.g., Chung 2013; Liu et al. 2018). Some argue that a major reason for the omission is that migrant tenants are difficult to trace after their original rental housing is demolished (Wu 2004).

12. Interview with a senior planner of Guangdong Urban and Rural Planning Design Institute, 6/22/2017, Guangzhou.

13. In Mumbai, the percentage of workers employed in the informal sector increased from 49% in 1961 to 65.6% in 1991 (Patel 2007, 75). According to the 65th Round of the National Sample Survey (2004–5), over 80% of Mumbai’s employment was in the informal or unorganized sector. In Guangzhou, the percentage of workers employed in the informal sector was 52.8% as of 2012 (Park, Wu, and Du 2012, 22).

14. See [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/world/06/dharavi\\_slum/html/dharavi\\_slum\\_intro.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/world/06/dharavi_slum/html/dharavi_slum_intro.stm)

15. The term “vote bank” was coined by sociologist M. N. Srinivas (1955) in his study of village-level politics in south India. It refers to a loyal bloc of voters from a single community who consistently support a certain candidate or political party during democratic elections, in exchange for benefits.

16. Interview with the former vice president of the Maharashtra Housing and Area Development Authority (MHADA), 1/6/2017, Mumbai.



17. Interview with an engineer of the SRA, 1/13/2016, Mumbai.
18. Interview with the manager of sales and marketing at the Imperial Towers, 1/13/2016, Mumbai.

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## Digital Underdogs

### *Postindustrial Policymaking and the “Ordinary” City*

Allison Bramwell

Two of the most disruptive changes reshaping postindustrial economic opportunity are digitization and urbanization. These changes are already altering the very nature of work and the entire structure of the economy. Much economic growth now depends on the knowledge, skills, and infrastructure required to develop and apply digital technologies. This evolving economy privileges people and places with the “right mix” of human capital and technology-based industries and disadvantages those without (Muro et al. 2017; Kenney and Zysman 2016). The social, economic, and political consequences of this growing digital divide make uneven regional development one of the most pressing 21st-century policy challenges (Sunley, Martin, and Tyler 2017; Rodriguez-Pose 2018). Postindustrial urban economic development requires that technological innovation be balanced with social inclusion (Schrock and Lowe 2021).

Cities are “at the very pivot” of this transformation (Savitch and Kantor 2002). A novel political ontology is required to capture these rapidly accelerating and highly spatialized dynamics—and the tectonic global changes likely to accompany them. Applying a distinctively urban lens to policy analysis de-centers the role of the state and opens up “new community spaces” for political action (Bramwell and Pierre 2017; Kaufmann and Sidney, introduction to this volume). It also provides important opportunities to analytically con-

sider urban variation (Pierre 2005). Whether they are economically secure and technology-intensive “strong market” cities or deindustrialized and deeply distressed “weak market” ones, we know much about economic growth and decline in large cities. Yet most places fall somewhere in the ambiguous space between growth and decline. In particular, we know much less about the prospects for economic restructuring in medium-sized, or “ordinary” cities, which are far more numerous (Wolfe and Bramwell 2008, 2016).

In keeping with this volume’s purpose to “see like a city,” this chapter explores the process and performance of postindustrial policymaking in three medium-sized cities located in three different multilevel policy environments. Like many others caught in the crosshairs of economic change, Greensboro, North Carolina, in the United States, London, Ontario, in Canada, and Saint-Étienne, in the Rhone-Alpes region of France, each faces the challenge of adapting their local economies to rapidly changing digital economy demands without exacerbating socioeconomic inequality. This type of balanced development requires strategic intervention, but established theoretical models do not account for variation in local context (Clarke 2001; Gross 2017).

Measuring institutional capacity according to the policy objectives that emerge and their implementation in each case, this research indicates that postindustrial policymaking is indeed distinctive in “ordinary” cities. In all three cases, multistakeholder coalitions strategically design balanced development agendas according to local conditions. However, institutional temporality indicates that none are unqualified “success stories” (Clarke and Gaile 1998). Resources and policy attention are limited, and the participation of influential public- and private-sector leaders is difficult to sustain.

It is the core argument of this chapter that urban policy analysis requires careful attention to local context. It remains an open question whether and how local institutions actually matter, but the dynamics of postindustrial policymaking in the “ordinary” city can neither be read off from those of larger places nor written off as idiosyncratic. City size and industrial specialization shape institutional performance at least as much as the multilevel environments in which they operate. Due partly to structural forces beyond their control and partly to limited institutional capacity, postindustrial policymaking is more difficult in these places. Isolating the “complex causalities” involved requires more nuanced interdisciplinary models that take into account not only the multilevel interplay of public policies and local choices, but also variation in city types (Kaufmann 2018; Kaufmann and Arnold 2018; Bradford and Bramwell 2014).

### Institutions and Postindustrial Urban Policymaking: Assessing Three Theoretical Approaches

Hard lessons from the era of deindustrialization have important implications for urban policymaking in the digital age. First off, devastating employment effects alongside the ongoing displacement wrought by hypergentrification in economic hotspots underscore *social inclusion* as a critically important dimension of *technological innovation* (Pike, Rodriguez-Pose, and Tomaney 2015). Postindustrial development must simultaneously *create* and *expand* economic opportunity to both people *and* place.

As such, urban economies must continually adapt their industrial specializations to the rapid and unrelenting pace of techno-economic change or risk disinvestment and decrepitude (Bailey et al. 2020). Despite the dizzying array of national policies intended to encourage economic growth in industrialized countries, it is widely argued that what distinguishes more and less economically “successful” places is strategic *local* policy action (Bradford and Bramwell 2016).

Finally, because local economies exhibit such variable characteristics and distinctive needs, no single set of interventions apply universally. Balanced development encourages the transition from mature industrial specializations to technology-intensive ones while supporting the requisite labor market adjustments. This requires strategies tailored to local socioeconomic conditions (Tödtling and Trippel 2005). The capacity required to independently establish and implement these place-sensitive policies draws important analytical attention to the *institutional* dimension of local and regional economic development (Rodriguez-Pose 2013).

Three theoretical approaches to the role of institutions in postindustrial urban development are captured under the broad rubric of the New Localism (Goetz and Clarke 1993). Theories of regional innovation, collaborative governance, and urban politics all acknowledge powerful constraints from exogenous forces but assume an important degree of local policy agency. However, each theorizes quite differently the postindustrial policymaking process and the institutional arrangements it implies. Variation according to state interventions, development priorities, and actor configurations has important implications for urban policy analysis (see Kaufmann and Sidney’s introduction, this volume). This chapter assesses the ability of each of these three approaches to account for the key empirical findings that emerge.

*Regional Innovation Systems for Technology-Based Development*

Since the onset of globalization, the economic competitiveness that accompanies technological innovation has become a policy preoccupation throughout industrialized countries. Substantial policy experimentation has been fueled by academic research in economic geography on industrial clusters and regional innovation systems. Seeing cities and regions as agglomerations of economic activity, in this view the “urban” represents the spatial scale where “flows” of people, capital, and ideas concentrate to drive knowledge-intensive growth (Castells 2010).

Because of the exigencies of ongoing adaptation to economic change, postindustrial priorities focus on technology-based development and the infrastructure required to support it. Urban fortunes rise and fall based on their stock of technology-intensive anchor firms, entrepreneurial startup activity, human capital, access to finance, applied R&D, and public research institutions, all of which support the generation and commercialization of new ideas. In this way, inputs and interventions funded from a mix of public and private sources mutually reinforce local innovation “systems” while connecting them to the global economy (Bathelt, Malmberg, and Maskell 2004).

Given the emphasis on systemic coordination, the institutional dimension of regional competitiveness implies the collective participation of innovation actors in strategic plans that leverage investments to local advantage. The “triple helix” of government, universities, and industry interact across horizontal and vertical knowledge-sharing networks to build common development agendas, but each has a distinct role (Leyesdorff and Etkowitz 1998). State intervention varies substantially by national context, but governments actively experiment with a range of supply-side policies accompanied by substantial public investment (Bramwell, Hepburn, and Wolfe 2012, 2019). Providing research infrastructure, educating highly qualified personnel, and facilitating technology transfer, universities are key players (Bramwell and Wolfe 2008). Prized for their decision-making acumen and their firsthand industry knowledge, the participation of successful business leaders and technology-based entrepreneurs provides a “hidden genius” for the most adaptive and competitive regions (Storper 2013).

These theoretical assumptions and the public policies they have inspired have recently come under intense criticism for perpetuating rather than alleviating uneven regional effects. Particularly damning is the argument that predicated economic success on local institutions obscures entrenched power inequities both within and between regions (Brenner 2004). The path-

dependent nature of regional development indicates that variables of city size, geographical location, industrial specialization, and institutional culture interact to shape growth trajectories. Surmounting structural obstacles that ensue from being “locked-in” or “stuck in the wrong specialization at the wrong time” is difficult largely because of weak institutional capacity to bypass entrenched interests (Tödtling and Trippel 2013). Most problematic, an exclusive emphasis on technology-based economic development and business privilege in decision-making means that social inclusion is almost entirely incidental.

### *Collaborative Governance for Balanced Development*

Constructively addressing these gaps, theories of collaboration in urban planning and public administration emphasize alternative development priorities, actor configurations, and state interventions. In this diverse set of literatures, “the urban” is theorized as a “collective resource” that is dynamically shaped and reshaped by the multiple ideas, agendas, and discourses that intersect and collide at the local scale (Healey 2007). Urban policymaking is characterized as a problem-solving process that requires ongoing and collaboratively determined experimentation.

Importantly, this approach acknowledges that growth remains essential to urban vitality, but argues that entrenched inequities are neither socially just nor economically viable (Clark and Christopherson 2009). It is a core normative premise that postindustrial economic development be balanced with an equally important “inclusion imperative” (Fainstein 2013). Balancing growth with equity comes together in the theory and practice of community economic development, which actively blends “progressive” principles with on the ground program experimentation, for example in the areas of workforce development and entrepreneurship (Bennett and Giloth 2007; Bramwell 2021).

Yet balanced development occurs not by default but by design. Much depends on intentional local policy choice. In this view, building equitable and inclusive local economies is an ambiguous and long-term project that depends on durable and inclusive institutions. Governance arrangements representative of public, private, and community-based interests enable collaborative deliberations to solve complex urban policy problems. Actor networks vary widely according to local policy priorities, the challenges under deliberation, and the urban scale at which they unfold (Benner and Pastor 2016). Whether through horizontal local networks or vertical multilevel ones, the active participation of local government is essential for the policy resources it contributes and for the democratic legitimacy it bestows (Pierre 2014).



This theoretical approach insightfully tracks the processes of voluntary collaboration among multiple disparate actors for complex, cross-boundary problem-solving (Emerson and Nabatchi 2015). However, it accounts less well for the fact that interests compete and not all differences can be negotiated away. As Clarke (2004) observes, urban development issues are “intrinsically governance issues,” and policy decisions made by “interdependent, complex, loosely-linked actors and institutions with shared purposes but no shared authority” highlight “how problematic cooperation and collaboration among these actors and institutions will be” (30–31). Some form of institutionalization is required to embed and sustain “progressive policies and practices,” but “local government actors often struggle to build network capacity and curb opportunism” (Schrock 2013).

In short, inadequate attention to the thorny issues of interorganizational conflict, participatory incentives, and unequal power relations compromises the reach of collaborative theories for explaining postindustrial policymaking. Particularly problematic is that an emphasis on capacity-building from within disadvantaged communities to solve problems that have been imposed from outside ignores profound power asymmetries that arise from the structural privilege of capital (Lester and Reckhow 2012). Decades of experimentation with policies and programs to mitigate the sociospatial consequences of uneven economic growth have taught us that even the best-conceived plans will fail without attention to local politics (Giloith 2004).

### *Urban Politics and Contested Development*

Capturing the macro-institutional environments in which urban policymaking unfolds while foregrounding the political tensions and trade-offs involved, theories of urban politics offer a way forward. As with the other two theoretical approaches discussed here, local institutions and the policy choices they enable are front and center. It is a core assumption that despite the macroeconomic forces beyond their control and the national policy regimes in which they are embedded, cities can and do make distinctive social and economic choices (Sellers 2002). Yet urban fortunes vary enormously and there is no “one best way” for postindustrial policymaking. Explaining variation in how cities go about solving the empowerment puzzle in complex 21st-century urban policy environments is a central theoretical preoccupation.

Sharing a definitional insight with collaborative theories, theories of urban politics similarly assert that the complexity of urban decision-making requires negotiated coordination among multiple actors and interests to “blend their

resources” and “get things done” (Stone 2015; Pierre 2014). However, while some institutional arrangements lead to transformation, the vast majority do not (Rich and Stoker 2014). Accounting for failure is an equally important analytical task. In a significant theoretical departure, this perspective problematizes rather than assumes voluntary multistakeholder collaboration. In this view, understanding urban policy choice requires systematic attention to shifting actor configurations, the interests and power relations they represent, and the patterns of politics between them. As Savitch and Kantor (2002) observe, “urban policy is not ordained by a raw interpretation of globalization but is mediated by particular institutions, attitudes, conditions, and power groupings within a city.” Coalitions form around distinct policy objectives, but uneven power dynamics determine which priorities do and do not make it onto urban development agendas (Pierre 2011).

It remains a seminal debate whether common development agendas that balance growth and equity are possible, or whether conflict and fragmentation inevitably prevail. An urban politics perspective sees the “two worlds” of economic growth and social equity as a contested zero-sum trade-off that makes balanced development agendas elusive (Kantor and Savitch 1993; Kantor 2013). No longer confined to the American context, international critical urban scholarship argues that the economic imperative prevails in most places, historically bestowing structural privilege on local business communities and private accumulation interests (Peck, Theodore, and Brenner 2009). Diverse coalitions of nonprofits, educational institutions, and community-based organizations advocate for poverty-reduction programs, but resource asymmetries make it difficult to build durable power bases able to counteract private-sector influence (Sidney 2009; Clarke 2017). Local governments arbitrate among these interests to set policy priorities, leverage resources, and provide democratically accountable leadership, but executive power to set development agendas varies widely within and between types of municipal administrations (Schrager 2016; Gissendanner 2007).

This approach offers important insight into the issues, multilevel networks, and political conflicts that shape institutional capacity in different macro-institutional settings (Stone et al. 2015). However, it does not speak to the accelerating postindustrial regional challenges wrought by globalization and technological change. In addition, an almost exclusive empirical focus on large metropolitan regions leaves unexplored questions of how variation in structural factors such as city size and industrial specialization influences urban decision-making.

In summary, these three theoretical approaches offer important insights

into how local institutions influence postindustrial policymaking. However, each leaves important gaps that compromise our understanding of the relationship between institutional capacity and local context. Structural differences profoundly shape economic opportunity. We know much about rapid growth in global cities and technology hotspots (Sassen 2013; Saxenian 1990), and about the steep decline in former manufacturing powerhouses (Bluestone and Harrison 1984; Eisinger 2014). But falling somewhere in the ambiguous space between growth and decline, most places demonstrate much greater variation in outcome than well-studied iconic large cities (Rodriguez-Pose and Griffiths 2021; Christopherson and Clark 2007).

Missing from much comparative urban research is reference to different city *types*, and empirical exploration of how variation in size, location, and economic specialization shape institutional capacity for policymaking (Kaufmann 2018; Kaufmann and Arnold 2018; Bramwell and Wolfe 2008, 2016; Bramwell 2014). As Amin and Graham (1997) observe, generalizations based on a few “paradigmatic” cases ignore the more “multiplex,” relational, and often idiosyncratic nature of the urban scale of activity—in what they portray as “ordinary cities.” We still know little about what accounts for differences between “national champion” cities that appear to have more autonomy to “design their own institutional environments and attract more resources” and “second tier cities from the same national polity” (da Cruz et al. 2019, 13). Analyzing the prospects for postindustrial policymaking in different types of places requires a more granular understanding of “how urban governance works” and “how much is dependent on context” (da Cruz et al. 2019, 13).

### Postindustrial Policymaking in Three “Ordinary” Cities

Though much of the world lives in them, medium-sized cities remain understudied, making them a distinct category worthy of empirical exploration (Bell and Jayne 2006; Kodrzycki and Muñoz 2015). With populations roughly between 250,000 and 500,000, these are neither small towns nor global economic hubs. Neither appreciably growing nor deeply distressed, they lack the concentrations of knowledge-intensive activity required to compete globally but do not always suffer the same profound hollowing out as their larger deindustrialized counterparts. Their economic futures are uncertain, and though opportunities for reinvention remain, forging new development trajectories is difficult.

To examine empirically how context influences institutional performance,

this research compares postindustrial policymaking in three “ordinary” cities operating in three different macro-institutional policy environments. Greensboro, North Carolina, in the United States, London, Ontario, in Canada, and Saint-Étienne in the Rhone-Alpes region of France are all medium-sized mature manufacturing cities, all overshadowed by contiguous larger and more economically secure urban regions, and all face the challenge of adapting to digital-economy demands without exacerbating socioeconomic inequality. It examines the postindustrial policy objectives that emerge and asks whether and how they address the imperatives of technological innovation and digital inclusion, or if other priorities prevail. It also examines institutional capacity and asks whether these policy objectives are durable or if political trade-offs compromise their implementation.

Controlling for size and economic specialization, this research examines the explanatory power of two levels of analysis.<sup>1</sup> The first level characterizes the macro-institutional policy windows that animate the local experimentation and funding mechanisms evident in each case. The second level isolates two sets of independent variables operating locally to account for local institutional capacity. Postindustrial policy objectives represent the first set of independent variables, and are characterized according to the development agendas, programs, and policy priorities that these imply. Actor configurations represent the second set of independent variables, and are characterized according to the governance types, intermediaries, and participants involved, as well as their level of engagement. The dependent variable is the institutional performance that ensues in each case.

The methodology involves detailed case studies based on twenty to twenty-five semistructured in-depth interviews in each city conducted with representatives of various state or provincial government agencies, local governments, publicly funded educational institutions, economic development organizations, and nonprofit organizations. For illustrative purposes, brief “vignettes” are provided rather than detailed case studies.

### *DesignTech in Saint-Étienne, France: Durable but Technocratic*

A midsized city located in the shadow of Lyon, the second-largest city in France, Saint-Étienne continues to struggle with restructuring a local economy that relied for several centuries on specialized steel manufacturing to produce firearms for the French military. This industrial city has undergone major economic shocks and employment loss, but it retains the ability to design and manufacture a variety of high-quality specialty goods, from fencing rapiers

and bicycle frames to advanced medical devices based on laser technologies (Power, Plöger, and Winkler 2010).

Of the three cases examined here, the Saint-Étienne Metropole demonstrated the strongest and most sustained institutional performance. Funded nationally under the La French Tech program, it not only generated a coherent set of local policy objectives that balanced digital innovation with digital inclusion, but a stable coalition successfully implemented this postindustrial development agenda over time. However, it is important to note that while program delivery continues, the broader urban policy agenda described here no longer operates in its original form and that subsequent policy changes have made it vulnerable to regional capture.

Operating in a “state-enabled” macro-institutional policy context that provides broad policy direction and generous operational funding, urban policy actors in the Saint-Étienne Metropole leveraged national programs and coordinated local resources to support the DesignTech strategic urban policy initiative (Schmidt 2016). To encourage digital innovation and start-ups, the French government initially chose to concentrate national La French Tech investments in large metropolitan centers. Disadvantaged regions pushed back, and Saint-Étienne was one of only nine “second-tier” cities in France to competitively secure funding. Building on this industrial specialization, metropolitan government and publicly funded nonprofits collaborated for over a decade to build a strategic vision for economic restructuring centered on the ideas of industrial innovation and design.

In this most durable of the three cases, the DesignTech initiative supported economic transformation to new specializations that apply digital technologies to improve manufacturing efficiency and encouraged entrepreneurial start-ups that integrate industrial design and digital technologies. Multiple investments and programs at the local level were unified around this core vision of integrating design, manufacturing, and digital technologies. Building on the idea behind multilevel funding (EU, national, and regional) for the Cité du Design urban redevelopment initiative, other programs and investments targeted at the design-technology interface include Le Plan Achille campus, which co-locates research and innovation infrastructure; the Designers + and DesignTech entrepreneurial incubators; and a Masters in Design program at the Université Jean Monnet.

However, most noteworthy from a balanced development perspective was the DesignTech Academy, a fledgling career pathways program into software engineering for under-skilled, low-income, and predominantly immigrant students of North African descent. Funded under the national Grand École

Numérique program, the DesignTech Academy was strongly embedded in the local institutional infrastructure. The program was designed, delivered, and implemented by the engineering department of Telecom Saint-Étienne, a technical university in the national Grande Écoles system, which acted as the intermediary organization that leveraged funding and recruited program participants. The program was explicitly supported by the mayor and metropolitan government officials because of its clear linkage with the broader DesignTech agenda. However, although it was up and running by 2016, funding was discontinued in 2020 due to program underperformance, and the social-inclusion component of the broader DesignTech initiative evaporated along with it. Dogged throughout by weak employer engagement, the DesignTech Academy ultimately failed due to employer reticence to take the “risk” of providing internships to nontraditional students and the preference to rely instead on conventional credentialing and recruitment processes (Bramwell 2021; confidential follow-up interview March 6, 2024).

This outcome highlights a policy dynamic particular to the French context. Saint-Étienne’s efforts were supported by multilevel policies and funding sources, which largely accounts for why the DesignTech initiative was the most successful of the three described here. However, consisting of a narrow, loosely institutionalized, largely closed and informal network of metropolitan government officials, anchor institutions, and publicly funded nonprofits, the DesignTech initiative was highly technocratic and largely clientelistic. Despite claiming the headquarters of several large firms with national reach, multiple firms in the advanced manufacturing sector, and numerous entrepreneurial start-ups, participation by the local business community in DesignTech programs, including the DesignTech Academy, has remained conspicuous by its absence.

This supply-side arrangement, in which state actors unilaterally set policy direction with little private-sector input, is not atypical in France. Despite numerous organizations and programs dedicated to digital innovation, insufficient program adoption by too few firms and entrepreneurs made Saint-Étienne’s programs vulnerable to cuts in the second round of national funding in 2019. After program consolidation at the national level, Saint-Étienne’s DesignTech initiative was forced to integrate with the much larger and more economically powerful Lyon. French Tech funded start-up activities in the two cities have since been merged into ONE Lyon St. Etienne. Service delivery to Saint-Étienne consolidated under DesignTech continues, but the initiative itself has evaporated as the institutional locus has shifted to Lyon.

*InnovateGSO in Greensboro: Collaborative but Ephemeral*

Located midway between the world-famous innovation hub in North Carolina's Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill Research Triangle, and Charlotte, with its national concentration in banking and financial services, Greensboro faced the pressures of restructuring a bit later than its Rust Belt counterparts. Experiencing massive job loss beginning in the early 2000s as it lost its historic strength in textile manufacturing to low-cost production sites overseas and its tobacco industry continued to decline, the implications of restructuring did not become clear until after the 2008 recession. Caught somewhat unawares by rapid deindustrialization, urban policymakers in this "ordinary" American city had only recently established a common agenda for how to strategically respond (Benner and Pastor 2015).

In something of a departure from what is typical in the competitive American multilevel context, an openness to novel cooperative arrangements and development agendas has become evident in the city over the past several years. Most notably, Greensboro's active participation in the Carolina Core regional economic development initiative has yielded transformative results for the region. By collaborating with surrounding city and county governments, state and local economic development agencies and organizations, and universities and colleges, Greensboro will benefit directly from several recently announced major advanced manufacturing projects in aerospace and electric vehicle battery production, which are projected to create at least 7,400 new jobs over the next five to ten years. The significance of these developments is profound. Succeeding where many deindustrialized regions have failed, not only did historically competitive cities and counties build a partnership for regional economic development under the state-led Carolina Core business recruitment initiative, the resulting projects presage a rare structural shift in industrial specializations to entirely new and innovation-intensive economic activities that all but guarantee sustained long-term growth (Todtling and Tripp 2005, 2013).

However, despite this ongoing preoccupation with economic development, the Greensboro case also demonstrates the most collaborative and balanced development initiative of the three. The multistakeholder InnovateGSO network was intended to generate an inclusive strategy that sought to expand technology-based economic opportunity to populations typically overlooked and underserved by conventional economic development. Yet perhaps partly *because* of this ongoing preoccupation, the InnovateGSO initiative was ultimately ephemeral due to its inability to sustain stakeholder buy-in and the

political attention required for long-term viability. The network has since disbanded and its primary program, the Triad Navigator Project, remains only marginally active.

This outcome corroborates long-standing observations about the *entrepreneurial* macro-institutional context in which American cities operate. Largely self-financing municipalities, with only marginal support from federal and state governments, compete for investment, so fragmentation prevails over voluntary coordination (Eisinger 1988). Thus, because local governments tend to be preoccupied with economic development imperatives over social equity ones, restructuring regions like the Piedmont Triad find themselves at a particular disadvantage in the struggle to balance innovation and inclusion.

Against this backdrop, the InnovateGSO initiative is worth examining in spite of its failure, because its multistakeholder and collaborative approach to “inclusive innovation” nonetheless demonstrated counterintuitive urban policy innovation. The most explicitly inclusive initiative of the three, InnovateGSO was a collaborative network that shared an agenda for economic transformation that sought to expand technology-based economic opportunity to minority and women entrepreneurs. Funded through a competitive grant targeted at deindustrializing cities across the state of North Carolina, it was facilitated by a statewide nonprofit and cochaired by representatives from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and the Chamber of Commerce. Participants were invited from local government; universities; foundations; social, cultural, and economic development organizations; the healthcare sector; and several large local firms. Designed to be broadly representative of the community, the network was a formalized but open structure with designated subcommittees that allowed new participants to join.

Brainstorming resulted in an articulated vision to make Greensboro an “epicenter for inclusive innovation in the state.” This vision targeted design as the innovation-related activity that best built on historical specializations in textiles and apparel, while providing opportunity to include people seen to be “disconnected” from the economic mainstream. The Triad Navigator Project was developed with the intention of improving access to the local entrepreneurial ecosystem for minority and women entrepreneurs. A primary objective was to build a mentorship network to connect these entrepreneurs to local technology and design sectors.

However, the project-based InnovateGSO network ultimately proved to be ephemeral, dissipating over time as funding expired and multistakeholder engagement attenuated. Much of the challenge was the relative power and influence of the leaders involved. Most participants were drawn from midlevel



administrative positions in local universities and nonprofits. Perhaps the most influential single participant was the mayor of Greensboro, who initially lent soft political support, but who attended meetings only for the first six months or so before disengaging and leaving a city councilor to attend in her place. The business community was similarly disengaged. Representatives of major firms participated initially but they were drawn from mid-management rather than executive levels, and even their attendance visibly attenuated over time. Despite efforts to recruit widely to ensure racial and ethnic representation, minority participants remained underrepresented in the network. The fate of the Triad Navigator project was tied to the fate of InnovateGSO. Preoccupation with identifying priorities meant that few resources remained for program development. Within the year, it would be tucked into the responsibilities of an already-stretched entrepreneurial support organization and left to languish as an unfunded and passive web-based tool.

*The Community Economic Roadmap in London:  
Coordinated but Contested*

Cities struggling for reinvention are numerous in southwestern Ontario, Canada's industrial heartland. Geographically two hours west of Toronto, and just outside the "digital corridor" of knowledge-intensive activity between Toronto and Waterloo, London is no exception. Struggling with the successive loss of multiple industries in both manufacturing and service sectors from food production to insurance, London is another "ordinary" city struggling with deindustrialization. Though the pressures of restructuring were felt in the region as early as the mid-1980s, neither the provincial government nor local policymakers have devoted concerted attention to economic transformation, leaving the city with little strategic direction (Bradford 2014). However, still somewhat "under the radar," London has a robust and highly diverse nationally and globally traded digital sector that has as yet attracted little concerted attention from local economic development organizations.

London's Community Economic Roadmap illustrates most clearly the disjuncture between articulating postindustrial policy objectives and sustaining the institutional capacity to implement them. Focusing on economic rather than equity imperatives, this strategic postindustrial plan had as a core intention interagency coordination of innovation-intensive and conventional economic development with workforce development activities in the city. However, despite a dedicated multistakeholder organizational structure supported

by local government, political conflict was sufficient to bury the initiative and the Roadmap ultimately failed.

Typically left out of studies of comparative institutionalism, the macro-institutional policy context of Canadian federalism is roughly characterized here as a “hybrid” form. In this state-influenced yet entrepreneurial system of federalism, powers are divided between federal and provincial governments, leaving no formal constitutional status for municipal governments, which are typically treated analytically as policy-takers rather than policymakers. Multilevel interactions occur in some policy areas, but provincial policy and jurisdictional authority over service delivery and performance management are seen to leave little scope for local policy autonomy (Horak and Young 2012). However, in this ambiguous intergovernmental policy space, decentralization and urbanization have recently driven urban policy activism in Canada (Bradford and Bramwell 2014).

In this multilevel context, it is in London that the most “coordinated” postindustrial policy innovation of the three is evident. Comparatively rare in Canadian municipalities, the Community Economic Roadmap went beyond conventional service delivery and land-use planning to present a comprehensive postindustrial plan intended to better align resources and improve interagency coordination for strategic economic decision-making (Tindal and Tindal 2009). Focused on the process of capacity-building rather than program development, the Roadmap was a formally institutionalized cross-sector, and multistakeholder governance initiative that the mayor launched in 2014. Funded by local government and convened by city staff, subcommittees worked on different development priorities, and a dashboard was dedicated to track progress on strategic initiatives. Participants included all economic development organizations in the city, some of which are funded locally and others provincially, as well as representatives from the business community, large nonprofits, and local anchor institutions.

However, the most coordinated urban policy innovation of the three was also the most contested. Launched with high aplomb and high expectations, the Community Economic Roadmap established the policy objectives and built the organizational structures. However, it could not sustain the institutional capacity required for implementation, and ultimately failed due to the politics of local economic development. As one participant observed, “we stepped into these very significant cleavages in the community without really knowing it and without really being prepared to address it” (confidential interview).

Three primary conflicts were evident. Because he was discredited by personal scandal and compromised by the termination of the city manager with

whom he was championing the initiative, the mayor's signature Roadmap agenda became vulnerable to public attacks from an opportunistic political rival. Cohesion was compromised by interagency competition between economic development organizations for funding and position on the agenda coupled with disputes over which organizations should be invited to participate in the network. Finally, unclear communication about the purpose of the Roadmap, which was intended to strategically align resources rather than to promote job growth, created unreasonable expectations. City-council impatience with perceived weak performance made its contingent funding precarious. When the work of the Roadmap became politically divisive, disappointed business leaders withdrew their participation. Not atypically in Ontario, the network was disbanded without implementing any programs and has since disappeared without a trace, leaving behind little but a dashboard populated with policy goals but missing data to track their achievement.

### *Comparing Institutional Capacity in Three Ordinary Cities*

As summarized in table 5.1, the findings of this research are decidedly mixed. In Saint-Étienne, a closed technocratic network with multilevel policy support but insufficient program take-up was “*durable but vulnerable (and now unbalanced)*.” In Greensboro, a diverse multistakeholder network of nonprofits and anchor institutions unable to sustain organizational momentum once funding expired but for which program revitalization remains possible, is “*collaborative but ephemeral*.” Finally, in London, where local politicians unsuccessfully championed efforts to encourage interagency collaboration among competitive economic development organizations, “*coordinated but contested*” institutional capacity resulted in failure. The following section synthesizes and accounts theoretically for these findings.

### **Institutions and Postindustrial Urban Policymaking: Toward an Interdisciplinary Approach**

By locating local institutions at the center of the analysis, theories of regional innovation, collaborative governance, and urban politics offer important insights into the various ways that multilevel contexts, local policy objectives, and actor configurations interact to shape urban decision-making and implementation. To advance our understanding of the “urban” as a site for postindustrial policymaking, this section analyzes the ability of each of these theoretical frames to explain three key empirical findings that emerge.

TABLE 5.1. Institutional Capacity for Postindustrial Policymaking in Three “Ordinary” Cities

|                                  | Saint-Étienne Metropole<br>(pop. 404,048)                                      | Greensboro<br>(pop. 287,027)                                                            | London<br>(pop. 383,822)                                                                          |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| POLICY WINDOW                    |                                                                                |                                                                                         |                                                                                                   |
| Multilevel policy relations      | State-enabled                                                                  | Entrepreneurial                                                                         | Hybrid                                                                                            |
| Policy window                    | LaFrenchTech (national)                                                        | InnovateNC (state)                                                                      | Municipal election (local)                                                                        |
| Funding sources                  | National government                                                            | State-level university–nonprofit consortium                                             | Local government                                                                                  |
| POSTINDUSTRIAL POLICY OBJECTIVES |                                                                                |                                                                                         |                                                                                                   |
| Development agenda               | DesignTech                                                                     | InnovateGSO                                                                             | Community Economic Roadmap                                                                        |
| Goal                             | Cross-sector technological innovation and career pathways                      | Inclusive entrepreneurship                                                              | Strategic economic governance                                                                     |
| Digital inclusion programs       | DesignTech Academy                                                             | Triad Navigator                                                                         | none                                                                                              |
| Priority                         | Balanced [initially]                                                           | Inclusion                                                                               | Innovation                                                                                        |
| ACTOR CONFIGURATIONS             |                                                                                |                                                                                         |                                                                                                   |
| Governance type                  | Technocratic                                                                   | Multistakeholder                                                                        | Interagency                                                                                       |
| Leadership locus                 | Local government                                                               | Joint nonprofit/university                                                              | Local government                                                                                  |
| Participants                     | Mayor, municipal bureaucracy, economic development organizations, universities | Mayor, firms, universities, economic development organizations, nonprofits, foundations | Mayor, municipal bureaucracy, economic development organizations, provincial agencies, nonprofits |
| Engagement                       | Weak private sector involvement                                                | Weak local government and private sector involvement                                    | Political and interagency conflict                                                                |
| INSTITUTIONAL PERFORMANCE        |                                                                                |                                                                                         |                                                                                                   |
|                                  | Durable but now unbalanced                                                     | Collaborative but ephemeral                                                             | Coordinated but conflictual                                                                       |
| STATUS                           | Active                                                                         | Dormant                                                                                 | Failed                                                                                            |

Consistent with theories of collaborative planning and governance, the first finding of this research is that balanced development agendas that integrate social inclusion with technological innovation *are* in fact evident in all three cases. In Saint-Étienne, the DesignTech initiative was innovation-focused but included a digital career pathways program for low-skill and low-income youth. InnovateGSO in Greensboro developed the Triad Navigator project with the intention of expanding technology-based economic opportunity to underserved minority and women entrepreneurs. A core objective of the Community Economic Development Roadmap in London was to coordinate technology-based economic development with workforce development. These findings indicate that urban policymaking is mediated through distinctive multilevel arrangements but also represents independent policy agency.

However, policy implementation is less than successful in all three cases. A second key finding is that institutional capacity is highly temporal in these cities. Consistent with regional innovation theories, trade-offs related to size and specialization appear to compromise institutional performance in each case. Saint-Étienne's comparatively small entrepreneurial start-up community made it vulnerable to funding cuts, leading to the demise of the DesignTech Academy and forcing collaboration with the much larger and economically powerful Lyon and the loss of autonomy this threatens. In Greensboro, InnovateGSO was unable to compete with conventional development priorities such as downtown revitalization and conventional business recruitment. Stymied partly by interagency disputes over economic development priorities, London's Community Economic Roadmap failed because of the very conflict it was intended to overcome.

These trade-offs highlight a third key finding—that postindustrial policymaking is far more politicized than regional innovation systems and collaborative planning approaches would suggest (Kantor and Turok 2012). Supported by national policy, actively championed by a two-term mayor, and supported by a metropolitan bureaucracy with dedicated expertise, the innovation and inclusion-focused DesignTech agenda was given pride of place in Saint-Étienne. In contrast, in both Greensboro and London, technological innovation competes with conventional economic development for space on local agendas, relegating digital inclusion to a distant afterthought. The InnovateGSO initiative was unable to sustain the participation of both the mayor and influential corporate interests, leaving it in the hands of less influential anchor institutions and nonprofits. Despite dedicated municipal resources in London, a politically weakened mayor was unable to withstand criticism about the purpose and performance of the Roadmap, which allowed political rivals and preexisting interagency conflicts to derail the initiative.

These outcomes reflect insights in theories of urban politics about how actor configurations and the power asymmetries they represent shape institutional capacity. The locus of leadership emerges as highly relevant. Local government is a key player, and mayoral support is necessary but not sufficient to ensure agenda viability. The business community is disengaged in all three cases, suggesting that it is less influential in these “ordinary” cities than existing models would predict. Rather, it is municipal bureaucrats, nonprofits such as chambers of commerce and foundations, and anchor institutions such as universities, colleges, and hospitals that do much of the heavy lifting. However, these actors lack the level of influence required to effectively champion initiatives through to implementation. These findings echo recent work that notes the attenuation of private-sector participation (Hanson et al. 2010), power and resource asymmetries among community-based actors (Clarke 2016), and conflicts between elected and unelected civic leaders over local policy agendas (Bramwell and Pierre 2017), all of which call into question the prospects for durable and inclusive institutions (Stone et al. 2015).

In short, none of the three theoretical perspectives examined here on their own provides an adequate explanation for postindustrial policymaking in the “ordinary” city. However, taken together they are highly complementary. Preoccupied with the institutional conditions that enable technological innovation, the regional-innovation-systems approach almost entirely ignores inclusion imperatives but acknowledges the structural limitations of size and specialization. Collaborative theories emphasize the need to consider social inclusion alongside economic innovation but underplay the political conflicts that ensue. Theories of urban politics account less well for how economic structures such as size and economic specialization perpetuate inequalities *between* cities but highlight the interests, actor configurations, and power asymmetries that shape urban development *within* cities. These complementarities suggest the value of more interdisciplinary theoretical models to inform urban policy analysis in different contexts.

### Institutional Capacity and the “Ordinary” City: Why Context Matters for Urban Policy Analysis

The capacity of institutions to collectively design and implement policy responses sensitive to local conditions remains a pressing research question. New “ecologies” or “pluricentric modalities” of governance are emerging in which novel ideas, institutional arrangements, resourceful actors, and political agendas coexist, intersect, and sometimes collide to shape urban policymak-

ing (Gross 2017; Le Galès 2021). Comparative urban research is necessary to account systematically for this institutional variation and the regional outcomes that result.

It is the central argument of this chapter that urban policy analysis requires careful attention to local context. This research demonstrates that postindustrial policymaking is indeed distinctive in “ordinary” cities, partly for structural reasons and partly for political ones. City size and specialization shape institutional capacity at least as much as the multilevel context in which it operates. These types of cities *do* make intentional policy choices intended to balance growth and equity imperatives. Highly variable but not entirely idiosyncratic dynamics emerge as multistakeholder coalitions develop strategic policy agendas distinctive to local priorities and conditions.

However, it is one thing for local institutions to form and entirely another for them to *perform* (Bramwell and Pierre 2017). There is a crucial difference between establishing collaborative arrangements and sustaining the institutional capacity to deliver programs. Weak local government or private sector participation, interagency conflict, resource insufficiency, and power ambiguity underscore the institutional temporality that emerges in each case. Balanced development agendas emerged in all three cases, but these were not sufficiently durable to have measurable impact. Multistakeholder coalitions are difficult to build but even more difficult to sustain in these cities; resource limitations dictate that policy priorities must be chosen carefully (Burayidi 2013).

Variation in institutional performance is attributable largely to the actor configurations and power relations involved (see also Bazurli and Verhoeven on urban governance configurations, this volume). What matters most is the power to determine which policy objectives make it onto development agendas, and to allocate resources accordingly. Primacy prevails for policies that sustain attention from the most influential actors and the locus of leadership emerges as a crucial variable. Municipal bureaucracies, economic development and social welfare nonprofits, and anchor institutions do much of the animating and convening for collaborative efforts, but appear to hold little sway over the policy priorities ultimately chosen. Regardless of the macro-institutional policy environment in which it occurs, mayoral support, which tends to be unpredictable, is necessary but not sufficient.

It is the much-contested role of business in urban development that presents the most pressing postindustrial puzzle (see also Wilson on the role of the private sector, this volume). All three theoretical approaches examined here deem private sector engagement to be a keystone without which transforma-

tive strategies are unlikely to succeed. Yet while many of the benefits of these initiatives accrue directly to the local business community, its active involvement is notoriously difficult to sustain (Bramwell 2012). Indeed, patchy, inconsistent, and opportunistic business participation was conspicuous by its absence in all three cases. However, often overlooked theoretically is the fact that the local business community is by no means unitary: Large corporations, property developers, small untraded businesses, and entrepreneurial tech start-ups coexist, but it is unclear the extent to which their interests overlap (De Socio 2007). Whether it is due to competing interests within the business community itself, corporate attention shifting from local to global concerns, an insufficient critical mass of firms, distaste for local politics, or some other explanation, this finding of weak business involvement in postindustrial urban policymaking presents an important theoretical conundrum that requires rethinking.

So do institutions even matter for postindustrial policymaking in the ordinary city? Three abbreviated case studies are by no means definitive, and more structured mixed-method comparisons are required. However, it is clear that institutional performance is problematic in ordinary cities, which have to work twice as hard for reinvention while juggling the numerous other priorities that vie for attention on local policy agendas. These findings corroborate those of other chapters in this volume. Applying a policy studies lens to these diverse and nuanced urban contexts has highlighted the interactions and interdependencies between formal and informal political processes and how these shape and constrain decision-making “on the ground.” Like other chapters in this volume (see especially Bazurli and Verhoeven and Wilson), this research finds that the ambiguity of urban policy challenges, the asymmetrical power settings in which solutions are formulated, and the perpetuation of uneven outcomes are definitional aspects of urban policymaking (Kaufmann and Sidney, concluding chapter).

Given the consequences, the dynamics of postindustrial policymaking in the “ordinary” city cannot simply be read off from those of larger places or written off as too idiosyncratic to characterize. Isolating the “complex causalities” involved requires the development of more nuanced interdisciplinary models that take into account not only the multilevel interplay of public policies and local choices, but also variation in city types (Pierre 2005; Kaufmann 2018; Bradford and Bramwell 2014; Wolfe and Bramwell 2008, 2016). Urban policy analysis needs not only to “see like a city,” but to see like *all* cities, especially the “ordinary” ones in which so many people live and work.



## NOTE

1. This most-similar-systems design selects a small number of cases that are as similar as possible in all independent aspects but in which the independent variable varies (Teune and Przeworski 1970; Denters and Mossberger 2006).

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## Risk, Capital Accumulation, and Racial Inequality in Detroit

*Exploring the Calculus of Emergency Managers  
During Times of Crisis*

Meghan E. Wilson

Crippling municipal debt loads have become common manifestations of late-stage capitalism in cities around the world. Financialization of local governments has risen drastically, building long-term reliance on debt finance for basic services. With debt as a defining element of public finance, cities across the world build risk into their financial futures. Austerity has driven the global financial markets into disarray, forcing cities and smaller governing entities to reimagine their credit risk. When city officials engage in economic development and financial restructuring, they tend to err on the side of limited risk, hedging the stability of the city on proven and stable financial tools (municipal bonds). Under distress, however, these smaller governing entities (cities and counties) build higher risk into their portfolios. This chapter explores the realities of building risk into urban financial systems and asks which segment of the population is most affected by those risks. Most cities facing austerity are unable to prioritize the normal democratic governing functions. While global markets have been able to manage some of the risks, we must account for the inequity built into the market forces. Marginal communities experience

the outcomes of debt financing differently, often because of their relationship to the rights and protections of government. During a financial crisis, expediency and long-term financial stability are prioritized over robust democratic engagement, and the needs of marginalized communities, which have less political and economic capital, are leveraged as liabilities that can be risked in hopes of stabilizing the institutions.

Practitioners and scholars typically understand public finance to be race-neutral, asserting that budgets are not racially coded. However, racial codes are enshrined in the institutions that create and administer budgets, as well as the line items and priorities in the budgets. Racial bias and racial hierarchies are foundational to capitalism and all its derivatives. More specifically, capitalism is rooted in the expropriation of Black people's labor and well-being (Harvey 2012). The urban core is a critical site of racialized capitalism because it is the place where we see property values, racial violence, and dispossession integrate with expropriation (Jenkins 2021; Dantzler 2021). In the United States, the city, particularly the urban core, is shaped and reshaped by racial violence and speculative investment manifested through calculated risk (Hacksworth 2019; Wilson et al. 2022).

Building on this work, I trace the process of policy and the implementation of financial takeover to address fiscal emergencies, and examine the implications of the financial risk that municipalities are willing to take when managing a financial crisis, especially for marginally situated people. I examine how risk is theoretically conceptualized and acted on by corporate and state administrators, to reproduce and reshape patterns of racial inequity, racial hierarchies, and mechanisms of expropriation and exploitation in the 21st century. Theoretically, we can trace how race is used to reproduce the history of racial oppression and how expropriation works to maintain racial economic injustice in public administration.

Using the implementation of Michigan's emergency management law in Detroit, Michigan, as a case study, I document the calculus that the governor's appointed emergency manager used when considering what financial risk to take during the restructuring of the city's government to move toward financial stability. In the restructuring, the appointed emergency manager created a valuation for both assets and liabilities to stabilize economic systems. By examining how these appointed administrators changed the local system, this chapter explains the priorities of local public institutions. The history of racial capitalism results in marginally situated people, and the spaces they occupy, being undervalued and treated as liabilities in local budgeting. Marginally situated communities are often the main sites of extraction, without replenish-

ment or remediation of the assets extracted. In fact, local public officials have shown a willingness to take more risk on the backs of Black and other marginally situated people in urban space, leveraging the futures of these residents' well-being to build collateral for speculative future gain.

The chapters in this volume posit a method of "seeing like a city," which emphasizes the importance of multifaceted analysis of actors to understand urban policy. This chapter's examination of the politics of race and risk in Detroit, Michigan, during a time of financial distress allows us to understand how the lens of "seeing like a city" (Kaufmann and Sidney 2020) reveals the interplay between local institutions and the limited capacity, structural forces, and crucial roles of marginalized communities. The chapter then explores how these factors shaped the calculus of risk taken by emergency managers, potentially exacerbating racial inequalities through financial choices. In this way, the Detroit case study exemplifies the framework's strength in untangling the "complex causalities" of urban policymaking and its impact on racial dynamics in a specific city's context.

## Methods

This research utilizes a heuristic in-depth case study research design (Eckstein, 2000) to explore the policy history of Detroit during a period of emergency financial management. Heuristic case study designs are used to develop theory rather than to make causal inferences (Mitchell 1983). This case study is used to explore the history and immediate impacts of emergency financial management in a majority-Black city. Using Detroit, we can map the history of Michigan's expanded financial management laws and the demands placed on the city. This mapping of Detroit focuses on the relationship between the state and a majority-minority city in crisis, focusing on how these dynamics might perpetuate racial inequities.

In line with Yin's (1984) argument that cases should be carefully chosen based on their outcome, this research analyzes the city of Detroit in the context of fiscal emergency management. It is concerned with identifying the relationships between the state and local governments and analyzing how these relationships perpetuate racial and socioeconomic circumstances. As argued by Agranoff and Radin (1991), the case study design is well suited for explorations of a retaliatory relationship, so Detroit's experience under emergency management is a relevant and informative research study.

To gain a nuanced understanding of how Detroit leaders and residents



perceived the role of government during the city's receivership, I conducted twenty-five in-depth semi-structured interviews with key informants between September 2014 and December 2018. The target population consisted of elite actors who had significant influence in the city and could offer valuable insights on the social and political climate (Marshall and Rossman 2016). These included elected officials, pastors, community organizers, educators, and business owners in Detroit. Some interviews were with Detroit political officials, elected and appointed, who had a meaningful role in the emergency management process. These elected officials included state legislators from the Detroit area, former Detroit city mayors, and city council members. We also interviewed the emergency manager of Detroit's bankruptcy, Kevyn Orr, as well as the bankruptcy judge, Hon. Steven Rhodes. Our community representatives ranged from the leaders of large foundations to neighborhood organizers. The semi-structured interview format allowed for flexibility in exploring emergent themes and experiences while ensuring that core areas of inquiry were addressed in accord with a predefined interview guide (DiMaggio 2014). This approach fostered rich conversations, allowing participants to elaborate on their perceptions and experiences. Interviews ranged from 37 to 113 minutes and were audio-recorded with informed consent from each participant. The interviews occurred in offices, restaurants, community gardens, churches, and over the phone, in Detroit proper and its suburban communities. All recordings were human transcribed verbatim to facilitate in-depth analysis.

The time frame of the research was chosen to capture insights from a critical period in Detroit's history. The early years (2014–16) coincided with the later stages of emergency management, allowing exploration of residents' experiences under external control. The latter portion of the research period (2017–18) encompassed the beginning of the city's transition back to local control, enabling examination of how perceptions of government legitimacy shifted during this crucial juncture. The interviews were meant to cover the period during which Detroit was undergoing bankruptcy, even though they were conducted once the city was out of receivership. This time frame ensures a comprehensive understanding of the social and political dynamics surrounding Detroit's experience with fiscal emergency management.

### History of Fiscal Takeover Policy in Michigan and Detroit

Historically, Detroit was an economic powerhouse in the Midwest shaped by a legacy of industry, race, and intervention; it was also a point of industrial

decline and racial unrest. Because it is on an international border, Detroit has served as a gateway for trade between the United States and Canada, fueling both Michigan's economy and global commerce. Michigan is defined by the Great Lakes, which provide a large freshwater reserve, supporting the industry and agricultural economy that anchor Michigan's identity. From auto manufacturing to agribusiness, Michigan's economy is deeply tied to its natural resources. Yet Detroit, once the center of the automotive world, has experienced economic isolation. Despite its strategic location, Detroit has remained politically and economically isolated from the rest of the state of Michigan and the greater Midwest region. The divide is deepened by racial demographics and the decline of its industrial base.

This section explores how Michigan's fiscal takeover of Detroit was not only a response to crisis, but a strategic decision that embedded financial risk with the marginalized in the city's recovery, raising critical questions of governance, democracy, and urban autonomy. US cities have faced high levels of fiscal fragility over the last six decades—meaning they are unable to meet their financial obligations due to dwindling revenue streams, high debt burdens, and overall economic instability. Several factors contribute to this urban fiscal fragility. Cities are fundamentally service providers, but in good economic times they also serve as real estate agents and as key job producers (Peterson 1981). One main source of decline in tax revenue is the shift from a manufacturing economy to a service-based one. This reduced property tax revenue, the main source of funding for local governments. A decline in federal funding for cities also made it difficult for them to invest in repairing and updating infrastructure and improving public services. What's more, the aging population means municipalities face rising costs for public employee pensions and healthcare. Many cities had promised public employees generous pension and healthcare benefits, which became unsustainable over time. The high cost of these retirement benefits contributed to significant budget deficits, forcing cities to cut back on other services or to raise taxes to cover the costs.

The increasing income inequality in the United States, and the growth in the number of low-income households, also reduced levels of tax revenue. These struggling cities could no longer afford to provide typical municipal services on their own, without external support. These cities, as public entities, could not make the necessary arrangements to meet financial obligations while providing for current residents' basic needs. It was difficult for them to fund the social services that are critical to the well-being of their residents. This economic and demographic shift was especially pronounced in Detroit, where decades of disinvestment, deindustrialization, and racial segrega-

tion compounded financial instability, making the city a focal point for state intervention.

As of May 2013, 136 cities in Michigan met the criteria for “distressed status” according to state law (“State Housing Development Authority Act of 1966” [1968]). Michigan is an interesting case because its comprehensive take-over legislation enables the state to intervene in cities and other public entities that can no longer handle their economic obligations. By 2015, the state had intervened in twelve cities and six school districts using an emergency financial intervention law. State officials have also dramatically restructured some entities using intervention policy. Overall, the state of Michigan used these laws to stabilize the state’s economy to mitigate the tragedy that could occur if an exogenous financial crisis were to occur, as happened in many jurisdictions from 1988 to the Detroit bankruptcy in 2013.

### *Michigan’s Intervention*

Before 1988, the state had no political authority to intervene in municipal financial crises or shift economic outcomes. Even in a financial crisis, the state did not have the ability to intervene in meaningful ways. But since the late 1980s, Michigan has enacted four statutes regulating state intervention in fiscally distressed local governments. Public Act 101 of 1988 (P.A. 101) introduced Michigan’s first fiscal crisis early-warning system, allowing the state to appoint an emergency financial manager to stabilize financially distressed municipalities and public utilities. However, it did not extend to school districts, which also faced severe financial challenges. In response, the legislature reenacted P.A. 101 as Public Act 72 of 1990 (P.A. 72), expanding state intervention to school districts.

Even though P.A. 72 sought to restore financial stability without overhauling local governance, its limitations were evident by the early 2000s. Emergency managers under P.A. 72 found their authority constrained, particularly in restructuring long-term financial obligations. The law remained largely dormant until 2008, when Michigan was hit simultaneously by the decline of the auto industry and a decline in the bond market, resulting in a wave of local fiscal emergencies. Cities with higher populations of marginally situated residents disproportionately bore the brunt of this crisis, fueling debates over the motives and impact of state intervention. The restructuring often affected the most vulnerable populations with essential redistributive goods and services.

In 2011, after the emergency manager sued for more power, Republican governor Rick Snyder and the Republican-led legislature worked to expand the

emergency manager's authority through Public Act 4 (P.A. 4), which granted managers unilateral control over municipal finances, governance, and contract negotiations, effectively sidelining elected officials. The law faced significant opposition, particularly in Detroit and other predominantly Black communities, where critics saw it as an undemocratic power grab. Activist groups like By Any Means Necessary (BAMN) condemned emergency management as a racially motivated policy meant to strip community assets. These sentiments were echoed throughout the region by leaders and pastors; Bishop Bernadel Jefferson, for example, argued that it undermined local political engagement. The backlash culminated in a 2012 statewide referendum in which Michigan voters repealed P.A. 4 by a 53 to 47 percent margin.

Also in 2012, despite this very public rejection, state lawmakers quickly enacted Public Act 436 (P.A. 436), which reinstated and expanded emergency management powers while circumventing voter approval through an appropriations clause. P.A. 436 offered struggling municipalities four options: a consent agreement, an emergency manager, a neutral evaluation process, or Chapter 9 bankruptcy. In practice, emergency management remained the predominant choice as it provided the most intervention. State representative Phil Phelps criticized the maneuver, stating, "[The emergency management law] was a bad law to begin with, the people voted it out, and the Republicans . . . put the law back on the books and created a roadblock for anyone trying to repeal it via ballot initiative" (P. Phelps, personal communication, March 15, 2015).

P.A. 436 remains Michigan's most invasive intervention law, granting emergency managers sweeping authority to override local governance in the name of fiscal stability. While proponents argue that the law prevents financial collapse and ensures essential services, critics contend that it sacrifices democratic accountability. The law raises fundamental questions about the balance between state oversight and local self-governance, particularly in economically vulnerable communities.

### *Black Cities in Crisis: The Case of Detroit*

Under P.A. 436, the emergency manager had the authority to renegotiate or cancel union contracts, hire and fire government employees, and sell, lease, and privatize local assets. The law was expanded to fully restructure the city of Flint, Detroit Public Schools, and the city of Detroit—all majority-Black sovereign governing structures. At the time of the intervention in Detroit, the city could not effectively provide basic municipal services to its resi-

dents. Emergency response time was averaging fifty-eight minutes. The city had nearly 80,000 blighted properties and 20 square miles of vacant land. The population was constantly declining and poverty was constantly rising. Detroit had severe financial constraints, including \$21 billion in debt, a junk credit rating, and a consistent deficit. These problems were part of the lived experience of the residents.

As a case, Detroit is historically significant in the United States as a beacon of labor and innovation through the development of the auto industry, and as a site of Black political power. Detroit had a Black mayor from 1974 to 2013, and has had a predominantly Black city council since the late 1970s—a powerful testament to Black leadership, mentorship, and education. The belief in Black leadership built Detroit's reputation as a great place for Black people, but that commitment cost Detroit contracts and businesses, and reduced its valuation and ability to secure low-interest credit. Market factors undervalued Black leadership and property, making Detroit a riskier investment for many traditional investors.

To build financial power at the local level, in 2005, Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick, hedged \$1.4 billion in a high-interest loan to restructure the city workers' pension fund, a swap agreement. Amid the already financially precarious situation, entering a swap agreement left Detroit and all its financial obligations in deep turmoil. The swap contracts negotiated in 2005 that Detroit entered were complex financial instruments that exposed the city's retirees, a majority of whom are Black, to significant risk. The swap agreements were based on the assumption that interest rates would remain stable or decrease over time, which would result in lower debt service costs for the city. However, when interest rates rose unexpectedly, as they did in the early 2010s, the city was forced to pay significantly higher debt service costs, which strained its already limited financial resources. The recession of 2008–2009 left the deal in turmoil; more than 21,000 retired workers had \$3.5 billion in underfunded pension obligations and \$5.7 billion in underfunded retiree healthcare benefits.

In the 2013 fiscal year, Detroit only paid 23 percent of its pension obligations. This was unsustainable. The city was running a deficit and still barely paying its bills; it was going to run out of cash and could no longer extend its bonds. To cut costs while addressing growing deficits, the city made major cuts to core budgetary spending. The city didn't hire new police officers and cut all nonessential transportation staff. The city made deep and wide cuts in public safety, transportation, recreation, and capital improvements, and continually deferred the pension payments.

The city was in crisis—corrupt politicians, hemorrhaging money, tens of

thousands of blighted buildings, declining levels of public trust, and failing public infrastructure. City council and the new mayor, Dave Bing, could not build a tool to raise revenue at the pace needed to maintain services and pay rising debt service. The city of Detroit and the state of Michigan struggled to reach a consent decree for the state to provide some relief. While the city of Detroit needed a lifeline in 2012, city officials were hesitant to cede complete power to the state. In 2012, these officials launched a preliminary review of their finances, enabling transparency into the financial affairs of the city of Detroit. The governor believed this was a positive step forward, but more work still needed to be done.

In March 2013, the governor appointed an emergency manager, Kevyn Orr, under the new expansive P.A. 436. While emergency management and, subsequently, bankruptcy are tools for shedding legacy debt, renegotiating unfavorable contracts, and building partnerships, they have human consequences: usurping power from elected officials, cutting retirees' pensions, removing clear accountability, and raising fees.

Both the city and the state worked tirelessly to build better systems, but it was the residents who were hurt the most. The 21,000 retirees, the residents living on blighted streets, the patients unable to get to a hospital—those are the casualties of an unbalanced budget. In a document more than 200 pages long, we don't see the race of the people left behind in these communities, but they are often minority, and in Detroit they are Black.

These are residents of a city with a deep history of Black music, culture, and innovation, where Black people built multigenerational lives. They worked in a city where the mayor, city council members, teachers, lawyers, doctors, sanitation workers, and community leaders were Black, just like them. It was a city from the 1970s built with Black working- and middle-class families looking to cultivate a future—until politicians decided that cities needed to be more entrepreneurial and creative about raising revenue and shedding debt obligations.

Investing taxpayer dollars into systems that are not guaranteed and not secured injects unnecessary risk into an already precarious market (Bliley 2008; Pennacchi and Rastad 2011). If it had been successful, the influx of hundreds of millions of dollars would have been great for the city; however, the reality is that politicians are often not equipped to watch the market ebbs, flows, and exogenous shocks closely enough to take the best calculated risks and build the best models. The choice Kilpatrick made was praised, but left the city on the hook for \$474 million (Preston and Christoff, n.d.). Taxpayers had to pay for one politician's risky investments. Kevyn Orr says:

[Swaps are] something that municipalities should not do. The derivative financial markets are for sophisticated investors that are used to these instruments and have the tools to analyze and assess them and basically play at the big ante table in the casino. If Goldman Sachs and JP Morgan want to enter into swap contracts which are basically a bet, they should. Municipalities should not be in that game. They are not qualified to use taxpayer dollars to make those kinds of bets. (K. Orr, personal communication, January 28, 2015)

Eight years and half a billion dollars later, most Detroit residents would agree that politicians should not be able to take those kinds of financial risks. Kwame Kilpatrick and his compatriots also stole \$75–\$200 million via fraudulent contracts. Kilpatrick had to cover his bases and find a way to raise revenue to cover this liability, which he did by firing city staff and not making payments to the pension fund.

Kilpatrick's financial choices while managing the city were in no way sustainable for a local institution—Detroit could not manage its debt load or the growing deficit. The city was overextended in every way, and creditors began to demand payment. Bankruptcy Judge Steven Rhodes says, “[Bankruptcy] should be reserved as a last resort. Negotiating with creditors is always a better option where it is practical to do that. In the Detroit case, there were simply too many creditors to make that a practical option” (S. Rhodes, personal communication, January 25, 2015).

### *Debt Explained*

As of March 2013, when Keyvn Orr was appointed emergency manager with full reorganizing rights, the city of Detroit had almost \$19 billion of debt. Of that \$19 billion, \$10 billion was in enterprise funds backed by the revenue from water, sewer, and parking. These funds are secured in that they have a built-in payment structure (the ratepayer) which will ensure the creditors are paid in order to not forfeit the assets. The rest of the debt included \$3.5 billion in pension underfunding and \$5.4 billion in completely unfunded pension healthcare.

The biggest concern of the emergency management was the \$5.4 billion in healthcare liability (Orr, 2013). Because of the federal Affordable Care Act's (ACA) healthcare exchange, which provides access to healthcare options, the cost of the healthcare liability diminished greatly. Pensioners could buy their

own healthcare through the healthcare exchange, provided by the Affordable Care Act (ACA)—freeing the city of that liability and giving the responsibility to the individual pensioner. So the ACA provided some support for healthcare.

Orr further explains the necessity for bankruptcy:

The story of Detroit wasn't the bondholders vs. pensioners. The story of Detroit was retiree healthcare. Not even current employee healthcare, but retiree healthcare. People who are 60, 70, and 80 years old have no chance of going into the bond market. If you don't find a solution for the healthcare they are going to die and you have no money to pay up. (Orr 2013)

Once healthcare was accounted for in the restructuring, actual pension debt needed to be managed. The remaining pension debt was the largest creditor on the balance sheet that was not secured, and the emergency manager felt that the only option was to renegotiate it through bankruptcy court, requiring major changes to the system.

These 21,000 retirees' life savings had been first leveraged by former mayor Kilpatrick, exacerbating the crisis, then again in federal bankruptcy court. The state-appointed emergency manager leveraged the city worker retirees' pension in federal court because there was no *federal* safety net to provide retirees with their pension funds. The callous nature of forcing people to defend in court an entitlement protected by the state constitution that they had worked for decades to acquire created a new understanding of debt financing. These local cities and school districts were financing all goods and services with debt, and could then write down the liability through political tools. The humanity of local government had been coopted by the market dynamics of local government and austerity.

The city of Detroit needed to restructure in some way—that is clear. Given the current structure of municipal finance and the priorities of the government, this always has a human cost. The city of Detroit did not take asset forfeiture seriously—the people could not imagine losing access to the walls that Diego Rivera painted at the Detroit Institute of Arts. Leveraging the Detroit Water and Sewage Department as an asset to borrow against for sustaining revenue was also not an option. The only way forward was to restructure pension debt and reduce or contract out public goods and services. These are human cuts produced by political choices.

Beyond the pensions, the services provided directly by the city shifted to



contracts, with the utility in the area where they paid market rate for power. This began with streetlights. With more than 88,000 streetlights out of commission and only 200 commercial electrical customers, Detroit was an ineffective public service provider. To bring this infrastructure back into working form, they needed to make capital improvements costing between \$250 and \$500 million, not including what is needed to maintain the system. In Kevyn Orr's plan, he wrote, "The Emergency Manager believes that it is in the best interest of the citizens of Detroit for the City to exit the power supply business" (K. Orr, personal communication, January 28, 2015). Since the city could not generate the necessary investment, the city's electricity customers were transitioned to the area's regulated utility. The transition continued for about seven years, with all customers (including the municipality) being moved to the private company's meters. The new third-party company reconfigured the lighting structure to cut down the number of streetlights in the city to 46,000, catering to "Detroit's current population centers." This meant that low-density communities no longer had public lighting. The outskirts of the city, with many of the most impoverished people, were left without public lighting or with just the remnants of old light poles. For the low-density communities, in 2025 they are beginning to transition those areas to five solar neighborhoods—where they work with the utility and developers to build solar in the communities.

Detroit is home to one of the largest municipal water and sewerage departments in the nation—serving nearly four million people. An external review board proposed that the city address the "systemic" dysfunction within the system. Even though the city has been said to have an overspending problem, it has historically underspent on critical capital projects meant to address the failing infrastructure. The Detroit Water and Sewerage Department estimated that it would need approximately \$3.4 billion yearly as of 2022. Given that the city should no longer be in the public utility business, the emergency manager supported the Great Lakes Water Authority leasing parts of the water department for a yearly fee for forty years. This leasing of public utilities has drastically increased residents' costs by imposing drainage fees and raising rates for water usage, without improving the water system itself. Because of the higher rates, many residents suffered water shutoffs (Guillen 2015). People who did not want to continue to pay the rising costs moved to communities where rates were lower, even though they receive water from the same supply. The residents who stayed behind were forced to live with subpar public utilities at much higher costs.

One of the first actions taken by the emergency manager was leasing Belle

Isle, Detroit's premier park, to the state of Michigan for \$1.00. It is estimated that this saved Detroit as much as \$6 million in annual maintenance fees. The state had planned to apply for grants to upgrade the facilities and infrastructure. This once city-run public park, a free public good and a cornerstone of the city, is now a state park with entrance fees that the state receives. Many of the parks in the city have been leased to nonprofits and neighborhood groups to cut down on the city's need to maintain the property.

Along the lines of providing for parks and recreation, the city only has seventeen recreation centers, all of which are out of date. The emergency manager believes that the government should not be providing all the services, but that the community in partnership with the city can cover basic needs cost-effectively. The emergency manager created a trust funded by a combination of city dollars, grants, and targeted fundraising to cover the \$16.2 million that the city pays out to maintain Recreation Department activities.

The restructuring of Detroit's retiree healthcare, pensions, and public services under emergency management incurred devastating human costs, disproportionately impacting the Black and poor residents who had already borne the brunt of historical disinvestment. The decision to privatize utilities and public assets did not simply reduce government expenditures—it directly translated into unaffordable water bills, widespread shutoffs, and entire neighborhoods being left in darkness. The loss of publicly funded recreation centers and the imposition of park fees restricted access to vital community spaces, further eroding the social fabric of the city. These measures were not just financial adjustments; they were extensions of long-standing racial and economic inequalities, reinforcing exclusion and displacement in a city where Black Detroiters had long fought for political and economic independence. Rather than a neutral fiscal response, the city's restructuring compounded historical injustices, leaving its most vulnerable residents to navigate deepening instability with fewer public resources.

### **Detroit and Beyond: Implications of Fiscal Takeover**

Over a decade after the emergency manager, Kevyn Orr, resigned in December 2014, the governing structure and development in the central corridor has changed dramatically. Detroit has seen major investments in its central corridors and continues to grow. Downtown, midtown, and some central neighborhoods in Detroit continue to boom with a new stadium, a new Amazon headquarters, a huge investment in the train station by Ford Motor Company,

and much more. Things look different in the city, but the communities are still hurt. Downtown has not seen a boom like this in decades, but the citizens do not feel empowered. In a coffee shop in downtown Detroit, one older man put it this way: “A potato chip is nice if you are used to starving.” Detroiters were starving for so long that having their lights on for the first time is a pleasant experience. Downtown development does not undo all the damage done over the years and heal the broken trust in public officials. Although the face of Detroit is different, the people are still hurt by their power being taken away. Detroit is a new city; the population is rising for the first time in thirty years. The financial future of the city is promising. Home values have risen throughout the city. The city of Detroit has been able to remove over 80 percent of the blighted homes. Industrial development is booming with a new Amazon distribution center, Lear Corporation, and 600 acres of solar power fields being built in communities. Detroit is not the bankruptcy poster child anymore, and the esthetic of the city is beautiful.

For Detroit, emergency management and Chapter IX did what it was supposed to do—balance the financial books and turn the city toward fiscal health. As of 2025, residents of the city still do not trust local or state officials—many have completely checked out of politics. Residents do not know where to go when they need help with a service. The new housing being built does not serve the most impoverished populations—the city lacks affordable housing options. More children are unhoused and malnourished because the city no longer serves these needs, and the private sector does not have the needed capacity. In February 2025, there was a major water-main break in southwest Detroit, leaving a predominately Latino community flooded, with nearly eight feet of sewage in their basements if not their homes.

This chapter has provided a glimpse of what risking a financial future can do to a city that has a majority of marginally situated people. The market corrupts democracy and inclusion in the name of efficacy and growth. Speculative profit is sought at the cost of pensioners’ futures. Former mayor Kwame Kilpatrick hedged the physical health and material wealth of an entire class of municipal laborers on a swap bond, and lost. Black pensioners who expected a future are now forced to rely on the federal government for support during their aging years. Black business owners had to close their businesses because they could not keep up with the tax increases needed to support the revenue deficits. Black residents pay higher water bills because the restructuring forced them to contend with a contract water company. Instead of a bastion of democratic possibilities, Detroit has become a market city due to a failure to manage risk.

This is the kind of government Stone (1989) discusses—one where political elites gather and make decisions in the best interests of the government, which may not be those of the residents (Hayek 2009). The fields of political science and public administration have been dealing with centralizing government for decades but cannot agree on how to best balance power. Through emergency management as a correction to financial crisis, the state of Michigan is creating the political and economic space to begin the reforms necessary to promote austerity. The state government is beginning to engage the community and create a neoliberal context for fiscal stability. While this is a key component in governing, other factors are at play in this conceptualization of government—how is the state maintaining its noneconomic responsibilities to its citizens? When considering Michigan, the government is responsible for many assets that provide quality of life for residents. There must be accountability. As the state of Michigan takes power away from traditional institutions, citizens need to fight for their democratic power.

Emergency management enables diffusion of austerity throughout the government and society, particularly at the local level. The government centralizes power and forces the local government out of the way of economic progress by bringing down the debt and opening the doors to private-market takeover of public goods. Any introduction of a market also needs a long-term method to sustain clear accountability to the citizens, not the markets. Accountability helps to mitigate inequality in a democratic system. There is tension between democracy and a market economy, because there is inherent economic inequality in a market-based/capitalist state; therefore, there is also political inequity for Black people. When reimagining the government, Michigan should promote a market economy that does not suppress democracy and accountability.

This situation parallels the path we have seen at the national and state levels for generations. The city needs to give residents a long-standing vision of democratic engagement. This comes with a cost—the city can perpetuate the domination that comes with racial capitalism. While the city has the capacity to make radical change, they are often forced to take on risk that predominantly affects the marginalized. If we took the approach of seeing like a city, we could build with people and harm reduction in mind (Kaufmann and Sidney 2020). Detroit made cuts to the heart and culture of the city and balanced its budget at the price of core services to Black and Brown residents, and on the backs of the Black workers who built the city. Was it worth it?

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## Policies in and of the Urban Everyday

Ross Beveridge and Philippe Koch

The premise of this chapter is that there is a distinctly urban way of doing politics and policy. To be clear from the start, “urban” should not be mistaken to mean the “local.” As you move up the ladder of governance from the neighborhood to the nation, state politics and policymaking change. In our view, however, urban policies are different from state policies, not because they are local or small-scale, but because they are grounded in a very different understanding of politics. As we will argue, the difference between state and urban policy is not a matter of scale, but of modality.

When we look at politics through an urban lens, different actors, practices, claims, and rules come into view (Magnusson 2011; Boudreau 2017; Davies and Imbroscio 2009; Stone 2015). Seeing politics like a city (Magnusson 2011; Beveridge and Koch 2023b) entails acknowledging that there are different registers of political action. Politics is not solely the province of state institutions and governmental agencies. Indeed, urban political action is often not even directed toward state or governmental institutions; through an urban lens, we observe multiple claims for and practices of self-governing urban spaces. This means that urbanites coproduce and appropriate urban spaces, and in doing so they retain sovereign political authority. Urban political arenas have different visions and practices of how to address problems of public concern. As Stone (2005) argued, if politics differs in the urban realm, so does the way policies are conceived and realized.

In this chapter our goal is to sketch out an urban understanding of policy, in which the urban is not conceived as the nation-state writ small, but in which the urban practices a different mode of politics. To do so, we first describe what we understand to be an urban form of politics. The idea that urbanization generates a particular form of politics has been articulated by various scholars (Magnusson 2011; Boudreau 2017; Rodgers, Barnett, and Cochrane 2014). Despite their diversity, these scholars share the general sense that the study of urban politics must move beyond the conventional framework of the political, which “suggests that the problem of sovereignty is central” (Magnusson 2014, 1570). If sovereignty refers to supreme and ultimate power, following Boudreau (2017) and Magnusson (2011; 2014), the urban grounds of politics can be conceived as non-sovereign, incomplete and deferred power, as much about self-government as government, and centered on the immediate here and now. There are distinctly urban conditions of political organization and experience, and distinctly urban ways of acting politically (Nicholls and Uitermark 2017; Barnett 2014). These conditions are largely shaped by the urban as the site, source, and stake of politics (Davidson and Martin 2013; Beveridge and Koch 2017). An urban area experiences conflicts and antagonisms, but it also provides resources for organizing and claim-making. The very stake of urban politics is often to directly provide access, enjoyment, and participation in the urban area; these are not secondary interests or implied benefits of political action (Lefebvre 1970; Harvey 2012; Kohn 2016; Imbroscio 2011).

From this basis, we delineate an urban understanding of policy. Unlike in the state form of public policymaking, seeing policy like a city entails the work of assembling policy. Urban policy does not rely on established and reified politics and publics; rather, it contributes to their emergence. Urban policy is about connecting local and often tacit knowledge rather than relying on existing nonlocal expert knowledge. The aim of urban policy is to build up or maintain meaningful sociomaterial relations in a context of rapid and often alienating urbanization. The shift from public policymaking to “assembling” policy is also one in perspective and terms. We take broad inspiration from assemblage theory regarding the importance of materialities, the relations between human and nonhuman entities, and even more importantly, in our focus on practices (Amin and Thrift 2002; Fariás and Bender 2009; Latour 2005; McFarlane 2011). The notion of assembling policy underlines our understanding that intervening in and shaping urban spaces—which is the purpose of urban policy *per se*—entails a bundle of activities that are always conditioned by, but also potentially transgress, existing material, institutional, and social relations. In this view urban policy is manifest in practices and experiences, not in abstract



norms, interests, or (strategic) interactions. The practices of urban policy are routinized, material actions by people working relationally, reliant on bodies, artefacts, and knowledge, situated in contexts, specific moments of time and space (Reckwitz 2002).

To illustrate our approach, we discuss recent housing struggles in Berlin. Housing has a long and vibrant history in cities; it is a distinctly urban issue in the confluence of politics rooted in need, cooperation, and proximity, as well as capital investment, the built environment, and state intervention. From self-building movements, to cooperatives, to more recent approaches based on ideas of the commons, the issue of housing presents alternative ways of assembling policy and undertaking collective organization in urban everyday life and state institutions. The empirical part of our case study work looks at attempts to re-municipalize housing, based on policy and media documents (Beveridge and Koch 2021; 2023a) and on the analysis and rereading of recent secondary and primary sources regarding current housing struggles in Berlin (Vollmer 2019; Hamann and Türkmen 2020). The chapter has the following structure. The paper next discusses how urbanization is transforming politics and policy and considers how we as researchers should respond to it. The third section makes the case for an urban form of assembling politics, one that is distinct from state policy. The fourth section examines recent housing struggles in Berlin to illuminate practices of assembling policy. The fifth section concludes the chapter.

### The Urbanization of Politics

In a recent paper, Julie-Anne Boudreau (2017) urges us to rethink and reimagine how we understand and study urban politics. Her argument is that planetary urbanization increasingly conditions how citizens and collectives relate to the world around them. The urban processes we live within and are exposed to shape our experiences, affect, and the logics of actions. As a result, she argues, there is “a specifically urban way of acting politically” (13). For her, the urban is not a specific scale in a nested hierarchy of political levels, but a particular social, economic, and political form. In Boudreau’s view an urban logic of action relies on different conceptions of space (networked, fluid, and mobile instead of bounded and fixed), time (fragmented, situated in the here and now, and circular instead of linear and oriented toward the future), and rationality (creative, experimental, and intuitive rather than planned and

deductive). It is a *decentered* way of being political; it does not cluster around one center of political authority. Further, the space where political actions occur is contingent and assembled from human and nonhuman collectivities consisting of people, places, technologies, and infrastructures.

This idea of a distinct *urban* politics has also been articulated by Warren Magnusson (2011; 2014). What he calls “seeing like a city” draws on James C. Scott’s famous work “Seeing Like a State” (Scott 1998). Scott argues that state-centered modernist politics rests ultimately on a bird’s-eye view, which introduced a distance between political decision-making and the specific places where these decisions should be implemented. The state’s role was not only distinct from society, it was positioned, at least in a theoretical sense, apart from society so as to act on it from above. Against this background, Magnusson’s plea for an urban lens on politics is based on the idea that politics emanates from and is embedded in the everyday things we do. Magnusson (2014, 1571) understands urban politics as consisting of “complicated patterns of government and self-government, a multiplicity of authorities in different registers.” The sovereign state does not lie at the center of the political urban; rather, urban politics is ongoing and enmeshed with processes of urbanization that create a range of struggles constitutive of the urban terrain itself (Enright and Rossi 2018). As Allan Cochrane (2007) has argued, the urban is fundamentally a range of politically productive settings, offering distinct and diverse possibilities. Seeing politics like a city means that on neither a theoretical nor an empirical level is planning or policy disembodied from people, communities, materialities, and urban environments. While formal policymaking and laws lie with state institutions, and these continue to carry weight, when seen like a city, they become entangled in urban collective life in which people are already making decisions in everyday contexts, prolonging habitual practices, and inventing new ones; globally mobile forces (of capital) are felt, and technologies and material structures can emerge, break down, and change urban spaces. New policies and planning directives may seek to act on urban contexts, but these urban circumstances are far from dormant and indeed already make their own versions of policy and planning decisions.

When we replace the state view with an urban lens, we start using different terms and languages, a point made most vividly by Simone and Pieterse (2017), who use the notion of “resonance” to capture the aligning of agencies, both strategic and random, across urban space. Some empirical phenomena come to the fore, others recede. For example, looking through an urban lens can shed light on political practices and actors that are often overlooked in

academic and media debates. It is a politics not so much concentrated on city elites, business owners, elected officials, and head of departments. Instead, we see localized actions performed by urban collectives, situated mobilizations around day-to-day issues, occurring against the backdrop of everyday urban routines. Seeing like a city reveals the non-sovereignty of politics and policy and the diffuse nature of agency.

Urbanization and the urban lens it brings with it have implications for the study of politics. First, it does not equate the public with the state or public administration. There are different collectives, organizations that can claim publicness, so we can talk of urban publics rather than just one public represented by the state. There is a long tradition of scholars in urban politics and urban policy who argue that in urban areas the state is not sovereign in a strict sense; rather, it depends on a wide array of nonstate actors to establish its capacity to act (Stone 1989; Hunter 1953). *Power over* seems less relevant than building *power to*. When we delve into the urban, elections (the input side) seem less pivotal than political science generally assumes (Stone 2009). What seems much more pertinent is how governmental and nongovernmental actors interact; the physical and social processes of urbanization on the ground are embedded in complex arrangements comprising actors from different segments of society.

If we follow Stone (2005) and assume that a shift in politics comes with a shift in policy, we could expect urban policy to shift away from the institutionalized procedures of the state and public administrations and toward the practices, rhythms, densities, and proximities of urban everyday life. An urban policy also becomes nonsovereign; it is not centered on the singular locus of the state, but is defined by many loci. When policies shaped and directed by governmental institutions shift to urban policies centered around the material practices of urban collectives, urban actors' practice and experience of politics and policies come to be seen as more important than the abstract preferences and assumed (strategic) interactions emphasized in traditional perspectives (Simone and Pieterse 2017). Policy becomes a bodily activity, always interwoven with the physical artefacts and specific conditions and knowledge of the urban. Urban policy has a location where it emerges and unfolds. It is distinctly place-based. Thus, urban policy is usually directed toward problems that occur in a specific place, that are related to material things and consider the people enmeshed with all these heterogeneous parts that make up urban environments.

### From Policymaking to Assembling Policy

Urbanization transforms politics. This has an impact on what we should consider “policy” as a political activity, and how we should study it (Kaufmann and Sidney 2020). If the state form is about policymaking, then we propose that the urban form is about assembling policy. By referring to assembling, as opposed to making, we foreground on-the-ground, or from-the-ground-up, practices. Further, it moves us toward a dispersed sense of agency and power and away from a conventional view that policy is made by those in (governmental) power. If policymaking is far removed in its iterations and contingencies from idealized models and cycles, it still proceeds from the idea that it is ultimately made and implemented by state actors. However participative or deliberative those processes might be, and how collaboratively produced their outcomes are, policymaking is underpinned by the idea of state sovereignty and a set of possible sanctions. By contrast, assembling policy highlights the openness, multiplicity, and situatedness of intervening in urban space. There is no sovereignty, no body or authority that can simply bend the world to its will, no matter what formal powers it has. Assembling policy is based on the idea that agency and space cannot be assumed as static, pregiven subjects and objects of urban policy. Instead, both are in the process of becoming, and so agency and space can be assembled and constituted in different ways. Neither the agent nor the space or structure of urban policy can be assumed in advance. This understanding departs from common conceptions of public policy.

In political and scholarly discourses public policymaking is usually understood as a “politico-administrative process of articulating and matching government goals with the means available to achieve them” (Howlett and Cashore 2020, 10). Thus, public policies have goals and means, and governments make and sanction them in the name of the public. From this perspective, governments are the main actors in public policymaking because they are in the position to make authoritative decisions on behalf of the public at large. This understanding of policymaking is grounded in a high-modernist rationality based on an ethos of problem-solving and a focus on discrete problem identification, calling for stable and delimitable policy instruments and objects that are separable from the processes and (human and nonhuman) agents of identification and implementation (Hartley, Kuecker, and Woo 2019).

Urbanization challenges core assumptions underlying this idea of public policymaking. As outlined in table 7.1, urbanization provides distinct stakes,

sites, and sources for policy (see also Beveridge and Koch 2019). The stake in assembling policy is the appropriation and coproduction of urban space. One could also argue that this is the stake in the state form of policymaking, and that assembled policy is also mediated by the state—policymaking entails allocating and distributing resources (finance, authority, infrastructures, rule of law) that are under the control of the state. In the urban form of assembling policy, however, *building policy capacity* in distinct places is always part of the policy itself (Bresnihan and Byrne 2015). Assembling policy is necessary because there is no predefined political authority to rely on that can or is willing to *just make* policy. A key example to illustrate this difference is squatting, because squats transform sociomaterial relations and generate new urban publics often not recognized by policymaking (Di Felicianantonio 2017). Reclaiming space in this way is often a transformative project based on collaboration and coproduction outside of, and in opposition to, formal politics and the publics and spaces it depends on. So, while squatting practices are a direct affront to the state and its guardianship of property laws, it at the same time attempts to build new political practices, actors, and spaces rather than appeal to abstract or distant arenas of decision-making.

Urbanization also provides *sources* from which policy is assembled (Nicholls 2016; Boudreau, Boucher, and Liguori 2009; McFarlane 2016; Bayat 2010). In the sociomaterial condition of intense heterogeneity and the proximity of people and artefacts, urbanity provides networks, knowledge, and shared life-worlds to organize politically (Daskalaki 2018; Stavrides 2014; Landau and Bule, this volume). These sources differ significantly from the state form of policymaking, where elections and governmental regimes enshrine authority and power in political and administrative institutions and agencies. In state policymaking, the sources are well defined and at hand, at least formally. In the urban realm, authority and power are much more fluid and not intrinsically embedded in certain institutions or agents. Collective practices with a certain reach and impact need to be forged and built by knowledgeable urban actors in the here and now. The political sources from which urban policy is built are located in the spaces of collective urban life. We should be careful not to assume their presence, as if they are somehow innate to urban life. The political sources shaping urban policy are outcomes, which generate and are generated by processes of assembling policy: politics of proximity, local knowledge and resources, and bottom-up and collective action. As many studies have shown, urban social movements are key to developing these distinctively urban sources of action (Nicholls and Uitermarks 2017; Vollmer 2019; Della Porta 2020; Bazurli and Verhoeven, this volume).

TABLE 7.1. Urban Form of Assembling Policy versus State Form of Policymaking

|                   | Stake                                                                                            | Source                                                                                                                 | Site                                                                                                                              |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Assembling policy | The appropriation and coproduction of urban space; the transformation of sociomaterial relations | The politics of proximity; local knowledge and resources; bottom-up collective action and social movements             | The urban everyday as the site of social production; not-for-profit platforms and organization interstitial state/societal spaces |
| Policymaking      | To gain access to and distribute or allocate state resources                                     | Electoral and regime politics; administrative knowledge and resources; top-down delegation and community participation | Governmental institutions; enforcement agencies; courts; different types of markets and expert panels                             |

The spaces and processes of the urban everyday are often *sites* of assembling policy (Yates 2015; Halvorsen 2015). Urban social movements are often embedded in and built on the rhythms of daily life. In the urban realm, actors addressing collective problems are regularly confronted with situations in which they have to build policy capacity in the here and now of their everyday worlds—they simply cannot rely on or appeal to preexisting governmental institutions and supposed sources of sovereignty. Policy is thus often shaped on the go, through the interactions of state and nonstate actors involved in the policy process. To at least a certain extent, these interactions are constitutive of institutional arrangements and the rules governing them, so traditional actors, institutions, and formal rules of decision-making remain relevant, but their importance cannot be assumed in the analysis of policy.

Against the backdrop of urbanization we need to find a new vocabulary to describe policymaking. To start this process, we suggest thinking through the idea of assembling policy rather than policymaking. As table 7.1 shows, assembling policy differs from public policymaking in terms of stake, source, and site. But this shift also has broader implications. First, assembling policy implies that the public is much more fluid than is assumed in the state form. The public that the policy addresses is emergent and related to the policy itself; to put it differently, the policy creates its own public of heterogeneous parts gathered together (Savage 2020; McCann 2011; Fariás 2011). Through this lens, seemingly self-evident categories used in politics and political analysis are actively destabilized (Sassen 2014). This means that, in a world where nation-state and the jurisdictional territories of politics cannot be taken for granted anymore, assembling policy as a practice and using assembled poli-

cies as a category in analysis seems appropriate. The idea of policy assemblage does not “sit well with the use of reified categories, not only concerning the nation-state but also other terms such as ‘the market,’ ‘class’ and more. Indeed, it is difficult . . . to *think with* assemblages while at the same time assuming the existence of such reified forms” (Savage 2020, 330).

Second, assembling policy instead of policymaking points toward an epistemic shift (McFarlane 2011). The idea of policymaking as a governmental action to identify goals and the means to achieve them, and then put them into action, is grounded in linear, high-modernist rationality. This way of seeing and acting on the world identifies and delineates its problems in somewhat abstract terms and at distance from the specific situations, and without close attention to the different ways that different actors perceive problems. The idea of assembling policy implies a relational and material epistemic that perceives problems as always enmeshed with heterogeneous parts, different understandings, and complex causalities. The status and form of knowledge differ between a state form and an urban form of policymaking. It is not expert knowledge that can be acquired and located in given institutions, but rather, it is local and often tacit knowledge. Then the question shifts, from what knowledge we need to solve these problems, to what knowledge is expressed in assembling this policy and the practices involved, and how can we combine different local knowledges to enhance policy capacity.

The third aspect is the result of the first two. In the state form of policymaking, society at large uses different instruments and tools to formulate goals and, in a separate process, to implement the means to achieve these goals. In the urban form of policymaking, goals and means are always mixed and the process of implementation cannot be analytically separated from the process of defining goals. What urban policy addresses, thus, is not society at large, “from above” as it were, but rather specific outcomes of urbanization. Assembling policy places the concern on practice, work, and collaboration: for example, through a collective capable of intervening in the urban everyday and through sources of power provided by a politics of proximity. It reshapes the political site in terms of the actors involved and acknowledged, generating politics, knowledge, and sociospatial relations. We think that this urban form of policy may be on the rise in reaction to ongoing urbanization and the decentering of the state. Indeed, it might offer a way to realign policy and politics in more democratic terms. At a distance from state institutions, citizens and urbanites develop their own forms of engaging and acting on their urban environment; they develop their own policy ecosystem, which stands in different relations to government institutions.

## Assembling Housing Policies in Berlin

What does this idea of assembling policy mean in concrete empirical terms? If we look at housing, an urban understanding of assembling policy rather than the state making policy sheds light on often-overlooked aspects and processes crucial to make housing more accessible and just. In the following sections we illustrate this through the example of current struggles around housing in Berlin. The short case study is based on a rereading of existing scholarly work (Vollmer 2019; Hamann and Türkmen 2020) and our own engagement with and understandings of the ongoing housing remunicipalization campaign (Beveridge and Koch 2021; 2023a). In this example, urbanites try to shape spaces of dwelling and confront the forces that shape how urbanization unfolds in particular places and locales. The distinctly urban nature of these political practices only comes into view when they are looked at through an urban lens: What is at stake in Berlin is really the direct intervention and common ownership of urban space. This is not a politics directed at winning control of the state, and with this change in the political stake, the site of politics changes from governmental institutions and agencies to urban society, as do the resources to act politically from administrative authority to a politics of proximity.

To provide some background information on the case, in September 2021 a majority of Berliners taking part in a referendum (*Volksbegehren*) supported the initiative to expropriate large real estate owners in Berlin (see also Hinze and Smith in this volume on the use of citizens referenda in Berlin). The outcome was the result of years of campaigning in the city, with the campaign umbrella group, Deutsche Wohnen & Co. enteignen, providing a focal point. The verdict forced the state of Berlin to enact a law that enabled the state to remunicipalize the housing stock of large real estate companies who own more than 3,000 housing units. The housing stock should be transferred to common property (*Gemeineigentum*), with compensation offered below market price. The communalized housing stock would then be controlled by a not-for-profit public-law enterprise, which includes the residents and tenants of Berlin in the governance structures.

At first glance, this seems to be a form of progressive politics with the state as the main locus of policymaking (or at least it could be analyzed as such). Indeed, the *Volksbegehren* is certainly a political reaction to the failed housing policy of the state of Berlin after the reunification of Germany in 1991. The campaign to remunicipalize housing companies in Berlin, which were privatized in the 1990s and 2000s (Vollmer 2019), has become one of the key



political struggles in the city and a focus of much international interest. From the mid-1990s, the state of Berlin sold large parts of its housing stock to the private sector (Uffer 2013; Holm 2008), with significant sales even occurring under the coalition government that included Die Linke, the Left Party (Holm, Lederer, and Naumann 2011). More than 200,000 housing units were privatized, 40 percent of the stock, between 1991 and 2007 (Holm 2008; Fields and Uffer 2016). What is more, the vision of public housing changed, through new institutional forms and management practices aimed at enabling the state of Berlin to extract surplus from its own companies or sell the companies to reduce fiscal debt (Silomon-Pflug and Heeg 2013). As a result, the rents of public housing units increased.

What is striking about the Deutsche Wohnen & Co. enteignen campaign is the form of its tactics and demands. It sought to bypass party and electoral politics through the use of a direct democratic instrument, gaining strength through horizontal and movement-like political mobilization. The principal aim of the campaign was not simply to bring the housing stock back under the control of the state, but to rethink the role of the state in relation to “urban society” in the form of a public-commons partnership (Beveridge and Koch 2021). This repositioned the state as non-sovereign. The campaign demanded that the expropriation be pursued in the name of “urban society,” and not in the name of the state. It therefore very clearly and deliberately makes a distinction between a state-centered form of policy and one rooted in the urban collective life. The terminology employed also moves away from the state, employing the terms “socialization” (*Vergesellschaftung*) and “remunicipalization” (*Rekommunalisierung*) but with no mention of a direct return to the state (*Verstaatlichung*). The aim is to locate political authority within urban society and the municipality, as a realm of local politics. These goals are distinct from the state but still interlaced with it. Seen in such terms, the initiative aims not only to decommodify housing, but to democratize key urban resources. Urban society (*Stadtgesellschaft*), with representatives of tenants, employees, and the wider public, should hold the majority share of the housing companies in relation to the city government and public administration. Further, the company should be legally bound to serve a strict purpose—to supply affordable housing to the population of Berlin. The everyday operation of the housing company should be as localized as possible, involving councils and assemblies from the housing units, and up to the neighborhood and district levels.

In conceptual terms, the Deutsche Wohnen & Co. enteignen campaign strives to unhinge policymaking from the state and fix it to urban society. The coalition of groups pushing the initiative forward was broad and encompassed

many social groups Mayer (2013, 11) found in contemporary urban movements: radical autonomous groups, middle-class urbanites, and disparate other groups that share a precarious existence of marginalized and excluded people (Vollmer 2019, 120–48). Some are experienced in housing struggles (Mietenvolksentscheid 2015) or represent well-established tenant organizations (Mieterforum Berlin). Supporters also include Die Linke party members, and other leftist movements and organizations support the initiative.

Newer groups are also involved, such as Kotti&Co., which has taken a leading role and been prominent in wider housing struggles in Berlin. The participation of Kotti&Co. is particularly noteworthy because its formation and practices are deeply grounded in the everyday experience of dwelling and the housing policies shaping these experiences (Hamann and Türkmen 2020). In her detailed study, Vollmer (2019) describes the creation of the Kotti&Co. as a slow process from sharing similar everyday experiences in the hallways of social housing blocks at Kottbusser Tor in the Kreuzberg area (191–194), to putting up a small protest camp (*Gecekondü*) in front of the building, and to establishing organizational resources, planning recurrent protests, and developing strategies for mobilization. The common cause of Kotti&Co.'s members is addressing the everyday experience of suffering from rent increases and the wider housing policies that enabled them. The starting point for the organization was “the discussion about what an appropriate reaction to the rent increase would look like” (Vollmer 2019, 192 [our translation]). Then the discussions moved slowly toward engaging wider urban publics through media and demonstrating within urban spaces. In the process of identity formation as a collective, “Kotti&Co.,” the group also needed to clarify the position of Kotti&Co. toward the state and its institutions. Group members shared their disappointment with parties and the formal institutions of the state. In their understanding, Kotti&Co. acts outside formal political institutions, but it does not fight against the state; rather, it seeks its transformation. This became clear in their discussion with autonomous political groups who joined protests. Kotti&Co. rejected attacks on the police, not to appease them but because “the police should not distract us” from our shared purpose (Vollmer 2019, 226). Formal institutions and the state are an important part in their own strategies as a means for transformation, but not in the revolutionary sense but rather as an arena to articulate and change policies. At the same time, and because Kotti&Co. has hardly any confidence in formal politics, they demand more self-government and self-determination (Vollmer 2019, 224–25).

## Conclusions

Through our engagement with ongoing housing struggles in Berlin, we have outlined an emergent shift from state modes of policymaking to urban modes of assembling policy. While the state form of policy is well known and researched, an urban form of policy is also present, looming in the margins, and activists and researchers alike are starting to develop appropriate concepts, vocabularies, and strategies. Underpinning this shift is the reaction to urbanization—urbanites around the globe are claiming the right to the city, to coproduce and self-govern urban spaces. They are fueled by a “politics of proximity,” articulating needs and desires and creating new collectivities. They are situated in the urban everyday, rejecting claims of sovereignty. Assembling policy is an embodied form of political action embedded in urban collective (human and nonhuman) life (Bhan et al. 2020). The physicality and materiality of the urban is not exogenous to policy, but part of it. By adopting these perspectives, we argue, these urban collectives help us to reimagine democracy. In particular, we detect in these practices a reimagined democratic politics that enables the self-government of the urban everyday, at a remove from state agencies and institutions (Farías 2011). Here we take our cue from democratic theorist Sheldon Wolin (1994; 2016). Following his arguments, policy can be seen as a means of assembling the urban demos, not as exercising the logic and power of the state in the name of a given polity. The demos, according to Wolin, must be at the center of any democratic politics, not as an abstraction or myth but as practiced in collective forms of decision-making and organization. For Wolin, the demos emerges through practices; it is not the foundational ground on which decisions can be made and actions taken. An urban form of policy thus understood can shape opportunities for civic agency and might create communalities among persons located in a particular place confronted by specific problems and demands, and in this way this form of assembling policy can play a key role in democratizing contemporary political life. Ultimately, this form of policy rests on the fact that people can create and renew commonality, develop common cause, and act on it (Wolin 1994, 24). If policy is understood as being generated rather than just made in an existing governmental ecosystem, we can acknowledge that policy must not be situated within more or less fixed institutional boundaries and conform to already existing rules and norms. Assembling policy in processes of urbanization might help citizens reimagine themselves as meaningful political agents, rethink how public problems should be addressed, and rearticulate how democratic politics should unfold.

The short case study of Berlin is illustrative in this regard. The claim to expropriate big landlords introduces a perspective on housing policy that was previously unthinkable, in Berlin and beyond. In recent decades housing policy was mainly driving toward commodifying housing and expanding real estate markets. Creating and securing private property as an institution has been and still is a main target of formal urban politics, in order to attract real estate developers and investments. With this claim the coalition behind Deutsche Wohnen & Co. enteignen positioned itself at great distance from more established political organizations in housing politics. By doing so, it not only expanded political space but contributed to the politicization of urbanites alienated from the political system. Situated in the urban everyday, this form of mobilization, rooted in urban collective life, might indeed help to assemble and experiment with more transformative policy practices where self-government and democratization take center stage.

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## PART II

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# Who Participates?

*Diverse and Shifting Actors in Urban Policy*





## City-Making in Africa's Urban Estuaries

### *Rescaling African Urban Policy Analysis in an Era of Mobility*

Loren Landau and Kabiri Bule

*It's a Sunday afternoon before a long holiday weekend. Scores of people gather on Yeoville Ridge above downtown Johannesburg. One by one, they utter a few words into a bottle's open mouth before sealing it and smashing the glass against the exposed boulders nearby. Having expelled the city's evil spirits from their bodies and scattered them against the stones, they are purified: ready to return to families elsewhere in the country or across its borders. These are people making livings in Johannesburg but lives elsewhere. In returning home purged of the city's moral pollution, they safeguard the lives and the welfare of the people and communities that matter most to them.<sup>1</sup>*

Cities are sites of institutional innovation, norm setting, and material production. Cities are where most of the world's population live (United Nations 2018). Across sub-Saharan African countries that were primarily rural a generation ago, rapid population growth and urban geographic expansion only emphasize their importance. Echoing the urban leagues and city-states of bygone eras, many of these contemporary urban centers have emerged as global players. Not only centers of production, they challenge national policies and occasionally forge independent connections, circulations of people, goods, and ideas. The proliferation of mayoral forums to address issues as diverse as trade, climate change, and migration illustrates the importance of

understanding urban policymaking and politics (see Bälz and Aki-Sawyer 2021; Bazarli and Verhoeven, this volume). Yet, as this volume's editors note, urban policymaking remains on the fringes of political analysis.

Effectively understanding and comparing urban policymaking practices depends on clearly conceptualizing "urbanity" and developing an appropriate definition of "urban policy" and the determinants of urban governance. This is acutely challenging. Even if all cities are sources of political meaning and material production, the forms of municipal government and the nature of the urban are often historically contingent and contextual. Moreover, effective comparisons must incorporate cities of vastly varied morphologies and metabolisms. African cities—the focus of this chapter—are cases in point. Their high levels of mobility, their fragmented and often frail institutions, and the informality and translocality that characterizes political and economic management will define them for generations. These characteristics also raise important questions about the nature of the urban, what counts as urban policy, and the normative presumptions that often serve as metrics for assessing urban policy and practice.

African cities' changing social and urban forms raise epistemological, ethical, and practical challenges regarding the governance of space, rights, and representation. This chapter outlines these concerns as a way to chart research at the intersection of urbanism, mobility, and public policy. As it does so, it builds on—and in some way inverts—Kaufmann and Sidney's (2020, 1) proposition that "urban policy . . . highlights dimensions of political life that are more visible within cities but that also operate at other scales." Its starting point is that the processes occurring in other geographic sites and in nonstate registers fundamentally shape urban governance (see Beveridge and Koch, this volume).

Levyng newly collected data and an existing corpus of work on African mobility and urban governance, this chapter works toward three conclusions. First, while recognizing that scholars of urban regimes often analytically include nonstate actors (e.g., businesses, civil society organizations), we nonetheless suggest that they unduly privilege state institutions as the locus of advocacy and the ultimate standard-bearer of urban policy. While states remain important actors, the range of alternative modes of local and translocal regulation at work in African cities often means that states are only of secondary, practical concern. Even if cities and ports are among the few sites where sub-Saharan states have exercised centralized control (see Herbst 2000; Leonard and Straus 2003), they are often amalgams of regulatory systems working at different spatial scales and moral registers: what Holston and Appadurai

(1996) refer to as honeycombs of jurisdiction and regulation. As in cities elsewhere in the Global South, urban populations' demographic dynamism often outstrips the capacity or interests of state regulators (see Harms 2016; Simone 2017; Buechler 2008; Auerbach et al. 2018; Ren 2018; Caldeira 2017; Landau 2006; Bank 2011). As the editors note in their introduction, there is a need to decenter the state, seeing it in its multifaced forms as but one actor among many shaping lives and space (see Kaufmann and Sidney, this volume).

Second, understanding urban governance and policy requires a distinctly translocal perspective that not only considers global supply chains and international institutions (public and private), but often less visible material and moral circuits of exchange as well. As people increasingly move into and through primary and secondary urban centers, they may spend most of their time in a city but retain political and moral engagements in sites well beyond the influence of urban policymakers. This results in a form of translocal, "do-it-yourself" urbanism that blurs the geographical and institutional boundaries underlying conceptions of the urban and urban politics (see Myers 2021; Turner 2015; Mains 2011; Jeffrey 2010; Katz 2004).

Third, we challenge approaches that explicitly or implicitly assess cities through a focus on inclusion and popular participation. We take as our starting point the normative assertion in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals 11: to "make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable."<sup>2</sup> This normative pronouncement provides a series of comparative analytical metrics that resonate strongly with much research on urban policymaking (see Paller in this volume). This chapter asks whether a focus on inclusion and local, state-centered participation effectively enables scholars to understand the politics and priorities of urban spaces and populations.

This is not to advocate for economic, social, and political marginalization, but rather to recognize that due to histories of "stateness" (Dyson 2009) and skepticism of official interventions, many urban residents have little interest in participating in official policy. Moreover, those seeking to build lives may actively avoid political and social engagements to remain effectively "uncaptured" (cf. Bule 2022; Landau 2018; Kihato and Landau 2006; Hyden 1980).

This chapter ultimately argues for an approach to urban policymaking that conceptualizes the urban not as a singular, bounded space, but as a series of constellations and corridors: sites linked to each other within and beyond the city through multiple institutional, economic, and moral economies. Such an approach not only reveals the horizontal intersections of multiple policy spaces—what McCann (2011, 107) might term "interurban policy transfers"—but gives cause to reconsider the almost universal call for localized inclusion,

visibility, and representation. After a brief review of the paper's multiple sources of data and approach, we discuss each of these in turn before reflecting on their implications for urban policy analysis.

### Data and Approach

This is a largely conceptual and exploratory chapter that draws on more than two decades of research on mobility and urban governance in sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere. It is not intended to offer definitive normative or epistemic frameworks, but to raise issues and open exploratory space. It originated in collaborations with the South African Local Government Association to assess municipal approaches to mobility in the country's cities. This project brought together generalized statistical analysis and extensive interviews with municipal authorities and civil society organizations to identify the policy and institutional challenges facing decentralized municipal government (see Landau, Segatti, and Misago 2013). It was later extended to include additional municipalities in South Africa and Botswana (see Mapitsa and Landau 2019) and then to cities in Kenya and Uganda, where we explored municipal and civil society responses to migration and displacement in Nairobi and Kampala (see Kihato and Landau 2016). The statistical data cited here stem from a recent survey (March–April 2021) conducted in Accra (Ghana), Nairobi (Kenya), and Johannesburg (South Africa). As national and regional nodes for economic and human circulation, they are ideal sites for exploring the governance of urban space in an era of mass mobility (see Paller in this volume for more on Accra). Reflecting patterns seen elsewhere in African cities, each has a relatively young population and receives migrants from across its respective country and from the region and further beyond. As indicated in table 8.1, data were collected from over 1,600 people distributed almost evenly across nine specific research sites, three in each city.

Together, these data provide unique, contemporary insights into the nature of urbanization, institutional engagement, regulation, and translocalism in African cities. The account presented here is by no means definitive, nor is it intended to be. Rather, it is primarily an illustrative, constructive critique of the analytical and normative shortcomings of much urban policy analysis. We present it here not to advocate for African exceptionalism or to argue that cities across the Global South cannot be compared alongside cities in other regions. On the contrary: While each city and country has a distinctive history and character, African cities amplify and illustrate many of the trends now

TABLE 8.1. Sample Size by City and Sex

| City         | Sex    | Respondents | Average Age |
|--------------|--------|-------------|-------------|
| Accra        |        | 575         | 34.28       |
|              | Female | 289         | 34.01       |
|              | Male   | 286         | 34.56       |
| Johannesburg |        | 528         | 35.64       |
|              | Female | 254         | 36.09       |
|              | Male   | 274         | 35.19       |
| Nairobi      |        | 519         | 32.22       |
|              | Female | 258         | 31.69       |
|              | Male   | 261         | 32.74       |
| Total        |        | 1,623       | 34.06       |

beginning to appear elsewhere—economic and environmental precaritization, translocality, and the notable absence of public institutions from social, economic, and political life (cf. Comaroff and Comaroff 2015).

### Toward Policy Analysis Beyond the Urban Edge

#### *The State on the Margins of Urban Life*

Urban theory and approaches to policy analysis are often informed by the Euro-American experience, where cities are sites of political and economic incorporation and contestation. Urban regimes incorporate markets and state and civil society actors, who combine—although not always easily—to regulate each other and the urban population. For historical and contemporary reasons, African cities primarily reflect urbanism of a different kind. Although the continent has a long history of urbanism associated with trade and pre-colonial political formations, the continent's primary cities are almost new. Whether designed as sites of colonial extraction (e.g. Johannesburg, Lubumbashi) or trade and transit (e.g., Nairobi, Kinshasa), the continent's cities were typically planned and constructed for limited, carefully regulated populations (see Freund 2001; Lamprkos 1992). Even in the postcolonial period, many countries maintained strong anti-urbanization agendas designed to maintain Africans as a primarily rural, agricultural people, with space in the city allocated to those needed by government or to provide necessary urban services.

Municipal governments were simply not prepared or willing to engage with the rapid urbanization that has occurred over the past two decades.

Whatever their actions (or lack thereof), they have done little to slow urbanization: Across the developing world, the total built-up area of less-developed countries quadrupled between 2000 and 2015 (Pesaresi et al. 2016). Secondary cities in sub-Saharan Africa doubled their populations in that period, and their *de facto* geographic boundaries grew even more rapidly than their populations (Angel et al. 2016). Primary cities like those discussed here have also expanded spatially—if less dramatically—as their populations grow from natural increase and in-migration. These rates are akin to those of industrial European cities 150 years ago and more recent ones in globalizing, industrializing Asia. But African cities have only limited industry, trade, and opportunities for secure livelihoods. In many spaces, state capacity to regulate urban spaces is limited or withheld. Regardless, cities continue to offer limited possibilities amid precarity. Some find fortune there, but most do not (see also Friesen et al. 2019; Lamson-Hall et al. 2018; Kihato and Muyebe 2015).

Many of Africa's urban spaces are made by people's efforts to build lives, often with little direct engagement with municipal authorities. Although one might celebrate this evident creativity and self-reliance (cf. Finn 2014), it generates a level of disconnection, informality, and ongoing mobility (or churn) that has significant implications for people's lives and for policy analysis (see Bule and Landau 2025; Landau 2018). While urban policy around land use or trade is, for example, undeniably important (see Kihato and Royston 2013), many of the neighborhoods in which people live are what O'Donnell (2004) terms "Brown Areas" or Scott (2009) calls "ungoverned spaces." Yet O'Donnell's and Scott's perspectives—like many policy analyses—are potentially misleading, as they create analytical dichotomies between state and non-state forms of governance and policy. While urban regime theory recognizes the role of private sector and civil society organizations in determining rules, such approaches often defer to the state as a locus of policymaking. Alternatively, states are seen as "captured," their executive committees consisting of big business or others. Yet few speak about urban policy and governance in the presence of frail or intentionally absent state institution, both traits seen widely across sub-Saharan cities. Under these conditions, forms of horizontally and socially enacted "policies" become central in shaping people's lives.

Our own work in South Africa, Kenya, and Ghana finds that those with the most *de facto* power in regulating urban spaces are often not municipal officials but self- or community-appointed leaders. While their authority may be officially (or unofficially) endorsed by state agents, their actions are often extra-legal (see Misago 2019 and [Xenowatch.ac.za](http://Xenowatch.ac.za)). Sometimes these congeal to create something Stone (1989; 1993) might recognize as an urban regime or governance system: a mix of actors relying on relatively stable, if emergent,

collaborations and contestations. Yet as Davis (2011), Tilly (1985), and Martin Scorsese (2002) all note, these often include mafias or mafia-like organizations working at multiple scales (see also Misago and Landau 2022; Ansell and Gash 2009; also, Alcantara and Nelles 2014, 183). Even when they rely less on violence, the basis of authority and influence is often economic or social, not political (see Landau 2015). Many of these themes surface elsewhere in this volume, most notably in Moncada's discussion of urban violence.

There is perhaps no better way to illustrate how millions live beyond the realm of formal law and policy than to consider the protections (or lack thereof) that immigrants and refugees receive in African cities. In research conducted in the mid-2000s in Johannesburg, Maputo, Lubumbashi, and Nairobi, legal status did little for those living in informal settlements, townships, or densely populated inner-city areas (see Landau and Duponchel 2011). This was in part because almost all services were provided through markets and local-level patronage, not states. Moreover, even the police operated on logics structured by law only loosely—if at all. Instead, it was people's social connections with neighbors, family members, and service providers that most influenced substantive outcomes. As such, when people seek to find ways in a city, it is not municipal offices or officials that are their most important connections, but the people who live around them or others who might make them visible to hostile actors (see Landau et al. 2016; Vidal 2010; Hornberger 2011).

Municipal and national policy texts or implementation remain relevant, as they clearly provide a general tableau in which other forms of governance exist. But for significant portions of the urban population, it is other, often "informal" regulatory regimes that matter most. As discussed, these may take the form of local protection rackets that determine who can build, live, or move through a city. Or it may be private property developers or private security operators who effectively regulate interactions and mobility or provide services, including water, education, and housing (see Landau 2015). These may be embedded in regimes involving state actors and formal policy, but they too may effectively operate beneath or in parallel to such systems. Recognizing this asks analysts to reconsider the meaning of regimes and open the possibility of multiple, potentially highly spatialized regimes that alternatively include and exclude officials as the locus of action and importance.

### *Translocality and Scale*

Having discussed the relative relevance (or irrelevance) of formal institutions and policymaking for many urban residents, we turn to the spatial basis of urban policy analysis. Underlying such analyses are definitions—sometimes explicit,



sometimes not—of “city” or “urban.” Shifting to such definitions recognizes the limitations of solely concentrating on municipal authorities, formal governing processes, or geographically delimited and homogenized spaces. Instead, we seriously engage Boudreau’s (2016) provocation that “the urban” is not simply a site, but rather a condition shaped by multiple societal issues that intersect in ways that are generative, performative, and potentially transformative (Beveridge and Koch make a similar point elsewhere in this volume).

Making sense of urban governance and socioeconomic outcomes amid mobility and informality demands that urban policy analysis extend beyond formal urban governments to include policies and practices that shape urban space whatever their geographic or institutional origins. This is both a liberating and confounding position. At one level, it erodes straightforward comparative frameworks. What is the unit of analysis, if cities are not legally defined jurisdictions? And how does one compare?<sup>3</sup> Indeed, with such fluid boundaries, there is a risk that the work will become an unwieldy study of everything (see, for example, Brenner and Schmid 2015); when this occurs, research ceases to be fundamentally about the city or what is distinctly “urban” (see Roy 2016). In some instances—for example in understanding global labor or supply chains—this is warranted. But we argue that even for those oriented toward more localized processes, a more permeable and heterogenous epistemology is needed to avoid being blindered from significant forms of regulation and policy processes that are at work in each site. As McFarlane (2011, 664) notes, “a new relational perspective on cities means that it is impossible to understand cities as territories prior to their engagements with other places.”

Such permeability can be accomplished without abandoning a focus on specific geographic sites. This can be done by understanding cities themselves as constellations of interconnected sites embedded in translocal and trans-scalar webs of circulation and regulation. Some speak of this as assemblages or systems of systems, although our focus here is somewhat more concrete. Making sense of urban spaces means tracking connections up, down, and out. The “up”—linking urban policy to “higher” levels of government—is already common in urban policy analysis. This typically takes the form of analytical “stacking,” where municipal responses are seen to challenge, follow, transform, or otherwise engage policy frameworks forged at the supra-city level. Such an approach has been productively employed by Ambrosini (2021), Bauder (2017), de Graauw (2021), van Ostaijen and Scholten (2018), and Martínez-Ariño (2018), among others. Where cities are expressly responsible for realizing international or national policy goals, this is clearly an appropriate starting point, although these connections are more dialogical than unilinear. It is not

simply about implementation or “urbanizing” national or international norms and provisions. Instead, policy formation is often mutually constitutive. As cities assert their independence and mayors or other officials mobilize international attention alongside national leaders, formal policy shifts at multiple levels may be driven from “below.” Such potential is illustrated by mayoral dialogues and interventions to support cities to address migration issues and help shape immigration and naturalization policies.<sup>4</sup>

Recognizing how municipalities are multiply connected to other levels of government is a powerful first step in garnering insight into factors shaping urban space, but this alone is not enough (cf. O'Toole 2011). There is a need to drill down to the hyperlocal—not just to take cities seriously (as this volume argues), but to initiate one's analysis at the level of the neighborhood, an enclave as small as a street, a street corner, or even a building. This allows Quayson (2014) to offer a vivid account of Oxford Street, Accra's highly globalized but remarkably local shopping mecca, or Tayob (2018) to reveal the translocal connections reshaping Minneapolis's economies and spaces. Looking at Oxford Street in Accra, or Johannesburg's Diepsloot, one of our research sites (see Harber 2014), or any number of other urban estuaries, reveals the range of actors and logics alluded to above (see, for example, Zack and Landau 2021; Hall 2021). Some are effectively self-regulating islands; others work in ways envisioned by public policy. Many offer hybrid regimes where local actors claiming multiple forms of authority interact to create vastly different (but potentially connected) governing regimes. Diepsloot, for example, is a remarkable poor and largely informal area housing close to 140,000 people. It is remarkably violent, and only occasionally patrolled by the police. Yet it is effectively conjoined with Dainfern, the wealthy, walled neighborhood within walking distance that relies on Diepsloot for labor. There too the police are largely absent, replaced instead by private security under control of the homeowner's association (see Murray 2020). The two are materially and socially connected, and both governed largely “outside” the state. The variations in these spaces could not be starker, but they cannot be understood alone. Paller's (2019) work on Accra offers less dramatic contrasts. It nonetheless illustrates how the gradual incorporation of different peoples and authority systems generates significantly divergent, if geographically proximate, policy environments. These are both distinct and connected within and beyond urban space (see also Bhan 2019; Roy 2016).

Digging down to the sub-urban (as opposed to suburban) brings to the surface the value of horizontal analysis. As indicated above, part of this is connected to material circulations. As Brenner, Madden, and Wachsmuth (2011)

persuasively argue, few truly “rural” areas now exist; even bucolic farmlands are integrated into urban food supply chains. Small-scale farmers may remain “uncaptured” by the state law and ideological projects (cf. Hyden 1980), but they are all touched by urban markets. Similarly, urban demands for water, electricity, and building materials mean that urban spaces depend heavily on practices, production, and policies well beyond city limits. And it is not just cities shaping formerly rural spaces. As supply chains extend across multiple jurisdictions—Johannesburg gets much of its water from Lesotho, another country, Nairobi much of its food from Tanzania (K’Owuor 2022)—the practical policy environments in those spaces must become part of one’s urban policy analysis. This may vary by issue area, but agricultural subsidies or extension services in a food-supplying area matter to urban markets (see Moragues-Faus 2019). Similarly, if Lesotho shuts the tap, Johannesburg goes dry.

Material circulations evidently, and importantly, imbricate multiple geographic spaces (see Buechler 2008). But as our world is not materialistically determined, there is value in “socializing” these material circuits. Our 2021 survey, for example, found that close to two-thirds of migrants (domestic and international) across the sample reported having household members living in another city, town, or village. In Johannesburg, more than half (56 percent) of people who were born in the city still had family living elsewhere. In many instances, households are effectively translocal: Most urbanites with family outside the city regularly send money to them, and many receive information, food, or other forms of support. While these connections appear to have weakened somewhat during the COVID crisis, they remain remarkably strong across all three sites. Moreover, more than half of domestic migrants (53 percent) in Accra indicated that if they have surplus, they invest outside the city. The percentage was lower in Nairobi and Johannesburg, but there are clearly significant numbers of people extracting urban resources (or attempting to) to build lives elsewhere. When asked where people would like to buy land or a home, only about half of those surveyed indicated they would like to buy where they are. When asked where they hoped to retire, most respondents across the survey imagined a life elsewhere—typically in their communities of origin. While such returns may ultimately prove untenable, they remain oriented in mobile temporalities, never fully invested in the urban.

Social and material connections mean that the regulation of urban space—what people do, where they spend money, how they interact—is conditioned by possibilities and policies elsewhere. These may include tax codes or rural land use and zoning laws. They may also relate to the informal forms of social regulation that pressure people to provide resources, return “home,” or seek

status in spaces other than where they reside (see Kankonde 2010). This is particularly acute in migrant-rich neighborhoods or gateway zones where the majority or a large plurality are recent arrivals effectively on their way elsewhere (see Saunders 2012). In such sites, multiple pressures and policies may rub uncomfortably against each other, some shaped by local concerns and others a consequence of seeking to build a life elsewhere (cf. Thomaz 2022).

What is emerging across much of Africa are urban spaces (or sites within them) that are effectively translocal or multiply local. Potts (2011) argues that this reflects a form of partial urbanization, where urban life becomes inseparable from lives elsewhere in ways that demand a simultaneous, multisite analysis (see Turner 2015; Mbembe and Nuttal 2004). We suggest that there is value in going beyond the kind of dyadic approach Potts and other transnational scholars outline. Rather, people in each site—a gateway zone within a municipality, for example—are constantly negotiating formal and social regulation at multiple scales and from multiple sites within and beyond the city: where they live, where they work, where they intend to go, and where they come from (see Dzingirai, Mutopo, and Landau 2014; Potts 2011). People in even the most economically marginal neighborhoods are part of continental and global constellations, interconnected through material exchange, social recognition, moral disciplines, and future imaginations (cf. Soja 1996). These more archipelagic forms of membership create constellations of economies and institutions that are both fragile and fragmented; more-dispersed connections of this sort demand new forms of multisited urban policy analysis.

### Inclusion as Metric

Our final challenge addresses how scholars epistemically and ethically mobilize ideas of inclusion and participation. At a normative level, scholars often align with the Sustainable Development Goals' (11) demand to build "inclusive cities," or with older refrains that aspire to ensure that all residents have a "right to the city." Even when not explicitly stated, such standards often serve as means of evaluating the effectiveness, structure, and morality of urban policy. For some this is largely about economics: access to work, basic services, and possibilities for upward mobility. For others, it is about political inclusion: consultation and the ability of all urban residents to shape the municipal policies affecting them. The understanding of inclusion informing most policy approaches—from urban visioning plans to the Sustainable Development Goals—draws inspiration from industrial cities in North America and, to some

extent, Latin America. Lefebvre's famous demand that workers have rights to the city is premised on their contributions to building its infrastructure and wealth (see Purcell 2016). Moreover, it presumes an ideal of urban ownership, if not of land, then of the city's future. For him, for the drafters of the Sustainable Development Goals, and the forces behind Habitat III's demand for urban inclusion, are ideals of localized belonging, of representation and visibility, of recognition and status where you are. They work from an ethics of inclusion that presumes that people wish to remain. Yet models of place-bound incorporation, assimilation, or integration are no longer adequate as either an empirical or an ethical guide (see Bakewell and Landau 2018). As people build translocal lives, often governed by processes beyond formal institutions, local state or social recognition and ownership may cease to be the goal. For some, it may be something to actively avoid.

The translocalism and informality described in the previous pages give cause to question the desirability of the inclusion that is so often a metric for "urban success." Indeed, one must not presume that urban solidarity and place-bound membership are desirable for those living in estuaries or translocal constellations or for those who see the state as either inherently oppressive or irrelevant. Instead, political participation and inclusion—like the economic and social lives described above—are often temporally and spatially dispersed, nodes and networks spanning space and time (see Vivet 2013, 78). People shun local engagement while supporting political parties and processes elsewhere. They attend churches, go to community meetings, or help repatriate corpses to maintain their status in villages they otherwise visit only now and then while they actively resist forging binding connections with their urban neighbors and institutions (see Cazarin 2018; Kankonde 2010; Landau and Freemantle 2016).

This helps explain why across the cities in our survey, we not only see low levels of civic engagement, but only faint or partial desire for it. This applies even among those who have spent extended periods in the city or were born there. In Accra, 75 percent of the locally born said they would not attend an official, local planning meeting if given the opportunity. That figure was close to 80 percent for domestic migrants and even higher for those from other countries. Those in Nairobi and Johannesburg were more inclined to attend, but only slightly. A similar percentage reported interest in attending a political rally, party meeting, or community group. While voting remains high on people's agendas, other forms of inclusion and local representation do not.

Policy analysis that measures "inclusion" or "participation" in localized or dichotomous terms must be respatialized. After all, what looks like exclusion

and political marginalization in one neighborhood may be part of a strategy for status and influence elsewhere. Recognizing these constellations of belonging and inclusion means explicitly recognizing that people seek varied forms of recognition and membership in multiple places. This may create alternative urban cartographies, with disconnections between neighbors and municipal institutions, but vibrant conduits between a Nairobi street corner, a village in Somalia, and a mosque in Minnesota. It may connect a small shop in Johannesburg to a political party in Kinshasa or a farmer's cooperative or a chamber of commerce in Mozambique. As much as supply chains and commuting corridors, these forms of participation shape urban policy outcomes and interactions.

Pentecostalism, one of Africa's most muscular social forces, is perhaps the greatest driver of belonging across corridors and constellations (see Bompani 2019; Kankonde and Nunez 2016; Landau 2014). While relatively few people in our three-city sample attended public meetings or party events, almost all were part of (and contributed money to) religious organizations. Large numbers of churches build on their strong connections to institutions in Nigeria, Ghana, Congo, and the United States, and many of them are increasingly political. However, their preaching is often extraterritorial, overtly denying the legitimacy of state laws while speaking of the dangers of local connections. Both the state and the sullied are enemies of salvation. If our concern is with the actors shaping urban space and governance, surely these are among the most significant (see Maclean and Esiebo 2017). Indeed, as they pray, parishioners draw on varied liturgical language to make demands on cities while locating themselves in an ephemeral, superior, and unrooted condition in which they can escape localized social and political obligations.

The forms of participation (and self-exclusion) we see emerging across many African cities are connected to urban residents' multiple and often translocal economic, social, and political aspirations. Rather than seeking strong localized relations and influence, some—by choice or necessity—orient their participation elsewhere. This does not justify the active exclusion of populations by political or economic elites, but it raises important analytical questions for policy analysis. Accepting that urban political participation and local recognition is not a normative goal for all (and may counter emic understandings of urban "success") frees us to treat it as both a subject for empirical inquiry and a potentially powerful heuristic. As scholars seek means of comparing and contrasting urbanism (Robinson 2016), finding ways to compare the nature and geographic scale of participation becomes a way to read the city. Doing this effectively means broadening the nature and scale of

participatory forms and recognizing the role that “stateness” and translocality play in shaping urban space. As such, scholars will benefit from considering categories or continua of participation that can provide more nuance and comparative leverage. Seeking a means of assessing participation at multiple geographic scales, for individual or collective projects, and in an assortment of residential environments holds the promise of a broader comparative account of urban policymaking.

As Kaufmann and Sidney (2020, 1) argue, one of the most core elements of many urban policy analyses is to understand “how institutions hinder or encourage participation.” In our case, we advocate an agnostic approach to this question. Rather than advocate for participation as a normative good, participation and other forms of social connection become means of characterizing cities rather than judging them. Such a perspective does not take as its goal facilitating participation or identifying local-level “democratic deficits.” Rather, it looks at forms of participation and—importantly—the desire and geographic basis for it, as means to understand political and policy processes. In this regard, formal meetings—consultations with political parties, policing forums, participatory budgeting consultations, and the like—become just one way to express citizenship and practice participation. These must be considered alongside substantive interactions with nonstate actors and with leaders (formal and informal) outside the city. This furthers other’s observations about multilevel policymaking, but again in ways that do not center state policy as the “dependent variable.” It extends the efforts to “see like a city,” which usefully positions urban government within a diverse and multilocal ecosystem. It goes a step further in asking scholars to see urban policy as an outcome of processes that may have little to do with direct city government action or that are taking shape precisely because city officials are deliberately absent, administratively under-resourced, or effectively kept away from neighborhoods and policies through the actions of developers, gangsters, or others. Most importantly, by decentering the focus on local authorities, it makes space for the multiple systems of political and social authority that intersect (but are not contained) within cities or urban boundaries.

In summary, sub-Saharan Africa presents cities with ill-defined boundaries, where people both struggle for and actively resist inclusion. Some seek status where they are but are stymied by economic structures that work against them. Others pursue a kind of distance-based deferral in which they seek recognition and futures elsewhere in continental or transcontinental constellations. For them, visibility, group membership, political participation, cross-cutting social ties—the forms of inclusion scholars and activists almost



universally celebrate—become forms of entrapment. Rather than rights to the city, which are effectively rights of ownership, many want what we've termed "usufruct rights." They are helping turn parts of cities into "nowherevilles"—places almost no one is from and almost no one wants to belong to.

### Conclusions: Translocality, Informality, and Urban Policy Analysis

The previous pages ask scholars to assess urban regimes in slightly more expansive ways. Doing so requires a dual recalibration. The first is to shift beyond the localized trifecta of business, civil society, and state that tends to position government as the locus of mobilization and influence. As work on xenophobic violence in southern Africa (and violence elsewhere) suggests, states often disengage from the de facto regulation of peoples, processes, and places. These become sites for experiments in governmental form. The general irrelevance of state policy in many people's lives further suggests the value of coding as regulators and policymakers actors who may have little engagement or make little reference to official policies or institutions. The second is a recalibration of scale. While scholars have long recognized the need to see municipalities as "nested" within state and national bodies, awareness is increasing that cities are connected horizontally. And these connections are often as much social as material. The policies shaping lives in those sites—whether related to agricultural and land-use policy, taxes and banking, or even education and housing—affect how people live, engage, and mobilize in the cities in which they reside.

Urban policy analysis must adapt to this approach with a heightened focus on informality and a rescaled epistemology. This should recognize the spatio-temporalities of life in the city—what Lefebvre might call its polyrhythmicity—but also the multiple urban configurations produced through the mobility of people, goods, and ideas. There is a need to go beyond the stacking or nesting of urban policy in terms of vertical relations among provincial, national, and global frameworks. This is invaluable, but a spatial approach considering corridors, catchments, and the constellations forged through material and socioeconomic connections will better capture the multiple temporal and geographic policy spaces that shape contemporary cities. Work by Banerjee (2011) and others adopting a "transnational" or "translocal" perspective starts us on this process, but there is need to include constellations, not just connections, which can help us build socialized, spatialized, and temporalized approaches that reveal what Johnson (2012) might term "systems of systems," but with a specific focus on material *and* social forms entanglement.



There is also value in reconsidering many of the normative foundations that work as metrics for comparative policy analysis. It is, for example, still possible to use levels of civic participation, social cohesion, and representation as comparative metrics without proffering these as universal objectives, making the Weberian distinction between ideal types and normative ideals. Doing so allows us to assess, for example, what social cohesion and community do and *should* mean when people with multiple temporal and geographic trajectories share space. It may also help avoid efforts to make visible populations that might otherwise wish to remain invisible, or to avoid the kind of “insurgent citizenship” or “autoconstruction” that the literature often celebrates (see Thomaz 2022; Holston 2008; Caldeira 2017).

In an era of informalized work and regulation, a focus on law and formal migration policy—even at multiple scales—is inadequate to explain social, economic, or developmental outcomes. Instead, we must understand the migration experience simultaneously across multiple geographic and temporal scales, both formal and social. At the very least, it requires a more substantive understanding of the multiple trajectories under which urban residents are living their lives and the spatial and temporal horizons that inform them. This means new forms of research. It means new forms of engagement. Perhaps most importantly, it requires constant self-reflection on the societies we want versus the societies we are likely to get. Until we reconsider what we mean by justice, by inclusion, by sustainability, we risk building cities that only exacerbate the inequality and exclusion we seek to address. There will be those who suggest that these observations do not apply beyond Africa’s rapidly transforming urban centers. Without denying their distinctions, it is worth remembering that even the cities where modern political analysis began—Frankfurt, Paris, New York, London—are increasingly looking like the kind of fragmented, precarious spaces we see across sub-Saharan Africa (cf. Simone and Pieterse 2018).

#### NOTES

1. Observation by the author in 2015. See also Wilhelm-Solomon, Zulu, and Worby (2016).
2. See <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>
3. For more on urban comparison, see Robinson 2016.
4. See, for example, new work by the Cities Alliance (2025), <https://www.citiesalliance.org/resources/publications/workshop-report/suidac-first-regional-dialogue-report>

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## We Have Always Been Here

### *Urban Resistance Testimonios and Immigrant Women in the Housing Justice Movement*

Diane Wong

I met Zhi Qin Zheng during the first winter I returned to the city from graduate school. Despite the season, Ms. Zheng (*Zheng tai tai* as we lovingly call her) always wore blue jeans with a collared T-shirt. She carried around a tote bag with oranges and other fruits to share at our meetings. Ms. Zheng was one of the lead housing organizers at CAAAV: Organizing Asian Communities (formerly Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence) and cofounder of the Chinatown Tenants Union. We spent countless hours doing outreach together, which meant going door-knocking in tenement buildings where tenants called in to report needing repairs or having no heat or water—experiences that were far too common in a gentrifying Chinatown. In New York City, one out of ten tenants are taken to housing court each year by their landlords, and in Chinatown displacement has come to disproportionately shape the lives of working-class residents and immigrant families. Through what I refer to as *urban resistance testimonios*, this chapter explores how immigrant women like Ms. Zheng come to understand their relationship to urban politics and broader urban policy processes through frequent encounters with housing precarity. Drawing from ethnographic research, field notes, and oral history interviews with tenants, organizers, language interpreters, and housing court judges, this



research expands the constellation of actors shaping urban politics to include the critical role of Asian immigrant women and the lead organizers, staff, and volunteers at CAAAV's Chinatown Tenants Union. In what follows, I offer a nuanced understanding of the conditions under which immigrant women are active in making urban space and urban politics, shifting away from a common narrative that portrays them as disengaged from democratic processes.

### What Used to Be There

If you stand at the corner of Allen and Delancey Streets, where Ms. Zheng used to live, a few things stand out. First is the perpetual "for lease" signs on the storefront windows, including one directly underneath her apartment window. Looking upward toward the sky, you would notice the six-story brick building and the bright red fire escapes that point toward Allen Street, once colloquially known as the "avenue of the immigrants." This corner of the city was never known to be the heart of Chinatown, but for Ms. Zheng it might as well have been since everyone she knew from work and her Buddhist temple lived in the vicinity. In fact, Chinese immigrants did not start moving to live in these parts of the Lower East Side until the 1980s, when immigrants from Fuzhou settled along the streets of East Broadway. What used to be a predominantly Jewish area of the Lower East Side became lined with Fuzhounese restaurants and has since come to be known as Little Fuzhou or New Chinatown (Kwong 1998). This influx of new immigrants brought tremendous changes to the neighborhood since many who arrived were women without immigration papers and could only secure low-wage work in restaurants and garment factories.<sup>1</sup> Many Fujianese women who came during this period, like Ms. Zheng, were quickly channeled into the workforce and contributed to the revitalization of certain industries in Chinatown, including the retail and garment trades.<sup>2</sup>

Ms. Zheng came to the United States in 1983 with her husband and children, a few years after her parents arrived in New York City. In our first conversation, she recalled that during their first year after arriving, her family had lived in a small building in Chinatown with about a hundred other households. The following year, they moved to a small place on Delancey Street, and they managed to stay in the same apartment for three decades. As a mother and garment worker, the apartment location was convenient and close to everything she needed to get by. She could drop off her children at school on the way to work at the garment factory and pick up groceries at the Forsyth mar-

ket underneath the Manhattan bridge on the way home. When Ms. Zheng first moved into her apartment on Delancey Street, her building was already home to several other Fuzhounese immigrant families. The area remained unchanged for a short time, until upscale restaurants, boutiques, and bars opened along Allen, Chrystie, and Orchard Streets.

According to Ms. Zheng, her housing conditions began to drastically change in the years after 9/11 as a result of the redevelopment policies that ensued. According to the Asian American Federation of New York, 75 percent of the workforce in Chinatown was left dislocated or unemployed in the first two weeks after the catastrophic event in 2001.<sup>3</sup> Although millions of federal dollars in recovery assistance were poured into lower Manhattan, the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, a public-private corporation tasked to distribute these funds, provided disproportionate support to Wall Street companies over small businesses in the area.<sup>4</sup> In the decade after 9/11, Mayor Bloomberg targeted the Lower East Side and Chinatown for renewal and redevelopment through rezoning and public-private partnerships that favored developers, bolstering the ecosystem of gentrification in the process.<sup>5</sup> Former garment factories were converted into multimillion-dollar lofts by developers, increasing real estate speculation in the area and the costs of living for working-class immigrants, who were already living below the poverty threshold. One evening as we were walking back from an outreach session, Ms. Zheng pointed toward a glass tower on Bowery Street where she had worked as a garment worker before it was converted into a luxury building with a boutique fitness studio on the ground floor. She stared across the street and said, "I almost forgot what used to be there."

After losing her job, her housing troubles soon began, when Nir Sela, Michael Daniel, and 55 Delancey Street Realty LLC bought the 55–61 Delancey Street buildings in 2001 and proceeded to harass the remaining rent-regulated tenants (Chao 2014). According to Ms. Zheng, the two Delancey buildings had a total of forty-five units that housed Chinese and Dominican immigrant families, who were paying on average \$800 a month in rent, which was standard at the time (Wang 2016). Her new landlord used various tactics to harass working-class tenants out of their homes in favor of tenants who could pay more, often wealthier university students or young professionals willing to pay triple the rent. She recalled the absurd tactics the landlord used to force tenants like her from their homes, including pressuring Chinese tenants to remove lunar new-year decorations, installing surveillance cameras in the hallways, and aggressively taking tenants to housing court for frivolous reasons. To intimidate her, the landlord once even falsely accused Ms. Zheng

of prostitution, which is classified as a class B misdemeanor. While many of her neighbors left after being harassed out of their homes, or in some cases accepting buyout offers, Ms. Zheng refused to leave. The last decade she spent at her Delancey apartment felt like a constant struggle. Ms. Zheng reminisced about how much easier things were when she first moved into the building: "It was loud but nice. After coming home from work everyone left their doors open and we shared meals, it felt lively with kids running up and down the stairs."<sup>6</sup> As newer residents moved in, the building never quite felt the same, and eventually she moved out on her own terms, but not without a fight.

In 2004, Ms. Zheng joined CAAAV Organizing Asian Communities and became one of the cofounders of their Chinatown Tenants Union (CTU).<sup>7</sup> She was introduced to CTU through another tenant in her building. As a tenant intern at the time, her work involved coordinating weekly outreach sessions with youth interns who were part of the Chinatown Justice Program.<sup>8</sup> After a few years of working on housing justice campaigns, when it came time to organize the tenants in her own building against their predatory landlord, Ms. Zheng understood what was necessary to win. For over a year, she spent the evenings knocking on doors with CTU volunteers to convince the other tenants in the two Delancey buildings to be part of a building-wide tenants association. As Ms. Zheng explained, the beginning is always the hardest: "A lot of tenants don't know their own rights. Many are immigrants, they don't know how America is governed. They think that it's the owner—*he* has money, we live in *his* housing, whatever *he* wants, it is that way. If *he* wants you to leave, then you should leave. If *he* doesn't bring something up, you should've done it yourself. But they don't know that when we rent this apartment, it's the owner's responsibility. We have rights too."<sup>9</sup>

As a result of the daily organizing of Ms. Zheng and CTU staff and volunteers, the 55–61 Delancey tenants association was established in 2007; it subsequently organized one of the largest rent strikes in Chinatown history. The tenants association won concessions from the landlord, including apartment repairs and rent abatements, as Ms. Zheng recalled: "Because we lived in such bad conditions—we often didn't have heat. He shouldn't ask for rent from us. He should lower the rent for us. We made our demands clear, and he lowered it by about \$200 per month for twelve months."<sup>10</sup> This victory was the culmination of months of protests, letter-writing sessions, public testimonies, court visits, and meetings with CAAAV staff, lawyers, and language interpreters. The 55–61 Delancey tenants association also participated in successful citywide campaigns to advocate for broader policies that protect tenants from predatory equity landlords. Ms. Zheng continues to work as a tenant organizer with

the CTU, knowing that many immigrants face similar experiences of landlord harassment as the pace of gentrification has accelerated in Chinatown. It was conversations with immigrant women like Ms. Zheng that left me wondering where her story fits into our current understanding of urban policy processes and political participation more broadly. In what follows, I introduce urban resistance testimonios as a framework to theorize urban participation through the everyday experiences of immigrant women who are learning to organize within, against, and beyond the state. I show how testimonios can reveal much about urban policy processes, in terms of both how urban policies can shape the political lives of tenants and how tenants themselves can shape the life cycle of policies through continuous struggle.

### Whose Politics? Testimonios as Resistance from the Ground

In the last two decades, urban regime politics has come to define how we understand the critical issues confronting cities (Stone 1989, 1993, 2015; Orr and Stoker 1994; Benner and Pastor 2012; Mossberger and Stoker 2001). A focus on urban elites has led to a critical disjuncture when it comes to what scholars are choosing to write about versus what is happening on the ground in cities (Jones-Correa and Wong 2015). The question remains: *Whose politics are being represented and whose politics have we overlooked?* Recent case studies of housing in Los Angeles and New York City demonstrate that seemingly marginal actors can shape policy processes through various forms of community activism (Saito 2019; Michener and Wong 2018; Michener 2019; Wong 2019; Doizer 2019; Roy et al. 2020). We have slowly seen a return to what Ross Beveridge and Philippe Koch call “urban everyday politics,” which offers a more capacious understanding of urban political participation, one that takes seriously the actions of those who have far too often been relegated to the periphery of urban studies research (Beveridge and Koch 2019; also Chang 2000; Bhimji 2010; Milkman, Wong, and Rabadan 2000; McGovern 2020; Nasol and Francisco-Menchavez 2021; Kim 2021; Landau and Bule, this volume). A renewed focus on urban everyday politics expands how we understand where transformative changes unfold in cities and also the constellation of diverse actors who are critical in shaping urban policy processes, including migrant workers, street vendors, taxi drivers, domestic workers, massage parlor workers, sex workers, and those who are unhoused, disabled, or chronically ill, all of whom are actively creating new formations and arenas for participation.

My work contributes to this emergent line of inquiry on the urban everyday and draws inspiration from Indigenous, Black, and critical race feminist studies scholars to introduce urban resistance testimonios as a form of participation that yields emancipatory possibilities. As a conceptual framework, urban resistance testimonios broaden the scope of how we record unseen realities and the interstitial contours of power to include the voices of activists, organizers, cultural workers, and tenants who share crucial lessons about organizing within, against, and beyond the state. The practice of testimonio has roots in Indigenous oral tradition and feminist folklore in Latin America, but scholars across disciplinary fields have used testimonio as a practice to understand how multiply marginalized communities critique the legitimization of state violence and disrupt regimes of power (Latina Feminist Group 2001). Chicana feminist writers have used the practice of testimonio to navigate complex politicized understandings of identity, community, and agency as shaped by systems of racial and gendered difference (Lopez and Davalos 2009; Prieto and Villenas 2012; Bernal, Burciaga, and Carmona 2012; Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981; Cruz 2001). Testimonio embodies what feminist writer Cherríe Moraga (1981) calls theory in the flesh, in that politics emerges from the physical realities and the circumstances of our daily lives. Through the practice of testimonios in the form of letters, ancestral knowledge, journal entries, and other first-person narratives, Gloria Anzaldúa articulates a third space, an interstice, a radical consciousness that centers the voices of the marginalized as essential to academic knowledge production (Anzaldúa 1987).

Black feminist and critical race studies scholars have used testimonial narrative as a tool to build situated knowledge about the world, particularly in relation to how interlocking systems of oppression come to permeate people's daily political lives (hooks 1989; Hua 2012; Fulton 2006; Boylorn 2012; Delgado and Stefancic 2000; Roberts 2018; Wilson, this volume). In her seminal work, Patricia Hill Collins introduces the concept "outsider-within" to illustrate that Black women hold specific kinds of situated knowledge that result from their unique position in society in relation to race, gender, class, and the embodiment of marginality (Collins 1986, 1990). To conceive of the peripheries as grassroots spaces of refusal and reclamation makes legible alternative modes of politics rooted in the material conditions and potentialities of those most impacted by chronic urban trauma. For instance, Nadia Y. Kim's ethnography on environmental justice activism in Los Angeles speaks to how Asian and Latinx undocumented women are reshaping the political landscape through their experiences of state betrayal and marginalization (Kim 2021). Similarly, while the narratives of garment workers are often excluded from

conversations about urban politics, Lisa Lowe argues that their testimonies of exploitation reveal new dimensions of political subjectivity and sites of urban contestation (Lowe 1998). It is through resistance testimonios and the voices of immigrant women themselves—exchanges told in person, recited at protests, or buried in the archives—that scholars can theorize urban everyday participation through the lens of a city, rather than the state.

By foregrounding urban resistance testimonios, we as researchers can also shift our relationship with the communities we choose to write alongside, compelling us to be more reflective about our methodological choices and the impact we have on the communities and cities in which we study. As a methodological and practical approach, urban resistance testimonios move us beyond what Eve Tuck calls damage-centered research to instead honor the ways marginalized communities have always found multiple, imaginative, and experimental ways to record their own experiences and make claims to the city. As Ms. Zheng expressed in a story circle with other tenants, “When we come together to tell our own stories we have the power to imagine what else we can change together.” For Chinatown residents, urban resistance testimonios can come in various modalities, such as dispatches through the 311 hotline or depositions before housing court. They can be public, as with a witness account during a public hearing or when testimony is given in front of the Rent Guidelines Board. They can also be private, in the form of a written letter of demands to a landlord or of the documents needed for an appearance before a judge in court—leases and rent receipts, copies of utility bills, photographs of apartment conditions, proof of attempts to contact the landlord, receipts for repairs made as needed, records of dates without heat or hot water, and more. In what follows, I draw from two examples of how immigrant women in Chinatown are using urban resistance testimonios to shape the outcome of public policies, disrupt existing power structures, and participate in a kind of politics that relates to their daily lives.

### Tenant Testimonies Guide a Historic Rent Freeze

In 2000, CAAAV’s Chinatown Justice Project (CJP), formerly the Racial Justice Committee, began to organize a community of working-class tenants in Chinatown. They began by raising awareness about gentrification and conducting surveys with tenants who lived in buildings owned by landlords notorious for displacing working-class tenants of color. The surveys revealed that whereas white tenants lived in newly renovated buildings and paid as much

\$2,800 in rent, low-income Chinese and Latino immigrant families lived in buildings with broken mailboxes, dilapidated staircases, exposed wiring, and daily harassment from their landlord.<sup>11</sup> That summer, CJP youth invited a dozen Chinese tenants to a meeting where the survey results were presented, and residents were able to share their visions for an affordable neighborhood. According to CAAAV's newsletter *The Voice*, "Chinatown Justice Project has been able to raise consciousness of our community around this issue of forced eviction over the past few years through different mobilizations [...] as tenants become increasingly critical of landlords, they also become more critical of the system that supports the landlords."<sup>12</sup> In the following months, CJP launched a successful anti-eviction campaign against Benjamin Shaoul, a slumlord who was aggressively evicting Chinese and Dominican tenants. In 2004, CJP youth identified the need to build intergenerationally, so the group shifted their efforts to developing the leadership of immigrant women, which was how tenant leaders like Ms. Zheng were recruited to join. In the spring of 2005, Ms. Zheng formally co-founded the Chinatown Tenants Union, an organization that has been at the forefront in fighting for safe living conditions, language access, and tenant protections.

One of the CTU's annual campaigns advocates for a rent rollback and freeze. In 1969, New York City adopted the system of rent regulations known as rent stabilization to curtail rapidly falling vacancy rates and rising rents in many postwar buildings. The Rent Guidelines Board (RGB) was formed the same year as a government oversight board that regulates rent for the one million apartments covered by rent stabilization. Each year, the RGB convenes a series of public hearings to decide on the potential percentage of rent increases for rent-stabilized apartments. Historically, the board has been favorable to landlords in their rent adjustments and has approved increases nearly every year, often by 3 percent on one-year leases and upward to 8 percent on two-year leases (Murphy 2015). In June of 2015, the RGB voted for a historic rent freeze on one-year leases. The seven to two vote was unprecedented, and for the first time in forty years it signaled a public acknowledgment of the precarious conditions faced by tenants whose incomes have not kept pace with increasing housing costs. On the day of the RGB vote, hundreds of tenants gathered at the Great Hall at Cooper Union, including CTU leaders and citywide groups such as Stabilizing New York City, the Rent Justice Coalition, the Right to the City Coalition, Equality for Flatbush, the Fifth Avenue Committee, and Picture the Homeless. When the chair of the board announced that a rent freeze for the two million tenants living in rent-stabilized homes had been given a green light, the auditorium burst into loud applause.



This historic vote resulted from years of base building at the grassroots level and the mobilization of a multiracial coalition of tenants, legal service providers, tenant associations, and citywide advocates. During the rent-freeze campaign, Ms. Zheng and other CTU leaders conducted hours of phone banking to inform tenants in Chinatown about the upcoming RGB vote and to encourage them to share their own testimonies at the public hearings in support of the rent freeze. Many Chinatown tenants attended the RGB public hearings in the weeks leading up to the final vote to share their personal experiences with landlord harassment. At one June hearing, CTU member Ms. Song shared her testimony on behalf of the 90 Elizabeth Street Tenant Association. As she stood in front of the RGB panel, her voice echoed through the auditorium: “My name is Song Mei Hong, I am a member of CTU and I live at 90 Elizabeth Street. I am an immigrant, I don’t know much English. I don’t make a lot of money. I make \$600 a month but my rent is \$1,000.”<sup>13</sup> In a five-minute testimony spoken in Mandarin and translated by a volunteer, Ms. Song detailed her experiences of harassment: “This new landlord that bought our building last year keeps harassing us, trying to evict us. When he first bought the building, he changed the locks and made us pay \$100 for new keys. The landlord has bought many other buildings in Chinatown. We have twenty-two units in our building, he has already forced out six units. He has been trying to increase our rent through major capital improvements. It has been hard for us. He stopped our heat at one point in the winter. He stopped maintaining the building. This landlord is not taking care of us, it has affected our health, and we really need to keep our homes. We are asking for a rent freeze otherwise there is no way for me to survive in the city.”<sup>14</sup> Many of those who shared testimony in front of the RGB were immigrant women, which reflects the sustained power of women in the tenant movement in New York City (Gold 2009; Cahill 2008). In the audience were also dozens of CTU staff members, volunteers, and tenants from other building associations who joined the public hearings in solidarity to pressure the board and to show through sheer numbers how many tenants needed a rent freeze, among other protections.

In addition to tenant organizers and immigrant women like Ms. Zhang and Ms. Song who shared their testimony with the RGB panel, volunteers also gave testimony. Huiying Chan, a CTU volunteer at the time, shared a story of a tenant they met during outreach: “Yesterday we were door knocking and there was a tenant at 51 Monroe Street who was sharing her story with us. She was constantly expressing her gratitude that there was an organization looking out for her. She also expressed her frustration of working at a restaurant for over ten hours a day and barely earning \$2,000 dollars a month and having to spend half of that salary on rent. She told us that when she heard about America



no one told her that it would be this hard to just get by.”<sup>15</sup> Chan emphasized the need for the RGB to humanize the narratives that were being shared by tenants at the public hearings. “To pay half of their salary on rent is an unfair burden on our community residents and as Chinatown faces more predatory landlords and unaffordable new businesses, any rent increase would add to the message that Chinatown is no longer for the Chinese immigrant population who helped to create it. As the board, you have the power just by voting to make their lives a lot less difficult and a little more enjoyable. On behalf of CTU and [in response to] the urgent and pressing need to make the city more affordable and a place where we are proud to call home, I urge you to stand on the right side of history.”<sup>16</sup> Each year hundreds of tenants stand in front of the RGB to share their experiences of housing precarity, and each testimony is a testament to the resilience and perseverance of the people who make the city. While individual testimonies might not have an immediate influence on policy processes, the impact of tenant testimonies accrues over time and can lead to deeper changes, such as a rent freeze for two years in a row, and set the stage for more comprehensive tenant protections in the future.

### Record-Keeping Through the 311 Hotline

In New York City, the 311 hotline gives the public a way to report problems and receive information about government assistance programs and non-emergency service requests. The hotline was created in 2003 as a centralized municipal government platform that residents could call at all hours of the day.<sup>17</sup> The majority of 311 service requests include complaints about building violations and noise disturbance. The most frequent categories of complaint for building violations include tenant grievances about heat, hot water, leaks, and construction pollution.<sup>18</sup> The Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD), which is responsible for developing, maintaining, and preserving the affordable housing stock in the city, collects 311 complaints from tenants who call the hotline with housing issues.<sup>19</sup> When CTU was first established in 2005, much of the housing organizing focused on developing bilingual “know-your-rights” guidelines and interpretations of key city services, including access to the 311 hotline for tenants who do not speak English. ManSee Kong, a part-time youth coordinator with CAAAV’s CJP at the time, was involved in the campaign to demand Chinese interpretation and translation access for 311; she recalled that “We were organizing for really basic things that we have now. One of the first actions I went to was for the

Hear This! campaign, where tenants were just learning about 311 and we were demanding that 311 have language interpretation services. We tabled outside on East Broadway and stopped people on the street passing by to show them how to dial 311. These were the earliest ‘know your housing’ and ‘tenant rights’ campaigns that CTU held.”<sup>20</sup> In the following months, CJP youth organizers launched a Tenant Complaint Hotline Survey to document housing conditions in Chinatown and to evaluate language services provided by the HPD for Chinese-speaking tenants. The survey concluded that “90% of all those interviewed reported that they would be willing to report to HPD about housing problems if the hotline services were provided in Chinese.”<sup>21</sup> After pressure from non-English-speaking tenants, the city has since mandated interpretation and translation services in most languages spoken by New Yorkers for 311, giving non-English callers the option to speak in their native language while filing a complaint. Crucially, the work of CTU reveals that policy formulation occurs long after a program is enacted, and that essential city services like the 311 program constantly evolve based on how individuals use and interact with it on a daily basis.

Furthermore, tenant advocacy groups like CTU have used 311 as an organizing tool, training tenants in how to lodge complaints so that each building violation is kept on record. Over the years, Chinatown tenants have used 311 to document various forms of landlord harassment, such as negligence and illegal construction. During a monthly CTU meeting in the winter of 2015, a tenant named Ms. Chen shared how she used 311 to record grievances against the landlord who was trying to evict her: “When he moved our mailboxes to the post office because of hallway construction, I complained to 311 because it was inconvenient for me to walk twenty minutes just to get mail. I also called 311 about temperature changes. Each day I kept a log of the temperature inside my apartment. It was different all the time, one day it was an icebox and the next day it was a sauna. When the landlord took me to court three months ago, I used these records to support my case. We must record what happens because otherwise it’s like it never happened.”<sup>22</sup> Given that the most egregious forms of violation occur behind closed doors, the anonymity behind 311 enables tenants to lodge complaints against their landlords without fear of retaliation. To avoid having to spend time in housing court dealing with an eviction, some tenants have effectively used 311 to collectively lodge complaints against predatory landlords to get violations on the record for specific buildings. When violations accrue, the city will send an inspector who issues a violation and requires the landlord to pay a fine, correct the violation through repairs, or appear in housing court to contest the violation.<sup>23</sup> By manipulating

city data in a way that supports their emplacement, these oppositional tactics used by tenants to record their housing circumstances transform the state apparatus into a tool of mass resistance.

## Conclusion

These urban resistance testimonios embody an urban rights praxis of remaining, in which tenant records become a form of truth-telling—to record the grievances that they have been exposed to, but also as an exercise in refusal, in record keeping, and in survival.<sup>24</sup> From the tenant narratives shared with the rent guidelines board to the 311 grievances, these testimonios create alternative timelines for cities—bending time to support the collective emplacement of tenants while simultaneously creating what historian Kelly Lytle Hernández calls a “rebel archive” that documents resistance in communities targeted for disappearance.<sup>25</sup> Importantly, this chapter reveals what we can learn about urban policy processes when the voices of tenants, organizers, activists, and ordinary people are deeply listened to and engaged. Through the testimonios of immigrant women like Ms. Zheng, tenants in New York City have found ways to use their voices to bolster support for community-led rezoning plans, city-wide campaigns for housing justice, and coalitional alignments for long-term movement-building. The last time I saw Ms. Zheng was before the coronavirus pandemic, but she has remained active with CTU and helped to organize one of the largest rent strikes in New York State history. She has taken to digital organizing via WeChat and has continued to build the power of working-class tenants through online know-your-rights workshops. In one of these workshops held over Zoom, Ms. Zheng drew from her organizing knowledge to speak about the pandemic and to advocate for a strong cancel rent policy: “The crisis is ongoing and working-class communities have been hit the hardest, unable to pay rent. People are still out of work and the government is not providing the resources and the solutions in a time of crisis. The eviction moratorium is temporary and so the demand right now is to cancel rent for a more livable future.”<sup>26</sup> Just as state actors have the power to shape the future of cities, so do ordinary people who are using creative resistance tactics to build alternatives—where cities are defined by the people who nurture them, not by developers or political elites. There are many other forms of urban resistance testimonios from immigrant women in the housing justice movement that call for deeper scholarly engagement, and creative interventions that make legible how cities are made and remade through daily actions from the grassroots.

## NOTES

1. See, in particular, Liang Zai, 2001, "Demography of Illicit Emigration from China: A Sending Country's Perspective," *Sociological Forum* 16 (1); Min Zhou and Xiangyi Li, 2016, "Cross-Space Consumption among Undocumented Chinese Immigrants in the United States," *Sociology of Development* 2 (2); Chin Ko-lin, 1999, *Smuggled Chinese: Clandestine Migration to the United States* (Temple University Press); Zhou Min, 2009, *Contemporary Chinese America: Immigration, Ethnicity, and Community Transformation* (Temple University Press).

2. On the garment industry, see in particular, Bao Xiao Lan, 2006, *Holding Up More Than Half the Sky: Chinese Women Garment Workers in New York City, 1948–92* (University of Illinois Press); Margaret Chin, 2015, *Sewing Women: Immigrants and the New York City Garment Industry* (Columbia University Press); and Min Zhou and Regina Nordquist, 1994, "Work and Its Place in the Lives of Immigrant Women: Garment Workers in New York City's Chinatown," *Applied Behavioral Science Review* 2 (2).

3. Asian American Federation of New York, "Chinatown One Year After September 11th: An Economic Impact Study" (September 2002).

4. See John Mollenkopf, *Contentious City: The Politics of Recovery in New York City* (Russell Sage Foundation, 2005), September 11th Initiative Series.

5. "Converting Chinatown: A Snapshot of a Neighborhood Becoming Unaffordable and Unavailable," a report of CAAAV Organizing Asian Communities and the Urban Justice Center, December 2008.

6. Zhi Qin Zheng, interview with author, March 4, 2017.

7. Founded in 1986, CAAAV Organizing Asian Communities is a grassroots organization based in New York City that organizes low-income, pan-Asian communities around the issues of police violence, evictions, and gentrification.

8. The Chinatown Justice Program was established in 2000 as a youth leadership program of CAAAV. After conducting a street survey of Chinatown residents, the youth identified gentrification as one of the main issues facing the neighborhood.

9. Zhi Qin Zheng, interview with the author, March 4, 2017.

10. Zhi Qin Zheng, interview with the author, March 4, 2017.

11. The survey findings can be found in "Hear This! Chinatown Tenants' Campaign for Language Access," an initiative of CAAAV's Chinatown Justice Project and the Urban Justice Center.

12. The quote is from CAAAV's newsletter *The Voice*, which was published between 1989 to 2008 and chronicled specific campaigns and organizing efforts.

13. Ms. Song, Rent Guidelines Board Public Hearing, April 23, 2015.

14. Ms. Song, Rent Guidelines Board Public Hearing, April 23, 2015.

15. Bernice Chan, Rent Guidelines Board Public Hearing, April 23, 2015.

16. Bernice Chan, Rent Guidelines Board Public Hearing, April 23, 2015.

17. More information on the Rent Guidelines Board and Rent Stabilization System: "An Introduction to the Rent Guidelines Board and the Rent Stabilization System," by Timothy Collins and the staff of the New York City Rent Guidelines Board.

18. Kerry Mulligan, Celina Cuevas, Edwin Grimsley, Preeti Chauhan, and Erica Bond, 2019, *Understanding New York City's 311 data. Justice Data Brief*, Data Collaborative for Justice.

19. The New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development identifies three classes of housing code violations. Class A violations are minor and non-hazardous. Class B violations are hazardous and involve inadequate lighting in public halls or stairwells, or absence of an approved smoke detector. Class C violations are immediately hazardous and involve inadequate heat and hot water, rodents, peeling lead paint, broken or defective plumbing, or defective plaster.

20. ManSee Kong, interview with author, March 7, 2017.

21. The survey findings can be found in "Hear This! Chinatown Tenants' Campaign for Language Access," an initiative of CAAAV's Chinatown Justice Project and the Urban Justice Center.

22. Ms. Chen, from CTU Workshop, April 2017.

23. The Public Advocate's Worst Landlord Watch List includes buildings owned by New York City's 100 worst landlords, ranked according to the number of open violations issued by the Department of Housing Preservation and Development. The worst offending landlords have amassed hundreds of open violations, with many topping the list for consecutive years.

24. Also see Marsuda, Franks, Kobayashy, et al. (2019), "After Dispossession: An Urban Rights Praxis of Remaining in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside."

25. For more on the Rebel Archives, see Hernández (2017), *City of Inmates: Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in Los Angeles, 1771–1965*.

26. Zhi Qin Zheng, from CAAAV Workshop, April 2020.

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## Private Interests, Public Institutions

### *Large-Scale Urban Development in Berlin and Chicago*

Annika Marlen Hinze and James M. Smith

Urban governance is a complex enterprise, with new and increasingly fluid institutional layers; as cities have again become important sites for capital ventures and development, and the price of (some) urban real estate is drastically on the rise, the mechanisms of urban governance have shifted as well, profoundly changed from the relatively stable local governing coalitions of the late twentieth century. One key element of this shift involves the jurisdictional control of large-scale urban policy decision-making moving to new institutions of local governance. Empirical evidence confirms that this is occurring in several national contexts, but scholarly approaches to studying local decision-making and policy tend to focus more exclusively on more traditional iterations of the municipal state, often underemphasizing the layers of global and local, public and private institutions involved in contemporary governance. One element of “seeing like a city,” then, is recognizing that to look beyond the “municipal” government, especially when considering large-scale urban development and infrastructure policymaking, we need to incorporate more institutionally focused approaches that draw attention to complexities in institutional design. As Kaufmann and Sidney (this volume) suggest, studying urban policymaking can involve “relaxing” the direct focus on state actors only, and recognizing that urban policymaking can include actors, even insti-

tutional actors, “beyond the state.” Such institutional complexities make it necessary for scholars to more closely examine the public access and democratic transparency of institutions, in terms of understanding and influencing decision-making and in terms of electoral accountability.

We apply these institutional concerns specifically to special-purpose authorities created by regional or state governments to manage one specific aspect of urban policymaking: financing and governing large-scale urban development. To reflect the global impacts of urban policymaking trends central to this volume, we study such authorities in two national contexts: Germany and the United States. Our approach sheds light on similarities between cities interacting with global trends. These similarities (across national contexts) in the constitution of special-purpose authorities may affect particular institutional dynamics at the state and federal levels. Our chapter, however, focuses on presenting two urban cases in which the diversity of political actors and organizations comes to be a central aspect of “seeing like a city.”

In understanding urban governance, then, we need to consider two opposing trends: (1) continuing variance in institutional design, public access, and the electoral transparency of local government between nation-states, depending on the nature of their governing structures, their social contract, and their civil society; and (2) growing global convergence in the use of special-purpose institutional design for large urban infrastructure projects. Local variation is still key, and comparative work on urban policy processes highlights both local variation and the simultaneous convergence in the structure of urban governance institutions involved in local policymaking.

This chapter studies policymaking institutions in Chicago and Berlin designed to complete large-scale urban development projects; we consider the level of private influence, public access, and democratic transparency. In line with the central themes of this volume, the institutions studied here don’t fit neatly within the confines of the “local state” as it has been conceived of in most studies of urban governance; instead, we see two very distinctive institutional forms that look to capitalize on flexibility and complexity to achieve development goals. To fully capture these dynamics, we focus on the concept of institutional access, which has been central to theories of democracy in policy studies. Our cases reveal a pattern similar to those found in comparative studies of national government, where access varies considerably. We also uncover, in two distinct federal systems, comparable governing arrangements for completing large-scale infrastructure—essentially, a *formalized* incorporation of private interests, and increasing instability among development coalitions.

### Institutional Approaches to Comparative Urban Governance

Understanding governance dynamics is a key component of building an urban policy analysis. A long-standing dialogue on policy outcomes considers whether processes of *government* or *governance* are more important in structuring policy outcomes. In the field of urban politics, in both North America and Europe, schools of thought emphasizing governance have been dominant. Beginning in the 1980s, urban scholars studying local policymaking and decision-making in the United States (e.g., Stone 1989, 2001) merged structural and agency-based explanations for local decision-making largely focused on the urban regime and urban regime theory, which centered on the informal mechanisms through which resources were allocated and decisions made. A consensus has emerged in more recent scholarship, including Stone's, that such theories do not adequately address the widespread use of formal arrangements such as public-private partnerships and new institutions involved in large-scale urban development policy, especially when considering cities outside of the United States. This means fewer long-term governing coalitions and more reliance on short-term governing arrangements and institutional creations. A recent study found that in the United States, the dissolution of municipal governance institutions has increased since the 1990s (Zhang 2019).

To expand analysis of this phenomenon beyond the US context while also considering institutional change, we use the idea of variation in institutional access, widely applied in the public policy literature.<sup>1</sup> Considering the structure of democratic institutions and levels of public access allows us to analyze how institutional structure shapes policy outcomes.

In a more traditional local state form centered on a legislature, the policy process may be open to multiple individuals or groups (depending on the institutional design—see Sharp 1991). The new institutions governing large-scale development in contemporary cities are not designed with this openness in mind. The policy design literature speaks to this scenario as well; policymakers may operate in or create institutions promoting solutions that appear to be socially equitable while creating unequal outcomes—whether in terms of access or policy outputs (see Ingram and Schneider 1990, 1991; Schneider and Ingram 1988, 1993; Ingram, Schneider, and DeLeon 2007).

Public policy and social movement scholars have long focused on the idea of access and institutional design as key to understanding power (e.g., Truman 1951). In this regard, Mahoney and Baumgartner (2008) build on the idea of a “political opportunity structure” in discussing groups’ ability to achieve policy goals (e.g., Tarrow 1996). Mahoney and Baumgartner (2008) define opportu-

nity as “the number of access points, the openness of those access points, the design of the political institutions, and the state of the political climate” (1264). Eisinger (1973, 12) suggests that the openness of a political system or institution may be as important as the resources available to a group. When a specific system is closed, policy actors may seek a more favorable decision-making institution through the process of venue shopping (Baumgartner and Jones 1993), where groups navigate different *institutional* venues to “win” the policy game. Venue creation is another option for local policy actors (one more common at the local level). When state or national governments create new local venues (or control existing ones) with specific policy actors in mind, equitable access for a broad range of political groups becomes problematic (Sapotichne and Smith 2012).

Much late-twentieth-century literature on urban governance moved away from institutional approaches, focusing on governing coalitions as a centerpiece of policymaking (Pierre 1999), and specifically on their capacity to produce policy results (Stone 2001). Focusing specifically on the arrangements between policymakers and private interests in the urban realm, Stone’s regime theory set out to help scholars understand “the informal arrangements by which public bodies and private interests function together in order to be able to make and carry out governing decisions” (Stone 1989, 6).

The literature on neoliberal urban development addresses the increasingly short-lived and varied nature of institutions created in the context of large-scale development decisions (Swyngedouw, Moulaert, and Rodriguez 2002; Brenner, Peck, and Theodore 2010). However, this literature clearly distinguishes between “public,” “private,” and even “grassroots” entities—when these lines of difference often cannot be so clearly drawn. Increasingly, private actors mingle or even coalesce with neighborhood residents and their organizations—as long as their interests align—only to part with them during the implementation, after development decisions have been made (Wilson, this volume). Aligning with neighborhood residents, for instance, offers private actors a “grassroots” label that may elicit more sympathy from the general public, especially before any binding policy decisions have been made. Every stage in the decision-making process may bring new and different institutional arrangements, depending on what is at stake, who the stakeholders are, and where they stand. This underscores not only the fickle nature of development coalitions but also the importance of careful labeling of different actors: As the Berlin case will show, strategic stakeholder labeling has become almost akin to branding to boost public approval and help steer the decision-making process in their preferred direction. Simultaneously, the often broad nature of

development coalitions and the resulting diversity of stakeholders and their interests may increase their instability.

By focusing more specifically on institutional form, we find that urban policymaking is, as much as any other level of policymaking, significantly shaped by the institutional rules regarding access to and transparency of decision-making. At the same time, urban development policymaking also presents an excellent example of the changes these institutional rules are undergoing over time in the face of global forces and the growing influence of the private sector. By incorporating a comparative approach into an urban policy analysis (e.g., Enright 2020), we avoid limiting analysis to local theories on development and institutions in the Anglo-American realm. This broadens the scope of urban policy analysis to a more global comparative context. Thus, “seeing like a city” means looking past one national setting but doing so with a keen eye to institutional form. Essentially, our chapter suggests that one aspect of a more urban policy analysis should include being more explicit in the discussion of institutional rules and institutional impacts on policy outcomes, even when studying informal processes such as coalition-building.

### Governing Shifts in Berlin and Chicago

In the cases of Berlin and Chicago, various actors (mayors, local private interests, global corporate interests) are utilizing (or creating) institutions to accomplish short-term policy goals and control access to decision-making venues. The case studies below illustrate how this approach might be applied, especially when considering large-scale urban development. Essentially, access varies by institution and policy area, with development policymaking generally becoming less accessible as projects increase in scale (street fixes versus arena construction, for instance).<sup>2</sup> We argue that our cases reveal larger trends in city governance and reflect distinct elements of urban policymaking in the United States and Europe.

We selected these cases because Berlin and Chicago are cities of similar size with similar levels of embeddedness in a global network of cities. They are located in two Western-style democracies with strong federalism principles, making them ideal comparative cases to understand whether and how national context and global interconnectedness create different or increasingly similar institutions in cities across the globe. Case narratives are derived from various qualitative sources of data, ranging from secondary sources such as media reports to archival data such as official planning and government documents.

This qualitative case-study approach allows for process tracing, analyzing institutional development, and considering the interplay between key actors and the institutions within which they operate (Kaufmann and Sidney, this volume). The materials on which cases are based were primarily collected and reviewed between 2017 and 2020. While we realize the limits of our methodology due to its small sample and the absence of case studies from the Global South, we see its strength in the level of similarity of these two cities in terms of size, structure, and embeddedness in similar democratic federal national contexts. The federal democratic perspective is particularly useful here, as it allows for a helpful comparison of the institutional embeddedness of cities in their federal contexts—in terms of understanding both the impact of different levels of government and the limits of home rule in a global context. In other words, how is “seeing like a city” in a global world affected by different levels of government in federal contexts?

In Berlin we examine the Mediaspree development, a major waterfront redevelopment project along the shore of Berlin’s main waterway. The nature of the institutional structures involved permitted development plans to go ahead in the face of this resistance. Since the introduction of the redevelopment plans, several initiatives and protests opposed the Mediaspree. The most successful initiative, named “MediaSpree *Versenken!*” (“Sink the Mediaspree!”), had successfully gathered enough signatures to enforce a local citizens’ referendum, in which a coalition of local residents and small-business owners introduced its own waterfront development plan in place of the original plan. However, Berlin has an established institutional mechanism to hold popular referenda on development and other proposals affecting urban infrastructure, governance, or administration, a successfully implemented popular referendum is not legally binding for the city’s policymakers. It only serves an advisory function, which city hall can choose to ignore. In the end, the city of Berlin chose to overrule the community’s development proposal and go with the original plan. Since Berlin is a city-state, there is no state-level authority that could challenge or, in turn, overrule city hall’s decisions. In addition, the federal government never chose to put the capital city under special federal authority when it comes to any planning decisions. Therefore, in Germany’s federal system, the city-state government remains largely unchecked in terms of large-scale development decisions.

In Chicago, special-purpose authorities managing urban development may be held to account by parent governments (e.g., the city or state), but the decision-making in such institutions is relatively closed. The city’s recent mayors, in coordination with other actors, particularly governors and private-

sector actors, have collaborated to offload large-scale development projects to special-purpose governments. Prominent examples include the Illinois Sports Facilities Authority and the Metropolitan Pier and Exposition Authority, which were created to finance and manage a new stadium for the Chicago White Sox Major League Baseball team and the redevelopment of Navy Pier, respectively (Smith 2010). In the case of Chicago and Berlin, then, institutional access has been shaped to respond to pro-development interests—sometimes on a case-by-case, short-term basis. While regime theory suggested governing coalitions worked closely with private-sector interests, this was not necessarily the result of institutional design at the municipal level. A key component of several regimes, including Stone’s case in Atlanta, also consisted of incorporating, rather than excluding, specific segments of the local population such as middle-class black voters (Stone 1989, 96).

In the case studies that follow, we use recent comparative work from the policy literature to characterize levels of access at institutions. First, what is the level of formal inclusion among urban advocacy groups in the institutions in question (Mahoney and Baumgartner 2008)? Second, what are the policy-making and democratic transparency and accountability “rules” within the institution (Mahoney 2007)—and, in the case of urban governance, how do such rules compare with decision-making structure in general-purpose local government? Third, what are the financing mechanisms within the institution and how will they affect access indirectly? Fourth, what are the channels for residents’ access to the institution? Fifth, who are the actors behind such terms as “private sector,” “government institutions,” and “grassroots movements” in both cities? Based on what we have argued here, we suspect that these broad terms obscure important complexities that are the result of a growing intermingling between the public and private sectors, and the increasing importance of “coalition branding” when it comes to promoting development decisions to the public.

### *Berlin: Uber Arena*

The Uber Arena is a development project on Berlin’s Spree River. It was commissioned by Berlin’s district of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg, and developed by Anschutz Entertainment Group, which in turn is a subsidiary of the Anschutz Corporation, belonging to Philip Anschutz, a venture capitalist, who is involved in various investment projects through his companies. Located near the East Side Gallery,<sup>3</sup> the Uber Arena is a large multipurpose indoor arena. It was initially known as O2 World, but the naming rights to the arena were

sold to Mercedes Benz in January 2015, and the arena was renamed Mercedes Benz Arena on July 1, 2015. In March 2024, the arena was renamed yet again, to Uber Arena. Christoph Weigler, president of Uber Germany, had announced a new long-term partnership between Uber and the Anschutz Entertainment Group in January 2024. Beyond the arena itself, Uber has also purchased the naming rights for the adjacent music venue (formally known as Verti Music Hall, now renamed Uber Eats Music Hall), as well as the square in front of the arena and the music hall, which has been renamed Uber Platz (Uber Square) (Hanack 2024). Together with the East Side Park and several other development projects, it comprises the larger Mediaspree project. The name “Mediaspree” is a general reference for the Berlin government’s redevelopment plans for the Spree River waterfront. The label reflects the involvement of large telecommunications businesses as the primary investors and private development partners.

The Mediaspree protesters primarily voiced concerns about public access to the waterfront and the potential destruction of the historical site of the East Side Gallery, parts of which had to be sacrificed already for the construction of the landing dock for the Uber Arena. The group of protestors, comprised of a wide variety of actors, argued that the privatization of public urban space was nothing more than “urban development from above” (Xhain.info). City hall, they argued, by endorsing and even supporting these development plans, was not taking into consideration the concerns and needs of the local residents. Furthermore, the protesters claimed that the project would ultimately result in rising real estate values and the eventual displacement of local residents. They also accused the city administration of purposefully fostering gentrification.

The initiative “MediaSpree Versenken!” (“Sink the Mediaspree!”) had successfully lobbied enough signatures to enforce a referendum. In the referendum, it introduced an alternate development proposal that would limit the height of the buildings along the waterfront to 22 m (72 feet), the general height limit in the city of Berlin; enforce a 50-meter-wide (164 feet) strip of land next to the waterfront, which would remain free of buildings and accessible to the public; and prevent the construction of an additional bridge for cars across the river. The district of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg followed precedent and presented a counterproposal, which was merely a toned-down version of the original development proposal introduced by the citywide government (taz, July 13, 2008).

The citizens’ referendum, however, was successful, and the district government vowed to adjust development plans accordingly. Since the referendum



was not legally binding, the Berlin government has all but ignored the alternate plans introduced by the citizens' initiative.

The referendum on the development in Berlin represents an interesting case that symbolizes the struggle for access in the case of development projects. The fact that the citizens' initiative lobbied for a referendum, which would, no matter the outcome, not have been legally binding, demonstrates two things: (1) The citizens' initiative was formed based on overwhelming support from local residents and local business owners, and so had broad support in the public and local, small-scale private sector, as residents were concerned about resulting gentrification, and the owners of clubs and restaurants along the waterfront were concerned about displacement by the development. (2) Due to the aforementioned level of support, the citizens' initiative may have overestimated the symbolic impact it could have on the local government and its development drive.

Construction on the Uber Arena as a vital component of the Mediaspree redevelopment was completed in 2008. In 2015, the Anschutz Entertainment Group introduced further plans for the area directly surrounding the arena. The construction of four additional structures was completed in 2018: a convention hall to seat approximately 4,000 guests; a multiplex cinema with fourteen individual theaters, seating 2,500 people; a bowling alley with twenty-eight lanes; ten cafés, restaurants, and bars; two hotels with 380 rooms; offices; and an extension of the original arena (Görke and Loy 2015). The square in front of the arena, which belongs to Anschutz Entertainment Group, remains publicly accessible, as a so-called privately owned public space.

The contract for the development of the area and the surrounding entertainment complex was negotiated directly with the Berlin Senate, with very limited input by the local district of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg. While this is somewhat extraordinary, it is not illegitimate: Districts and localities are by default endowed with the urban planning and implementation rights, but according to §9 of the Implementation Law (*Ausführungsgesetz*) for the general Building Code (*Baugesetzbuch*), short *AGBauGB*, the Berlin Senate may take over the planning process if the area in question is of "extraordinary political significance."<sup>4</sup> The wording itself implies the relative flexibility of this planning mandate, which the Berlin Senate has exercised quite frequently in urban planning decisions.

In response, the local district of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg criticized the city's failure to involve the district. Local residents and activists also raised concerns about the nature of the development at large, which is located in a "historically sensitive" area, adjacent to where the Berlin Wall once stood (and

where refugees from the east drowned in the Spree River in their attempts to reach the west). Criticisms mostly revolve around the commercialized nature of the development (Conrad 2013). Such criticisms resurged after Uber Germany's purchase of the naming rights of the arena and square and the announcement that the company would develop a new mobility concept to better manage traffic around the arena. In response, Berlin's Social Democrats, who are part of the city's current governing coalition, criticized Uber's critical role in "depressing wages and social- and tax-corruption in the rental car business" (Hanack 2024).

### *Background: Mediaspree and the New Berlin*

After the fall of the wall and the reunification of Germany, the Berlin "city-state" government sought to rebrand the city's image as a center of cultural consumption in an attempt to attract the much-sought-after creative class, which has been hailed by many as a savior for struggling cities (Florida 2002). In the early 2000s, the city of Berlin officially implemented targeted creative industry policies (STADTart 2007). Developing the Spree's waterfront into a "branded" cultural space represented the first major campaign of this kind of "creative clustering," which was targeted specifically at what the local government defined as "underutilized urban spaces" (Novy and Colomb 2013). In 2002, the Media Spree Berlin GmbH was founded. The designation "GmbH"—*Gesellschaft mit beschränkter Haftung*—a limited liability corporation, is a legal designation for a private company in Germany. The Media Spree Berlin GmbH was founded as a private sector marketing company, which was intended to represent the interests of businesses, property developers, and landowners in the area, but also included representatives from the Berlin Senate and the local district, Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg. That constellation made it more akin to a public-private partnership under the legal guise of a private corporation. The Uber Arena was planned as one of the first projects of the Media Spree GmbH, and the protest around the larger Mediaspree project therefore concentrated specifically on the arena and its surrounding "entertainment complex."

In 2005, Mediaspree development organization was transformed into a public-private nonprofit association (Media Spree Regionalmanagement e.V.). The designation "e.V."—*eingetragener Verein*, which translates roughly to "registered association," specifically requires its members to pursue nonprofit, non-business-oriented activities. Therefore, anyone participating in its activities would be referred to as a member (*Mitglied*), instead of a shareholder or

owner. According to Scharenberg and Bader (2010, 329), the membership of Media Spree Regionalmanagement e.V. was comprised of landowners only, whereas representatives of the local and state governments, as well as of the Chamber of Commerce, had solely advisory capacity, with very little actual decision-making power. Its structure and purpose closely resemble those of a special-purpose authority in the American context, with an equally elite and exclusive membership, as well as a comparably low level of democratic transparency and accountability.

It was at that time that the MediaSpree Versenken movement was initiated. What was special about this particular movement was its inherent diversity—it included actors from the local alternative scene, club and bar owners threatened with potential displacement by the Mediaspree project, as well as individuals concerned with the cultural heritage of the site and the transformation of the waterfront through privatization and large-scale development. Since the city overruled the initiative's referendum, the movement has fizzled, with its unique coalition fractured and disbanded. A closer examination of its broad membership reveals some interesting nuances, however: Many of those claiming to have been displaced or impacted by the project are not low-income residents, but bar and club owners concerned about displacement by bigger businesses and developers. In other words, the struggle around the development seems to pit small business against bigger business and begs the question of whether the clear delineations between gentrifiers and developers on the one hand, and the victims of (re-)development on the other, are useful for understanding the actual complex processes and coalitions around redevelopment (see Beveridge and Koch, this volume, for another example of shifting policy dynamics in Berlin).

*Chicago: Special-Purpose Government  
and the Chicago Infrastructure Trust*

Urban scholarship focusing on Chicago has placed mayors at the center of discussions regarding urban power (see, for example, Bennett 2011), and to some extent coalition-based politics—for example, studies of the Chicago political machine by Erie (1988) or Simpson (2001). Chicago's mayoral politics remains critical to understanding the trajectory of the city; the transition from Rahm Emanuel (mayor from 2011 to 2019) to Lori Lightfoot (2019–2023) and then to Brandon Johnson (who took office in 2023) represents a significant shift in terms of ideology and identity in the mayor's office. At a moment when contemporary popular studies of cities emphasize the political pragmatism

of mayors and the innovation occurring within cities across the globe (see, for example, Katz and Bradley 2013), it seems that mayors should be at the center of contemporary urban studies. However, in Chicago and other cities, recent large-scale urban development utilizes governing institutions outside the direct realm of municipal government. Chicago's recent mayors, in coordination with other actors, particularly those at the state level such as governors, as well as private sector actors, have collaborated to offload development tasks to special-purpose governments—sometimes created explicitly for the purpose of managing the development project. For the most part, such institutions have taken the form of special-purpose governments that are managed by city and state governments, but they also formally incorporate private interests through board governance. As in the case of Berlin, then, on-the-ground urban governance in Chicago reflects a shift away from traditional policy decision-making.

In the 1980s, a collection of state-city-private collaborations took the form of special-purpose governments created to finance and manage urban development projects in Chicago. As mentioned above, the Illinois Sports Facilities Authority (IFSA) was created to finance a Major League Baseball stadium, and the Metropolitan Pier and Exposition Authority was created to manage the redevelopment of the entertainment district, Navy Pier (the MPEA was also given jurisdiction over Chicago's convention center, McCormick Place, and has managed several convention center expansions since its creation by the Illinois state legislature in 1989). Development projects focused on enhancing the city's entertainment and tourist infrastructure were the key focus for authorities in Chicago and other cities in the 1980s and 1990s (Judd 2003).

Both IFSA and MPEA have remained key actors in Chicago's urban policy landscape, suggesting that authorities created for specific purposes have long-lasting effects on the character of urban governance in American cities (note: the NFL's Chicago Bears organization, the main tenant of Soldier Field, one site of IFSA redevelopment and funding, together with the city of Chicago proposed a plan for a new stadium funded with new IFSA funds in May 2024). These formal mechanisms increased the city's capacity to accomplish many of its urban development objectives, not the existence of an informal governing regime (Smith 2010) or even strong mayoral leadership (Bennett 2011). By working with other governments, in this case, state-level governments, to create new institutions, cities are able to access new sources of funding for projects that otherwise would not be completed (or could not be funded by municipal sources of capital alone).

Other nontraditional approaches in Chicago include privatization agree-

ments and other forms of public-private partnerships. Perhaps infamously, the city privatized its parking meters in 2008, entering a ninety-nine-year lease in which they took a lump-sum payment and used it primarily to address budgetary issues the city was facing at the time (Gilmour 2012). The city used a similar approach in privatizing the Chicago Skyway (Gilmour 2012). Chicago's approach has been contrasted with other approaches to long-term leases in which the payment from the private partner is paid out over a longer period. One example is the Indiana Toll Road privatization scheme, which distributed the \$3.8 billion the state received over several years, focusing specifically on road infrastructure projects (Gilmour 2012).

In what might be considered a hybrid of these approaches to managing urban development policy and finance, Chicago under Rahm Emanuel experimented with a model known as an "infrastructure bank" or "infrastructure trust," calling the new institution the Chicago Infrastructure Trust (CIT). The goal was to address two policy issues simultaneously—rebuilding or updating the city's infrastructure, and doing so cost efficiently (and thus aiming to reduce city outlays). According to its website at the time, the CIT aimed to "assist the people of the City of Chicago, the City government and its sister agencies in providing alternative financing and project delivery options for transformative infrastructure projects" (CIT 2018a). Emanuel proposed the CIT as a nonprofit organization, a 501(C)(3), distinct from the city government; however, the Chicago City Council would still be required to approve the creation of the Trust (Mack and Hilkevitch 2012). At the time of its creation, Mayor Emanuel presented the idea for the Trust as a "revolution" in local governance (Spielman 2014), and was joined by former President Bill Clinton when he made the announcement regarding the creation of the CIT (Novak 2017).

The Trust, while in existence, framed its utility from the perspective of debt limits and burdens—issues that have been at the heart of urban policy for over a century. "[T]he City of Chicago does not have the public resources to make all of the repairs and improvements needed for our aging infrastructure. Traditional means of raising public funds such as borrowing money through issuing bonds or raising taxes will not fully address the City's infrastructure needs" (CIT 2018a). This of course sets the stage for bringing a private partner more directly into the process of urban finance policy.

CIT used a governance structure similar to other special-purpose and hybrid authorities. The board of directors had seven members, five from the private sector and two from the public sector (the city treasurer acted as chairman and a city alderman also sat on the board). Additionally, the city created

an advisory board consisting of private sector, labor, and city government representatives to serve as an accountability mechanism for the CIT. The day-to-day administration of the CIT was managed by five staff members, including an executive director, managing director, and managing finance director (CIT 2018a; Novak 2017). Over the time of its short existence, the staff and board experienced significant turnover, with a new executive director being appointed in 2015 (Spielman 2015).

Similar to other institutional arrangements in Chicago and Berlin, the CIT was designed to offload the financing or management of certain infrastructure to private entities who bid for the opportunity to build the project. In theory, the city would enter agreements with the private contractors in which the private groups guarantee a certain level of increased efficiency and cost savings as a result of the infrastructure upgrade. The city of Chicago would then pay the savings to the Trust so that the projects could be financed. According to one criticism, however, the Trust failed to attract private financing for larger infrastructure projects—which was presumably the goal when Emanuel and the city formed CIT (Novak 2017). The same report found that the CIT “has cost Chicago taxpayers more than \$5.1 million to pay for its handful of employees, offices on Wacker Drive, consulting fees and other expenses” (Novak 2017). It was clear that Mayor Lori Lightfoot, who took office in May of 2019, found little utility in the Trust, and eliminated the CIT in November of that same year (WTTW 2019). This did not change with the election of Brandon Johnson as mayor in 2023.

Just prior to its disbandment, however, the CIT reported having participated in planning related to several initiatives: a municipal buildings retrofit aimed at bringing “smart” lighting to Chicago’s streetlights, the installation of 4G broadband service in the Chicago Transit Authority’s underground tunnels, and the construction of a new training facility for Chicago public safety employees (CIT 2018b). Also close to its disbandment, the CIT announced that it had selected a contractor to build a long-sought public works project in Chicago: an express train from the Loop and central business district to O’Hare International Airport. According to a press release, “The company plans to transport passengers between O’Hare and Block 37 in the Loop in approximately 12 minutes each way by utilizing electric vehicles that run through new twin underground tunnels. The project will be funded entirely by the company with no taxpayer subsidy” (CIT 2018c). An expedited route to O’Hare has long been on the wish list of the city and its mayors, and the fact that CIT was considered as a potential partner and financier suggests that the CIT was viewed as a key instrument by Chicago governing elites during its

existence. It also continued the trend of governing elites in Chicago offloading development management to distinct entities outside of traditional municipal government. Lightfoot appeared not to continue with this approach, at least with regard to infrastructure policy and spending, pursuing municipally managed policy initiatives instead. She announced her principal infrastructure initiative, Chicago Works, which was delivered through municipal departments rather than outside bodies (Pratt 2020). The city council was the authorizing body for the funds that would be borrowed and spent to pursue a variety of large-scale (\$3.7 billion total, \$1.4 billion in the first phase) infrastructure projects (Cherone 2020).

### Discussion: New Institutions and Urban Policy Analysis in Berlin and Chicago

This chapter demonstrates how institutional analyses of urban policymaking, with a specific focus on access to decision-making, can help to build a distinctive urban policy analysis framework. Focusing urban policy analysis on the institutions where policymaking takes place both captures the convergence of policy processes across countries and recognizes the distinctive elements of specific cities.

Berlin and Chicago are cases in which institutions of urban governance are functioning with imbalances in political access, and with a lack of transparency regarding individual actors' true interests and motives. In coalitional models of urban governance, a lack of access might be explained by analyzing group capacity, but shifting the focus to institutions, we see that unequal access heavily influences outcomes before policy debates begin. To better analyze institutional effects in case studies, those studying local policy might apply Mahoney and Baumgartner's (2008) questions discussed above. Taking care to incorporate institutions in an urban policy analysis approach will lead to more robust theories of urban governance, allow for more comparative work, and connect contemporary studies of cities into the policy literature more broadly.

As is clear in Chicago and Berlin, special-purpose authorities and similar institutions have become pivotal in urban development megaprojects (a trend across other US cities and Europe as well). These bodies are created to manage, and in many cases finance, large-scale urban development projects, and thus have a central impact on urban policymaking. The use of special-purpose authorities and similar institutions in the United States clearly reflects Mahony and Baumgartner's (2008) condition of access and inclusion

in decision-making. Governing boards of authorities (appointed by parent governments such as those of the state or city) bring certain interests directly into formal decision-making while leaving others out. For example, a representative from the real estate industry or labor might be appointed to a special-purpose authority's governing board. But there is very little traditional access for citizens or residents. Experiments such as the Chicago Infrastructure Trust demonstrate that the city's leaders are still invested in this type of institutional creation to address critical policy issues.

Similar constructs can be observed in the Berlin case: In 2002, the Media Spree Berlin GmbH was founded to develop the Spree River corridor, and, in its new role, strove to attract private investors. The formation of a GmbH—a limited-liability corporation in the Berlin case—represents an example of a public-private partnership acting within the legal framework of a private corporation. This construct mirrors a special-purpose authority in the United States, with minimal levels of public transparency, and no democratic accountability. Private actors played a key role in the nonprofit's supposedly public-interest mission: real estate marketing and planning of development in the area—thereby directly incorporating private actors in public-interest development policy in unprecedented ways, similar to the Chicago case. While evidence here suggests that access may have an inverse relationship to the scale of a project, a more expansive study will be needed to understand this relationship. Certain factors could lead to greater access in some larger developments, but those are not evident in our cases. The Berlin case demonstrates that local coalitions change quickly, and indeed, in Chicago, the individual actors within the CIT had already been replaced once before the CIT was eliminated altogether.

The Berlin case also shows that the coalitions of actors around development, regardless of whether they are involved in the decision-making or any potential protest, have become more complex and difficult to clearly differentiate from one another. "Grassroots protest" may, in some cases, merely be an effective frame used by other private interests to make their own voices heard, while the protest itself may do very little for actual residents facing increasing rents or even displacement. This necessitates a closer look at the institutions that form around development, in favor or against it, and at the individuals who run and organize these institutions. Who are they, and what are their ultimate motives? Ultimately, it appears that the coalitions of actors involved in the decision-making and implementation of large-scale development projects have become more difficult to explain and untangle by using simple frameworks.



Particularly in Berlin, we find that coalitions among policymakers and the private sector have become increasingly fickle and short-lived, and seem to be changing significantly over shorter periods of time. This, on the one hand, makes them more flexible in fostering political discourse and the implementation of large-scale development projects. In other words, they should be better able to push through political negotiations, planning, and implementation quickly, and implement large-scale development more efficiently. On the other hand, the formation of ad hoc institutions under the guise of a private corporation, or a public-private partnership dominated by an appointed board of directors from the private sector, necessarily lacks democratic transparency. The bigger a project, the bigger the controversy, protest, and even resistance it will eventually spur in the local community and other private interests excluded from such institutions. Ultimately, this might even reduce the viability of such development projects, as they become democratically obscure, financially bloated, and unpopular in the local community.

In Chicago, institutional experimentation has continued over the decades, and our analysis has highlighted the closed nature of the new institutions being developed. The Chicago Infrastructure Trust may have been short-lived, but it served as an example of how political leaders look to shape institutions in ways that will favor specific development outcomes. The CIT was a clear example of bringing private actors directly into the decision-making process. The rules for policymaking within the CIT, discussed above, were very technical and focused more on efficiency than any type of inclusion or accountability to residents. One might argue that accountability could have been achieved through the cost savings that were supposed to result from use of the infrastructure trust model; however, this must be balanced against the fact that CIT was also designed with the interests of the private financiers in mind. The overall levels of access, then, were very limited compared to those in traditional forms of legislative, representative governments.

### Institutions and Access in Urban Policymaking: Conclusions

Based on these trends in Chicago and Berlin, it is our view that rather than the individual groups comprising temporal coalitions within cities, the longer-lasting institutional mechanisms (perhaps those created by powerful coalitions at the time) should receive greater focus. One emerging trend in both cities is the complexity of the institutions involved—while both present different forms, both fall outside the realm of “municipal government.” This turn

to nongovernmental and other special forms of government should be recognized and analyzed as we build toward an urban policy analysis. Despite varying forms of formal local government, the tendency to offload development tasks to new, hybrid organizations is present and has a noticeable impact on both policymaking processes and outcomes. While the full implications of this trend are not entirely clear, one emerging conclusion is that local policy actors, especially those involved in large-scale urban development, recognize the importance of institutional capacity and often go *beyond* the local state (or state, generally) to meet development goals. While effective in terms of increasing capacity, this also has limiting implications for democratic access, transparency, and accountability in urban policymaking.

## NOTES

Some portions of this chapter first appeared in “Comparative Approaches to Development Politics and the Quest for a More Robust Theory: New Institutions of Governance in Chicago and Berlin,” *PS: Political Science & Politics* 53, no. 1 (2020): 10–14.

1. Sharp (1991) applied a similar approach in discussing economic development policymaking in US cities.

2. Baumgartner and Jones (1993) cite research by Clarence Stone (1976) suggesting that “at the local level, community groups are more successful in affecting community development projects in the open, public, forums used in the policy adoption stage, but that business-oriented elites are more effective in the quieter, more technical and bureaucratic, implementation stages” (34–35).

3. The East Side Gallery is a permanent open-air gallery. It comprises the longest still-existing piece of the Berlin Wall, which was painted by artists from around the world in the spring of 1990, the year after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

4. In German: “*Gebiete von aussergewöhnlicher stadtpolitischer Bedeutung*” (§9 AGBauBG).

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## Urban Security Politics and Everyday Resistance to Criminal Victimization

*Evidence from Medellín*

Eduardo Moncada

Policymakers and politicians increasingly look to developing-world cities in search of policy innovations to tackle a range of challenging issues, including climate change, sustainable economic development, housing, and inequality along the lines of gender, race, and ethnicity (UNDP 2021). Cities in Latin America are seen as key innovators to address a particularly pressing set of issues in the region: crime, violence, and insecurity. Latin America is home to 8 percent of the world's population, but, astonishingly, accounts for one-third of the world's homicides each year (Meers 2018). And while crime and violence also affect rural areas where robust illicit economies in wildlife, timber, and various contraband operate, cities remain epicenters of citizen insecurity in the region. It is precisely in these urban settings that policymakers and politicians have advanced several intriguing but controversial political projects to address crime and violence, such as the “pacification” of slums in Brazil's Rio de Janeiro (Magaloni, Franco-Vivanco, and Melo 2020) and urban redevelopment in Ciudad Juarez and Monterrey in Mexico (Conger 2015; Moncada 2016). Perhaps the best-known case of urban policy innovation in matters of security can be found in Medellín, Colombia. Once the most violent city in the world, registering 391 homicides per 100,000 people in 1991, homicides

declined substantially by the early 2000s. A string of nontraditional mayors in Medellín argued that the decline was the result of their targeted public investment in parts of the city historically neglected by traditional political parties. This seeming urban order in one of the most violent countries in the Western Hemisphere attracted policymakers from across the globe eager to learn from the apparent model of “highly competent city management” (Dávila 2009, 39) and replicate the “Medellín miracle” in their own cities.

Yet urban policymaking can be highly ambivalent; it is rarely straightforward and often jointly produced by politicians, citizens, and informal actors, including criminal actors. Adopting a “seeing like a city” (Kaufmann and Sidney, this volume) approach that privileges a disaggregated understanding of the state and the urban political arena provides a powerful vantage point from which to analyze complex urban policymaking processes—of which citizen security is a prominent example in much of the developing world. I illustrate the need for greater attention to this ambivalence in the making of urban space through analysis of the case of urban security policymaking in Medellín at two interconnected levels. I first show that understanding security policymaking in conflictive urban settings requires that we consider the intersection between formal and informal politics at the micro scale. More specifically, formal political efforts to address insecurity in Medellín have coexisted with, and at times relied on, the informal strategies of powerful criminal organizations that vary across small stretches of urban space—a dynamic evident in other crucial urban policy domains, such as the regulation of migration flows into and throughout urban spaces (Landau and Bule, this volume). In the case of Medellín, these informal strategies entail strategically constraining violence to reduce unwanted attention to illicit activities. The result is that urban order is *jointly* produced by elected authorities, criminal actors, and everyday citizens in ways that advance their respective interests, including political survival, economic development, and illicit profits.

But how does this intersection between formal and informal politics affect urban residents, particularly those most vulnerable to crime and violence? To answer this, I zoom down to the micro level to analyze the politics of citizens’ resistance to criminal extortion, which functions as a way for victims to shape the informal urban politics that govern everyday lives and behaviors in micro-scale urban spaces. Existing research on the politics of urban crime and violence provides important insights into the nature of relations between states and criminals (Arias 2017; Durán-Martínez 2017; Lessing 2017; Trejo and Ley 2020). We know comparatively less, however, about the role of victims in this relationship and how their efforts to push back against criminal

victimization, while delivering important immaterial benefits, fall short of reconfiguring power dynamics between themselves and the collusion between states and criminal organizations. I analyze how—in a context where the local state and criminal actors coexist and at times implicitly cooperate to facilitate order—victims are forced to navigate extortion at the hands of powerful criminal groups using practices of everyday resistance (Scott 1985).

The empirical background of this chapter is an urban policy landscape where formal and informal politics overlap in complex ways to shape lived urban space, and more precisely, everyday practices, norms, and behaviors within this space. I draw on fieldwork in Medellín, Colombia, including interviews, focus groups, and participatory drawing exercises, to describe and analyze the construction of urban space at multiple scales. Here political authorities implicitly allow criminal actors to shape the everyday lives, economic transactions, and political understandings of segments of the local population in exchange for a form of urban order that advances the political and economic priorities of their electoral coalitions. Criminal actors, in the meantime, leverage this equilibrium to advance illicit activities while using violence strategically. This underscores the need to move beyond a focus on formal government actors and institutions alone to understand what conditions shape the contemporary urban landscape in the realms of spatiality, order, and policy. My analysis also shows how criminal actors wield power to participate in urban politics, albeit informally. This shows that without considering the powerful criminal actors prevalent throughout much of the urban developing world, we risk losing sight of a prominent though largely undertheorized actor in urban politics. Finally, the micro-scale analysis of resistance to criminal victimization in an informal market in Medellín underscores the need for greater attention to the micro spaces within cities where politics unfold. And we cannot understand micro-level urban politics unless we adopt a multi-level approach attuned to the interlinkages across different levels of authority operating within the city (Giraudy et al. 2019).

### State, Society, and Criminals: The Construction of an Urban Hegemon

The illicit drug trade has a long and complex history in Colombia. Starting in the 1970s the country's Caribbean coast experienced a boom in the cultivation of marijuana, which was exported to foreign markets (Britto 2020). But in the late 1970s cocaine production catalyzed powerful criminal syndicates based in the country's major cities, including the Medellín drug cartel.



As shown in figure 11.1, levels of lethal violence in Medellín—already far exceeding the national level—climbed steadily during the 1980s, peaking in 1991. The lead-up to this apex was a national government crackdown on the Medellín drug cartel with assistance from the United States government, including the Drug Enforcement Agency, as well as rival drug-trafficking organizations that stood to benefit from dismantling the Medellín cartel (Durán-Martínez 2017; Lessing 2017). This state-criminal conflict contributed to urban violence. For example, the Medellín cartel enlisted numerous preexisting violent actors across the city in their fight against the state, including gangs and vigilante groups, giving them weapons and funds in exchange for assassinating municipal police. But there were other sources of urban violence, rooted in long-standing patterns of uneven state presence across Medellín's neighborhoods. Criminal groups known as *bandas* used violence to protect their territories from rival groups (Jaramillo 1994, 15), as did *milicias*, which were the legacy of failed peace negotiations with insurgent groups in the 1980s and provided security and protection in neighborhoods while extorting residents and businesses (Jaramillo 1994, 31–33). Alongside these nonstate armed actors, death squads of military and police personnel operated like assassins for hire (Salazar 1990). The result was the fragmentation of territorial control across urban space among competing armed groups that relied on coercive force to target enemies within or outside of the state.<sup>1</sup>

But the nature of Medellín's criminal landscape changed dramatically in the late 1990s, in part due to the breakdown of the Medellín cartel following the killing or arrest of several of its leaders. This reconfiguration of the criminal landscape, however, also stemmed from the incursion of civil-war dynamics into the city and their intersection with the illicit drug trade. Right-wing paramilitaries entered the city and quickly coopted preexisting criminal groups while partnering with the narcotrafficking offshoots left in the wake of the Medellín cartel's collapse. The alliance between drug traffickers and paramilitaries led to the consolidation of criminal territorial control under an armed criminal hegemon that exercised tight control over the city's illicit markets and criminal actors. What did this criminal territorial monopoly imply for formal political efforts to establish urban order?

### Progressive Urban Policymaking Under a Criminal Hegemon

After a long history of exclusionary local politics where traditional political elites aligned firmly with the country's two dominant political parties, the

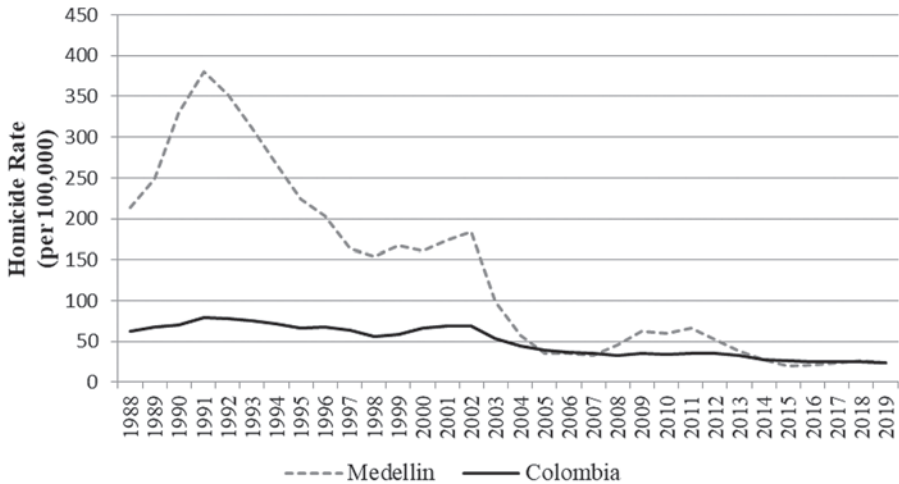


Fig. 11.1. Lethal Violence in Medellín and Colombia (1998–2018)

Conservative and the Liberal parties, controlled Medellín’s government, starting in 2003 voters elected to the office of mayor a string of nontraditional candidates. These candidates were themselves a diverse group that included a US-trained academic (Sergio Fajardo, 2004–2008), a longtime progressive local social activist (Alonso Salazar, 2008–2012), and the former CEO of a software design company (Daniel Quintero, 2020–present). Starting with Sergio Fajardo, Medellín’s municipal government embarked on several progressive policy initiatives intended to reduce local crime and violence, in part through targeted public investment in historically marginalized parts of the city. A core element of this reorientation of public investment was termed “social urbanism,” which entailed reconfiguring the built environment—including in the areas of public transport, public space, and government investment—to narrow the physical and socioeconomic gaps between classes. As violence decreased, the city soon earned international acclaim as local politicians and foreign observers alike attributed the decline to public investment in some of the Medellín’s historically most violent neighborhoods, ranging from modern public libraries to a world-renowned cable car system as part of its public transportation. The “rebranding” (Pasotti 2010) of the city was central to advancing the economic interests of Medellín’s powerful business elites, who broke with the traditional parties to support nontraditional candidates for mayor because this enabled the city to cast aside the cloak of insecurity and violence it had been saddled with for several decades. Between 2002 and 2009,

foreign direct investment in Medellín increased tenfold as the city earned a reputation among investors as one of the best cities in the region for doing business (Moncada 2016, 239). As a result, even those elected mayor on the tickets of traditional parties or who counted on those parties as core parts of their electoral coalitions (Anibal Gaviria, 2012–2016 and Federico Gutierrez, 2016–2020) sustained elements of the novel social urbanism policies that became central to maintaining economic investment and to the broader narrative about how city government had finally brought order to Medellín. But the security gains in Medellín were not simply a product of formal politics. They instead resulted from the intersection between formal policymaking and criminal politics.

The consolidation of urban territorial control in the hands of paramilitaries aligned with drug traffickers was crucial for Medellín's reduction in violence. Absent competition over criminal turfs, consolidated territorial control reduced incentives for lethal criminal violence among warring criminal actors. The leadership of the new criminal hegemon issued orders requiring its street-level members to keep lethal violence in check. Reduced levels of lethal violence in turn enabled local political authorities to point to their policies as the source of this welcome change in security conditions. More concretely, local government could now extend the state presence via targeted investment into parts of the city that had long been inaccessible amid high levels of violence. At times access to these spaces entailed informal negotiations between street-level bureaucrats in charge of public investment on the ground and criminal actors in control of the territories (Holmes and Gutiérrez de Piñeres 2014). Criminal leaders were cognizant of the new political economy the city was entering, where foreign investment and continued illicit markets could coexist only if macro-level urban order was sustained. More broadly, criminal actors themselves stood to benefit from the investment in the city's peripheral neighborhoods, because they could co-opt local civil society organizations that were receiving financial contracts from the city government for new social service initiatives that formed part of the broader project of social urbanism (Moncada 2016, 85–86).

This pattern of coexistence and mutual dependence between criminal and political actors within the city's political sphere persisted over time in Medellín (Abello-Colak and Guarneros-Meza 2014). Urban order, however, has not been without tensions and outright conflicts. For example, in the lead-up to the 2015 mayoral elections, then candidate Federico Gutiérrez made reducing extortion in the city center a key part of his electoral platform. Medellín's downtown has historically been one of the city's most violent areas, and as

I discuss below, is notorious for extortion by criminal gangs linked to drug-trafficking organizations (Moncada 2020). Criminal groups extort an estimated US\$250,000 from residents and businesses in the downtown area each month.<sup>2</sup> Yet shortly after assuming office, local authorities intercepted telephone exchanges between members of the criminal groups responsible for extortion in the city center as they discussed plans to assassinate Gutiérrez in retaliation for his threat to upend the state-criminal equilibrium sustained by his predecessors. The plans to end extortion in the city center were quietly dropped, returning the city to the pattern of seeming order forged by the intersection between formal and informal politics (Moncada 2022, 86). Where do victims fit in this broader context, where urban political authorities and criminal actors jointly generate order? The next section takes up this question.

### Everyday Resistance as a Determinant of Urban Everyday Life and Space

Between 2016 and 2017 I carried out fieldwork in one of the several informal markets that operate in the city center of Medellín. My fieldwork consisted of interviews with a diverse range of actors in the market, and also politicians and civil society leaders in the surrounding areas as well as focus groups, and participatory drawing exercises with vendors. The market stretched several city blocks, and about 400 informal vendors worked there seven days a week, twelve hours a day. The vendors were *recicladores* (recyclers) who scoured trash bins for items to repair and sell. The market emerged in 2011 when the vendors were displaced from their previous locale by local authorities, who alleged that criminals were using the site to sell drugs. Every Saturday morning, each of the several hundred vendors in the market paid a criminal actor a “tax” (known locally as a *vacuna*, or vaccinations) of 2,000 Colombian *pesos*. In this section I analyze the data I collected through my fieldwork to interrogate how it is that within the context of implicit state-criminal coordination to sustain urban order, segments of society remain vulnerable to criminal victimization but pursue unorthodox forms of political engagement to resist aspects of their victimization. I find that victims engage in individual-level practices of resistance against criminal extortion and associated violence that provide them with some minimal material and immaterial gains, but that more broadly can be understood as a form of political participation to craft the norms and expectations of criminal, state, and social actors in an urban micro space.

Extortion in the city center of Medellín is run by criminal groups called

*Convivir*, a term that paradoxically translates as “living in harmony.” In 1994 the Colombian national government authorized the creation of the Convivir as civilian self-defense groups trained and armed by the military to combat insurgent forces in the country’s decades-old civil war.<sup>3</sup> Politicians and economic leaders, however, established Convivir to safeguard their own interests, given the state’s limited territorial reach. The Convivir found an ardent advocate in Álvaro Uribe Vélez, then governor (1995–1997) of the department of Antioquia—of which Medellín is the capital—and subsequently president (2002–2010) and then a senator (2014–2020); he was long alleged to have links with right-wing paramilitary groups. Uribe encouraged the establishment of Convivir in nearly all of Antioquia’s municipalities (*El Tiempo* 1996; *Razón Pública* 2011), many led by paramilitaries that used them to target civil society leaders and political leftists (*Semana* 1996). In 1997 the Colombian Constitutional Court limited the activities that the Convivir could undertake, their use of weapons, and their members’ ability to remain legally anonymous. But by then the Convivir in Medellín had begun forcibly collecting “security taxes” from businesses and residents in the territories where they operated. The protection services were initially welcomed, given the context of intense drug-related violence (Moncada 2016, chap. 3). But as violence declined, the Convivir and extortion persisted.

But extortion is more than the forced extraction of material resources. Criminal actors, like other dominant rulers, use practices of social and political domination to facilitate taxation. The Convivir appropriated the broader negative social perceptions of the recyclers as fodder for practicing social domination. As in other parts of the urban developing world, informal vendors in Medellín are criticized as both manifestations and sources of urban disorder.<sup>4</sup> But recyclers who scour garbage cans and landfills to obtain merchandise are seen as occupying the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder within the informal sector.<sup>5</sup> Members of the Convivir used this perception to publicly humiliate the vendors, stepping or stomping on vendors’ merchandise or publicly shoving and pushing vendors to the ground. Several vendors described how members of the Convivir would often stare at vendors whose merchandise they had damaged, or who they had just toppled, as if daring the vendors to challenge not only the criminals’ coercive capacities but their perceived higher social authority to govern the informal market and its population.<sup>6</sup> Other practices the members of the Convivir used to encourage vendors to pay criminal taxes included slapping them on the backs of their heads or immobilizing them with Tasers before urinating on them in public. But the most common social tax that criminal actors used to impose social domination was verbal insults that

reaffirmed social domination. Members of the Convivir insulted the vendors' dirty clothes, how they smelled, and their livelihoods selling *checheres* [slang word for assorted trash items]. As one vendor noted, "Some Saturdays they just stick out their hands. Other Saturdays they wake up on the wrong side of the bed because they come with their foul words to make one feel insignificant. As if taking our money wasn't enough!"<sup>7</sup> Another reflected on how these insults reaffirmed broader social norms regarding the recyclers: "They just say what everyone in society already thinks about us."<sup>8</sup>

As part of the focus groups with victims in Medellín, I also conducted participatory drawing exercises. Scholars have used participatory drawing methodologies to study how people experience and interpret violence (Auyero and Berti 2015; Moser and McIlwaine 2004; Wood 2003). I used this methodology to prevent the voices of the most vocal individuals in the focus groups from biasing the resulting data. My concern was that the perspectives of individuals who were not as vocal during the focus groups would not be reflected in the final analysis. As such, toward the end of each focus group I gave participants blank sheets of paper, pencils, and pens, and asked them to draw something in response to the following prompt: "Please think about the place where you work every day. Now draw what you feel generates either insecurity, security, or both in this place." After about ten minutes, once everyone had finished I invited each participant to share their drawing and explain it to the group.

While sharing her drawing (fig. 11.2) with the other participants in the focus group, Beatriz explained,

This is me [*yo*] and my business [*negocio*]. What generates insecurity [*inseguridad*] for me? Lots of things. The police [*policia*], the cars and motorcycles [*moto*] that speed by so fast. But the worst is when they [Convivir] make me hide their drugs [*esconder droga*]. And when they do it they insult [*insulta*] me, say ugly things to me [*puta*, Spanish slang for "whore"].

While sharing her drawing (fig. 11.3), Dolores explained to the group how social domination by the Convivir entailed choosing between storing drugs and weapons for the criminal group and protecting her daughter:

Here I drew myself and my daughter [*yo + hija*]. This is our spot in the market. I sell pants—all kinds, I have them. But here there are also the people from the Convivir. And although it doesn't look like it (referring to the drawing), here they are, let's say early in the morning, hid-

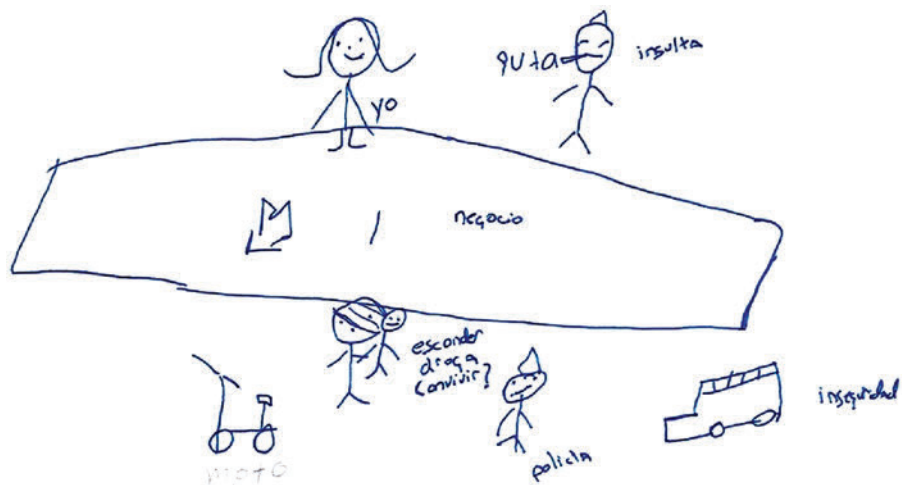


Fig. 11.2. Drawing by Beatriz (MDE\_FG3\_550), informal vendor, focus group, Medellín, March 2017.

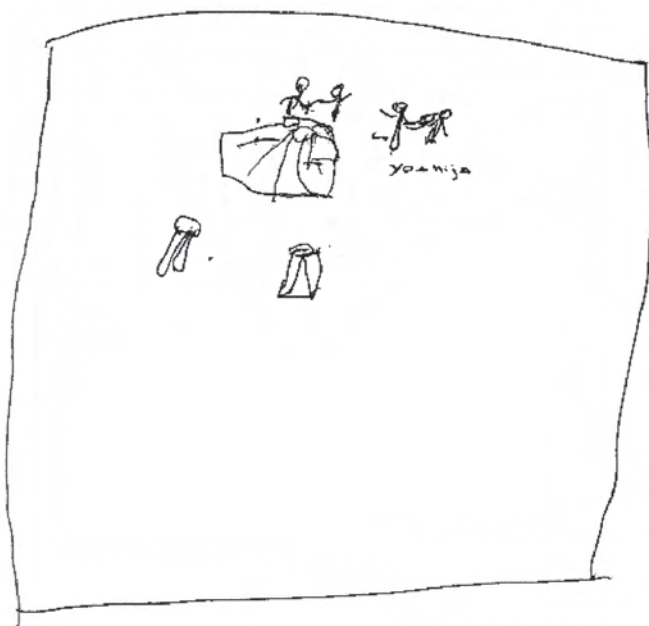


Fig. 11.3. Drawing by Dolores (MDE\_FG3\_818), informal vendor, focus group, Medellín, March 2017.

ing drugs and a gun in my merchandise. I don't want that. But I can't say anything to them—because we know what they will do to me. My daughter is young, she is five years old. But although she's young, she knows when something is wrong. Children can sense when a parent is upset or scared. Sometimes she asks, "Why don't you tell them to stop [hiding the drugs and the gun in the merchandise]?" Because she sees how nervous it makes me when they do this to me. [Dolores taps her finger angrily at the two figures in the drawing representing the members of the Convivir.] She's a little girl, she doesn't know. But what can I do? I put our lives at risk if I say something. I worry that this will affect her in her future.

Members of the Convivir who sold drugs in the market would forcibly incorporate the vendors into their illicit drug sales. Hiding doses of cocaine and marijuana joints and blunts among the vendors' wares allowed the criminals to roam the market enticing potential clients without having to carry drug-filled baggies. As the danger of incursions by rival criminal actors increased, criminals also forced vendors to hide weapons for them in the market. A first step in forcing recyclers to hide drugs entailed publicly insulting them in front of the other vendors. Vendors interpreted their forced complicity as a form of social domination because it insulted their efforts to make an honest living:

SEBASTIAN: How are you going to justify taking a man's work—the place where he earns the food for his family—and use it to sell drugs? You can't. No one that respects you could justify it. We are disposable to everyone.<sup>9</sup>

DAVID: This is our work. Hiding the drugs in our merchandise, selling the drugs next to us—all of that is not only bad for us, because we are the ones that would suffer the consequences, it is also disrespectful to us as workers.<sup>10</sup>

The Convivir also engaged in political domination to carry out extortion. To do so, the criminal group flaunted its capture of the local police assigned to the informal market. The National Police of Colombia reports to the Ministry of Defense. But political authorities at different levels of government oversee various police divisions distributed across the national territory. The country's major urban centers, including Medellín, have dedicated police forces who are in part overseen and funded by municipal authorities. The municipal police are responsible for public safety in ten municipalities in Antioquia, including



Medellín, where they oversee the city's 16 districts and 249 neighborhoods. Starting in 2010 the National Police of Colombia adopted the National Plan for Community Vigilance by Quadrants, the PNVCC, under which policing in the country's eight largest cities, including Medellín, was decentralized to foster collaboration between police and populations within neighborhoods. Under the PNVCC, districts normally assigned to a single police station were subdivided into zones based on georeferenced crime data to identify crime hotspots, each of which was then assigned a Centro de Atención Inmediata (Immediate Attention Center, or CAI). The police assigned to the CAI then divided their assigned zones into quadrants that a handful of police would patrol to strengthen police-community relations. In the informal market, however, vendors soon understood that the police assigned to the quadrant in which the market was located were captured by the criminals.

Vendors consistently described the criminal capture as an exchange between the criminals and the police: "[P]art of the issue is that there is solidarity between the police and the Convivir. The police say [to the criminals]: 'I will let you work, give me my cut, and we'll proceed that way.'" <sup>11</sup> Criminal capture had allowed for extortion and accompanying illicit activities to proceed unimpeded. As one vendor noted, "The police are there [referring to the market] . . . but not watching out for us." <sup>12</sup> Police in the market strategically chose not to see the extortion and other illicit activities that the Convivir carried out. Vendors expressed frustration that police consistently turned a blind eye to the criminal activities in the market. At times this literally entailed the police positioning themselves in places where they could not see extortion or drug sales taking place.

Mario explained this aspect of the criminal capture of police to the other vendors in the focus group in which he participated while using his drawing, shown in figure 11.4:

Here are the police patrols [*policia*], sometimes two or three guys that should be walking are just standing, talking, texting on their phones. Here's a crazy person [*loco*]. There's lots of them. And so the crazies and the homeless, they buy drugs from the delinquents [*delincuentes*], start hitting the pipes [using drugs] right there, maybe they fall asleep all high there. Now no one wants to go near me, so I don't sell anything. But the delinquents are also bothering me, demanding money or insulting me or whatever. And the police just keep standing where they know that they cannot see anything [*no ve*] or only where they see the crazies and the homeless, but never the delinquents. Why? Because they are corrupt police.

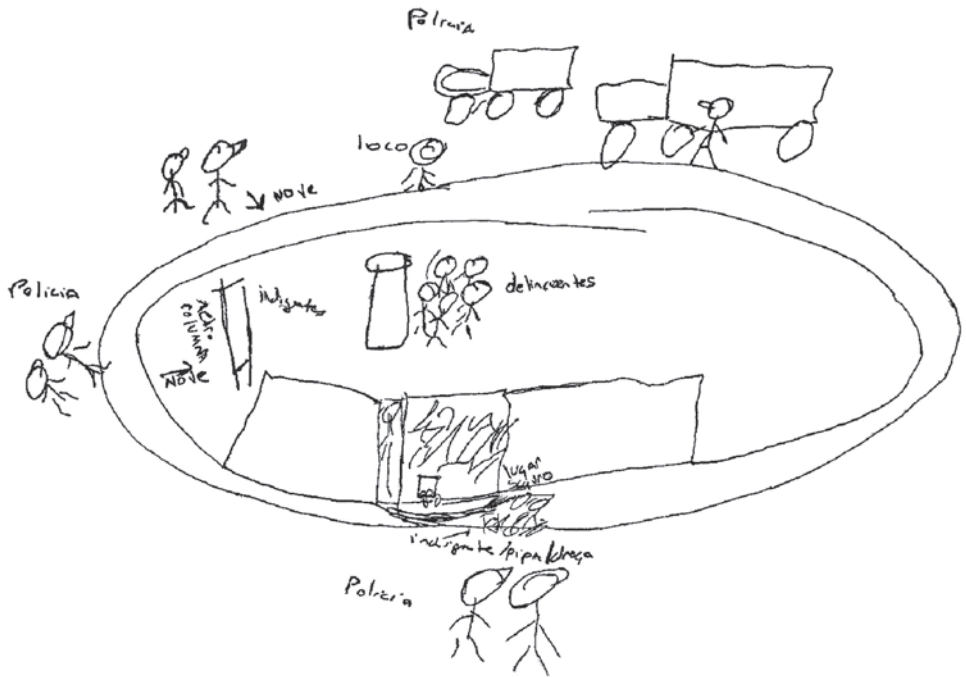


Fig. 11.4. Drawing by Mario (MDE\_FG1\_911), informal vendor, focus group, Medellín, July 2016.

Reporting illicit activities by the *Convivir*, much less the extortion that the vendors were subject to, could result in police colluding with the criminals to target the vendors for violence. As one informal vendor summarized the relationship between the police and the vendors, “We’re more afraid of the police than we are of thieves.”<sup>13</sup>

### Resistance as Informal Urban Political Engagement

But vendors resisted their victimization using everyday resistance. The concept of everyday resistance to criminal victimization draws on James Scott’s (1985) seminal work on the nuanced ways in which subaltern populations resist subordination. It entails a repertoire of individual-level practices, including discourses, rhetoric, and other noncoercive actions. Victims sporadically use these practices to negotiate the material aspect of their victimization (i.e., the extent of their financial losses), but also to contest the nonmaterial dimensions of extortion (i.e., the social and political strategies of domination that

criminal actors use). As Scott (1989, 37) argues, “For every form of appropriation there is likely to be one—or many—forms of everyday resistance devised to thwart that appropriation.”

To resist material domination vendors appealed to the very asymmetry in power between themselves and their victimizers. When criminals collected their weekly tribute, vendors delivered discourses that affirmed criminal authority but encouraged benevolent rule.<sup>14</sup> As one vendor noted, “When it comes time to pay them the *vacuna* (extortion tax) we have to become movie actors because it is better to have them as friends than as enemies.”<sup>15</sup> Through “acting” as resistance, vendors confirmed and challenged the authority of the criminal actor. During the focus groups several vendors recited some of the “lines” they use to this end, such as “You as the ones who see and know everything here must know that I haven’t sold a thing in so long. So how could I have money to pay when no one is buying?”<sup>16</sup> and “Well, nothing moves [in the market] without you saying it’s okay. So can’t you make people move their pockets and let loose some money here?”<sup>17</sup>

These performances reduced material taxation *at the margins* when the criminals allowed the vendors to pay half or less of the tribute. Several vendors indicated that given their precarious economic circumstances, these reductions still represented a gain: “*algo es algo*” (it’s better than nothing).<sup>18</sup> But it is the ability to sometimes deny the criminal actors exactly what they demand that vendors saw as more powerful than the marginal financial gain—a way to preserve their dignity in the face of victimization: “When you don’t give [the racket collectors] everything they want, you show them, you make them see that you are not some little dog following them and obeying them when they say ‘sit.’”<sup>19</sup>

Vendors used rhetorical tools to resist verbal insults by framing themselves *and* the criminal extortion racket as businesses. They in turn equalized their social status in the face of their victimizers’ efforts to denigrate their position in the social hierarchy:

I tell them “no” (when the racket’s collectors verbally insult the vendors). We are in the same situation. Working on the streets, out here where nobody cares about either of us. Both of us work hard to make a living, to feed our families and to survive. We are not that different.<sup>20</sup>

Vendors resisted offenses against their dignity as workers when the criminal group’s members attempted to hide illicit drugs in the vendors’ merchandise. The vendors indirectly reminded the criminals that they too were business owners to be treated with respect:

Yes, they try to extend the plaza (name given to micro-territory used for the sale of illicit drugs) into our businesses. So sometimes we find a little “package” that doesn’t belong in our things, and so with a lot of respect, we say: “Jefe [boss], the thing is, my food is at play here. Please help me and don’t hide this here.” Or if they take a chair and start selling (drugs) from right next to where I’m working, we say, “Oh, I’m so sorry, but I need the chair back for my customers.” And then you take it and they don’t have anywhere to sit. You have to make them feel uncomfortable. But also, in a respectful manner, we make our businesses get respected too.<sup>21</sup>

Finally, though police complicity with the criminals prevented vendors from enlisting them to support their resistance, vendors invoked their theoretical relationship with other parts of the state to resist political domination. They did not report their victimization because they feared retribution by the criminal group and further enabling political authorities to depict the vendors as a source of criminality. As one vendor indicated, “The state is always looking for reasons to paint us as criminals, even though we are not—we are only *surrounded* by them.”<sup>22</sup>

But the vendors did resist political domination by invoking the frames and rhetoric of the ideal-type citizenship found in the Colombian Constitution. This exemplifies what Scheingold (1974, ch. 2) calls the “myth of rights,” wherein the belief in the rights that the state formally grants, but denies in practice, can still provide a powerful catalyst for political mobilization.<sup>23</sup> Vendors invoked this belief in carefully worded discourses and orchestrated actions to make clear to the racket’s coordinators that the vendors reject the notion that they are second-class citizens. As one vendor noted:

They [criminals] tell us that we are trash, like what we sell. But we show them. We mobilize, we talk about rights, about the Constitution—our bible. We celebrate it while we work, talk about it, laugh about it, so that they hear us when they’re coming to collect their money.<sup>24</sup>

I regularly observed resistance to political domination enacted through strategic, everyday discussions among two or three vendors about their constitutionally guaranteed right to work. One morning three neighboring vendors at the market were discussing whether the city’s Public Space office would take away their merchandise to what they sarcastically refer to as the “North Pole”—a far-off warehouse where vendors must pay large fines to retrieve their wares. The vendors complained that the legal code that gave Public Space

agents this power was essentially a “law that allows the state to steal.” The three vendors then noticed one of the members of the *Convivir* crossing the street and approaching. “*Aquí viene el duro*” (Here comes the tough one), one of the vendors whispered. At that point I expected the conversation to end, but instead the vendors began talking more loudly about how the confiscation of their merchandise was a violation of their “Constitutional rights as citizens of this county.” A second stated loudly, “We all have rights, no matter how we earn [money] for our *pansito* (bread), *carajo* (fuck)!” The third vendor replied: “Even though we may not look like it, we are also citizens!”<sup>25</sup> I later asked one of these vendors why they carried on this way in front of the member of the *Convivir*. He answered: “So that they remember that they are not the only authorities here.”<sup>26</sup> Far from an organic extension of a conversation, the dialogue had been a strategic declaration to remind the victimizer that the vendors rejected political domination as part of their victimization.

## Conclusion

How do violent cities forge urban order? In what ways does the political process of building and sustaining urban order impact the everyday lives, perceptions, and political subjectivities of populations that remain vulnerable to criminal victimization? And how do these populations resist their victimization in the shadow of coexistence between the state and criminal actors?

In this chapter I used the analytical framework that Kaufmann and Sidney (this volume) advance, which challenges researchers to more explicitly theorize the informal processes and actors that are often behind the urban political, social, and economic outcomes that we seek to explain. I provided an empirical analysis of the case of Medellín, which, after a long period of intense violence, has over the past several decades become a point of reference among politicians, policymakers, investors, and international development agencies looking for solutions to urban crime, violence, and insecurity. But aligning with the notion that the editors of this volume advance that the process of urban policymaking is ambivalent and complex, I argue that theorizing urban security necessitates attention to the surprising ways that formal and informal politics coexist and become mutually dependent. In the case of Medellín, nontraditional mayors pointed to the reorientation of public investment and the broader project of social urbanism as the determinants of urban order. And while these policies may have contributed to some of the decline in lethal violence in Medellín, they cannot be divorced analytically from the informal

political context in which they emerged and were sustained—a criminal landscape where the highly fragmented pattern of territorial control of the past gave way to a comparatively more consolidated landscape with power in the hands of a small number of powerful criminal actors. By demanding order in the streets, criminal groups paradoxically provided a fruitful terrain—physical and political—in which incumbents could advance political projects that recast Medellín as a beacon of order in a notoriously violent country, advancing their political fortunes and the economic interests of their allies. To theorize urban order, we therefore need to consider both formal and informal politics and the interactions between the two.

Likewise, the analysis in this chapter urges a broadening of the cast of actors we normally consider in our theories of urban politics. Theories of urban regimes contend that the nature of relations between local political incumbents and private sector actors shape urban policymaking (e.g., Stone 1989). I propose that attention to the nature of urban regimes is necessary, but not sufficient, to explain urban political responses to crime in the developing world. Across developing-world cities, powerful criminal actors wield territorial control and impose constraints on the incentives and capacity of governing authorities to extend state territorial presence as part of responses to crime and, in turn, enforce the rule of law. This underscores how criminal actors participate at different points in the policymaking process, albeit indirectly. Greater attention to the role of criminal actors can yield stronger understandings of urban politics.

Finally, my analysis also incorporates the micro scale of an informal market in a major city within Colombia. My findings here urge greater attention to the micro spaces within cities where politics unfold. Likewise, it shows that we cannot understand micro-level politics within the city unless we consider politics unfolding in other micro spaces, given deep interlinkages along financial, social, and political lines, as well as the politics of the city as a whole.

#### NOTES

1. Territorial control refers to the ability of an actor to monitor and control entry and exit into an informally demarcated spatial unit.

2. “Miembros de ‘Convivir’ de Medellín Ganan un Millón de Pesos Mensuales,” *El Tiempo*, August 11, 2014.

3. The term *Convivir* is an acronym for *Cooperativas Comunitarias de Vigilancia Rural* (Community Cooperatives for Rural Vigilance).

4. Informality has nonetheless been useful for advancing political objectives under both nondemocratic (Collier 1976; Cross 1998) and democratic (Holland 2017) political regimes.

5. On the recycler population in Colombia, see Rosaldo (2016).
6. Field notes, Medellín, July 2016.
7. David (MDE\_FG8\_1112), informal vendor, focus group, Medellín, March 2017.
8. Evelyn (MDE\_FG2\_720), informal vendor, focus group, Medellín, July 2016.
9. Sebastian (MDE\_FG3\_406), informal vendor, focus group, Medellín, March 2017.
10. David (MDE\_FG8\_1112), informal vendor, focus group, Medellín, March 2017.
11. Simon (MDE\_FG2\_230), informal vendor, focus group, Medellín, July 2016.
12. Evelyn (MDE\_FG2\_720), informal vendor, focus group, Medellín, July 2016.
13. Simon (MDE\_FG2\_230), informal vendor, focus group, Medellín, July 2016.
14. See Kaplan (2017) on civilian use of “rhetorical traps” in wartime contexts.
15. David (MDE\_FG8\_1112), informal vendor, focus group, Medellín, March 2017.
16. Alfredo (MDE\_FG7\_101), informal vendor, focus group, Medellín, March 2017.
17. Mauricio (MDE\_FG3\_735), informal vendor, focus group, Medellín, March 2017.
18. Eva (MDE\_FG4\_51), informal vendor, focus group, Medellín, July 2016. Vendors across multiple focus groups used variants of this phrasing.
19. Focus group participant (MDE\_FG3\_550), Medellín, March 2017.
20. Antonella (IV\_MDE\_899), informal vendor, focus group, Medellín, July 2016.
21. Federnel (MDE\_FG6\_45), informal vendor, focus group, Medellín, March 2017.
22. Focus group participant (MDE\_FG3\_753), Medellín, March 2017.
23. See also McAdam (1982) on how African Americans asserted formally accorded rights to mobilize against structural racism, and Ewick and Silbey (1998) on everyday interpretations of laws as political acts.
24. Interview with Alicia (IV\_MDE\_911), informal vendor, Medellín, July 2016.
25. Author observation at informal vendor market, Medellín, July 2016.
26. Interview with informal vendor (IV\_MDE\_551), Medellín, July 2016.

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## Housing Policies, Claim-Making, and Resistance in African Cities

Jeffrey W. Paller

Africa's rapid urbanization is transforming the continent economically, socially, and politically. Cities offer African populations visions of modernity, opportunities for development, and connections across the globe, while increasing pressure on infrastructure and deepening inequality. In the process of city-making, African governments struggle to provide affordable housing and basic services for ordinary residents. Rising property values, influxes of foreign capital, insecure land rights, and political corruption exacerbate the housing shortage, often forcing the poor into informal settlements without tenure security (Auerbach et al. 2018). While national governments design policies to spur urban growth and development, local governments implement them unevenly, often resulting in the displacement of existing residents.

African governments have recently turned to National Urban Plans to help manage rapid urbanization. At least eighteen countries have such plans, though the policies vary institutionally and administratively (Cartwright et al. 2018). With the help of international funders and consultants, National Urban Plans are viewed as a way to attract foreign investment and achieve sustainable urban development. But similar to the experience of Brazil (Donaghy, this volume), China, and India (Zhang, this volume), local context shapes the successful implementation of these plans. These policies depend on coordination between multilevel governments and agencies (Kritz 2020), as well as

the participation of residents who are not passive bystanders in the process of urban development (Wong, this volume).

As part of the process of urban development, African governments turn to forced evictions and demolitions to make way for new infrastructure, housing, and other amenities. Residents are forced to relocate, or must fight to remain in place. As with evictions across the Global South, residents experience these events collectively (Weinstein 2021). They protest, bargain with traditional authorities and landowners, and take governments to court. These urban political dynamics disrupt the national political landscape by instigating legal and policy reforms, pressuring government representatives to action, and emboldening opposition parties and other nonstate actors. Less understood in existing scholarship, however, is the political process by which these policies came to be, as well as the degree to which housing policies themselves shape the contours of political participation. Housing policies enable residents to use certain forms of collective action, such as protests, slum-dweller associations, and land occupations, to resist displacement and claim belonging in the city, while constraining the use of other strategies.

Global urban policy analysis requires a better understanding of how national-level ambitions often compete or conflict with local-level needs and understandings. Local residents might resist national policies outright, as residents of Barendrecht and Barcelona did when they confronted environmental and migration policies, respectively (Bazurli and Verhoeven, this volume). But they might also disengage with or exit the policy process due to a lack of shared understanding with other residents (Landau, this volume). To better understand how local implementation and contestation of housing policy inform global policy analysis, this chapter examines how different groups come into conflict as they claim ownership and urban citizenship in Accra (Ghana), Cape Town (South Africa), Nairobi (Kenya), and Lagos (Nigeria).

The chapter proceeds as follows. First, I provide an overview of urbanization and housing policy across the continent. Second, I document the emergence of progressive housing policies in Accra and Cape Town, and explain how they enable poor communities to make claims for affordable housing. Third, I discuss how the politics of belonging in Accra and Lagos undermine residents' ability to claim rights to the city. Fourth, I show how multilevel governance in Nairobi and Accra impedes coalition-building and enables politicization of housing for electoral gain. I conclude by explaining how urban policy analysis requires close attention to the dynamic interaction between policy designs, governance systems, and modes of resistance.

### Rapid Urbanization in Africa

Africa is urbanizing at a rapid rate. In 1970, only 18 percent of Africans lived in cities. This number increased to 40 percent by 2018, and today Africa is majority urban (OECD/SWAC 2020). According to the United Nations population division, 472 million Africans are now estimated to live in cities, with the number increasing each day. Natural population increase, migration, and rural reclassification are the reasons for the increase. Unlike urbanization elsewhere, most African cities are growing without large-scale industrialization. Instead, violent conflicts, faulty agricultural policies, failing state institutions, centralized political development, economic investments, and informal-sector job opportunities spur African urbanization. This contributes to new pressure on land, leading to multiple claimants for property, which helps create winners and losers. The struggle over urban space is an intense new site of politics, where diverse stakeholders have competing visions of how land should be used and who can extract value from the city (Kohn 2016).

The contentious politics are particularly intense in Africa's fastest-growing and largest cities. For example, Lagos, Cairo, and Kinshasa already rank among the fifty largest cities in the world, and their strengthening ties to foreign governments and international capital firmly embed them in the global economy. It is only a matter of time before Johannesburg, Accra, Nairobi, and Dar es Salaam join the ranks of the world's largest cities. The desire to be a "world-class" city is at the forefront for city governments and planners, who aim to attract investment in massive sports facilities for international events or flashy financial districts (Cheeseman and de Gramont 2017), gated communities, and entire new cities (Grant 2009; Watson 2014). China's aggressive investments in infrastructure contribute to this rapid growth and development.

African cities offer incredible opportunities for investment, land speculation, and construction contracts, contributing to infrastructure developments, new construction booms, and urban renewal in city centers (Gillespie 2020). This has contributed to what some scholars call "urban land grabs," where they are promoted as the new frontier for global capital flows (Zoomers et al. 2017; Steel et al. 2019). Tech hubs have expanded, as they are the sites of Africa's rapidly growing middle and upper classes.

Many African leaders have high modernist goals, a vision of a new future with shiny skyscrapers, highways, and gated communities. Watson (2014) labels these "urban fantasies," based on "speculative urbanism" (Goldman 2011). These fantasies take the form of urban renewal, urban extension, or

entirely new satellite cities. These “new cities” encourage a vision of escape, social segregation, and exclusion (Klopp and Paller 2019). Many African leaders are looking to Dubai, Singapore, and Chinese cities as models of high modernism that do not require democratizing the political system. Largely absent from these plans are the poor, as the plans espouse a vision of a “city without slums” (Huchzermeyer 2011). Examples of these nationally inspired projects include Tatu City and Konza Techno City in Nairobi, Hope City in Accra, Kigamboni in Dar es Salaam, Eko Atlantic in Lagos, and Cité le Fleuve in Kinshasa (Watson 2014; see Van Noorloos and Kloosterboer 2018 for an extended list).

To make way for these high-end developments, cities engage in what some scholars have called “urban cleaning,” where government forces, including the police and military, destroy “illegal” slum settlements (Raleigh 2015). Large-scale evictions and displacements have occurred in Zimbabwe (2005, 2007), Angola (2007), Kenya (2008, 2009, 2010), Nigeria (2000, 2009), Sudan (2005), South Africa (2010), Ethiopia (2011, 2017), Uganda (2011), and many other countries. State coercion and social control are particularly evident in instances of forced evictions, where state governments use demolitions as a way to make urban slums legible to the government (Ghertner 2010). For example, demolitions in Kenya were used to curb popular dissent, as well as to punish opponents and reward loyal followers (Klopp 2008). While justified as responses to “public nuisances” or public health crises, demolitions serve powerful political interests by attaching the problem facing cities to these “illegal spaces” that are morally objectionable (Ghertner 2008; Macharia 1992).

Africa’s city dwellers, on the other hand, confront their changing and rapidly growing cities in numerous ways. Citizens must confront livelihood and land-use changes, spatial alteration, social segregation, and physical displacement (Steel et al. 2019). Most new development projects are tailored to fit the needs of the elite. For example, new highways are built to cater to those with cars. To build them, governments demolish structures and relocate hawkers. Many residents who lose their homes to modern housing developments cannot afford the new accommodations and must relocate. Urban construction gives politicians numerous opportunities for corruption and rent-seeking, undermining the public welfare. Traditional authorities such as chiefs and leaders of kinship groups, especially those who claim ownership or custodianship of urban property, flex their muscles and profit from skyrocketing land prices. The urban poor are typically the losers in the process.

I root the chapter in Accra, Ghana, where I have spent more than ten years researching urbanization and housing challenges. I conducted exploratory

fieldwork in 2009, ethnographic research in three neighborhoods in 2011 and 2012, survey research in sixteen neighborhoods in 2013, and key-informant interviews in several cities in 2016, 2017, 2019, and 2022. Accra is a particularly interesting case to study urban growth because it has many of the characteristics facing large African cities, including rapid growth, sprawl, informal settlements, emergence of a middle and upper class, and an influx of foreign capital and investment (Acheampong 2021). I supplement the Accra case with a controlled comparison with other cities, holding constant specific variables including progressive housing policies (Cape Town, South Africa), customary land tenure and the politics of belonging (Lagos, Nigeria), and challenges of multilevel governance (Nairobi, Kenya). This analysis extends my event analysis of forced evictions documented in Paller 2020.

### Progressive Housing Policies

The policy framework in a city can set the stage for bargaining and negotiation between community residents, relevant intermediaries, and government officials and politicians. Nowhere is this more evident than in Cape Town, where progressive housing policies enable communities to make universal claims to housing as a human right and articulate a “right to the city.” Similarly, in Ghana, the experience of residents and pro-poor organizations in resisting eviction and demolition helped inform the policymaking process, giving the urban poor a privileged position and importance in the urban policymaking process.

Ghana and South Africa are both urbanized societies with high levels of democratic engagement and rule of law, which have contributed to progressive housing policies. South Africa is notable for its progressive constitution, which includes the right to adequate housing and protects against unlawful eviction. The governing ANC claims to have built 3.2 million homes between 1994 and 2018. While Ghana does not have positive rights in place for housing in its constitution, it has devised a National Urban Plan, a National Housing Policy, and a National Spatial Development Plan, which include protections for the poor.

The South African Constitution enforces socioeconomic rights, stipulating that “everyone has the right to have access to adequate housing” and the state must take reasonable means to “achieve the progressive realization of this right” (1996 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, article 26). In addition, nobody can be evicted “without an order of the court.” The law, therefore, is

tasked with transforming a highly unequal society and achieving spatial justice. Cape Town's history of political and social exclusion dates back to the 17th century, and deepened during British and Afrikaans rule. The long history of legal segregation—enforced by the Black (Urban Areas) Act of 1923 and the Black (Urban Areas) Consolidation Act 25 of 1945—targeted development for the white minority (Strauss and Liebenberg 2014). Between the 1960s and 1980s, the government used the Group Areas Act to remove blacks, coloureds, and Indians from the city. This history of legal segregation—and the subsequent legal corrective outlined in the 1994 Constitution—places the law front and center in political mobilization and the social movements in the country (Heywood 2009). Poor residents who turn to land occupations justify their actions with claims to rights to access housing protected in the Constitution.

For example, in the early 2000s, the city of Cape Town evicted shack dwellers from their homes to make way for large housing projects, a World Cup stadium, and private developments. Many of these cases were legislated in court, with varying levels of success for the residents (Strauss and Liebenberg 2014). Shack demolitions, subsequent rebuilds, service delivery protests, and gatherings at court when eviction notices are served are common events (Levenson 2021a). Residents frame their activity as “land occupations,” and have support from the social movement organization Reclaim the City, as well as the news outlet *GroundUp*. In response, the city of Cape Town has an Anti-Land Invasion Unit that was formed in 2009 to stop people from illegally occupying land; it is the city's biggest law-enforcement operation.

The framing of identities is important in the struggle for housing: The residents use the term “occupiers,” while the city uses “invaders.” Landlords hire “red-ants”—private security agents—to demolish shacks on private land. Most of these demolitions occur after court-ordered eviction letters are granted, though there are many disputes over the process. Organizations use innovative forms of collective action. For example, Reclaim the City partnered with the world-famous guerilla activists the Yes Men and staged a “zombie rally” after sending out a press release spoof, stating that the city agreed to all of their demands (Wayland and Geffen 2019).

The progressive housing rights context shapes the types and modes of contention on the streets of Cape Town. South Africans view access to safe and affordable housing—and socioeconomic rights more generally—as a substantive part of the country's democracy (Levenson 2021b). These constitutional rights extend beyond consultation through “integrated development planning” and listening sessions, which many residents view as lip service (Levenson 2021b). To counter the housing shortage, residents take to the streets

and participate in land occupations as a “popular challenge” to poor service delivery. In addition, there is “racialized dispossession,” where blacks continue to be marginalized and excluded from the “new South Africa.” Squatting and land occupations, therefore, give South Africans the chance to claim belonging in the city—and citizenship in the new South Africa (Chance 2018).

While South Africa’s progressive housing policies are largely an outcome of legalistic maneuvers that emerged out of its 1994 democratic revolution, Ghana’s urban policies developed more incrementally. International agencies and organizations such as the World Bank, Cities Alliance, Amnesty International, UN-HABITAT, and the World Resources Institute have played important roles in coordinating government ministries and domestic stakeholders. This led to the launch of the National Urban Policy in 2012 and subsequent revisions (Ghana Urbanisation Think Tank 2019). The plan seeks to “comprehensively intervene in the urban sector to facilitate and promote the sustainable development of Ghanaian cities and towns . . . and promote a sustainable, spatially integrated and orderly development of urban settlements with adequate housing, infrastructure and services, efficient institutions, and a sound living and working environment for all people to support the rapid socio-economic development of Ghana.”

Perhaps more importantly, the development of progressive housing policies is also the outcome of vibrant struggles on the streets of Accra. Ghana’s history of mass action and public participation—facilitated by its democratic institutions—set the stage for claim-making and resistance in Accra. While demolitions and evictions are less common in Accra than in Cape Town, one is especially notable in the history of the city: the government’s order to evict 30,000 people living in an informal settlement along the Korle Lagoon in 2002.

The city government sought to redevelop the surrounding area into a tourist attraction (Grant 2006). To prevent removals of residents, they and their supporters relied on strategies that used legal institutions to enforce existing laws regarding tenure. Individuals, communities, and the movements that represented them sought the assistance of the Centre for Public Interest Law to mediate their claims against removal. But the Court ruled against the residents, prompting lawyer Farouk Braimah to organize the NGO People’s Dialogue on Human Settlements (PD) to engage in direct negotiation as well as public protest (Braimah 2010). PD linked with international funders like UN-HABITAT and Slum/Shack Dwellers International (SDI) to experiment with slum upgrading and fight to keep residents in place.

Unlike in South Africa, residents were forced to bypass the court system to push for progressive housing policies—and to remain in place. In their



shift to direct action, PD, with financial support from SDI, collectivized the struggle through protest and meetings in which government officials, activists, and concerned citizens met to discuss current challenges and solutions. Most importantly, PD became an intermediary between officials from the city government and the residents. PD sought to use its position as power broker to negotiate fair terms for potential relocation and compensation, while maintaining a public narrative that any relocation must happen “with a human face.” Amnesty International joined the housing rights struggle several years later in 2009 when it started to focus on forced evictions as violations of human rights. The advocates have made it clear that they are willing to work within the institutional structures to secure the tenure of their constituents, but also stress that residents should move and relocate to land that the government sets aside for them.

Housing activists have been able to directly influence the government’s plans to upgrade the city. For example, since 2001, the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy I focused on attracting foreign capital to fund housing development. The GPRS II (2006–2009) focused on poor and marginalized populations and detailed a special program for upgrading slums (Bank of Ghana 2007). Two major initiatives—the Cities without Slums action plan and the Slum Upgrading Facility—seek to mobilize foreign capital and to link this financial assistance with local actors. The projects package the financial, technical, and political elements of development projects. In essence, the fact that housing advocates held close relationships to state agencies allowed them a voice in the process (see Donaghy 2018, this volume). Some NGOs now serve as important intermediaries in providing sanitation facilities to the urban poor.

Progressive housing activists and members of the media have helped push for the inclusion of human rights language in housing law and policy, the cancellation of eviction notices, the tacit acceptance of squatters as tenants (but not necessarily owners) of property, and initiating public service projects for the urban poor, especially in terms of sanitation. These victories came through the strategy of intense negotiation with government officials at multiple levels of governance. These human rights NGOs have opened new avenues of participation for the residents, while also helping shift public opinion toward the needs of the poor.

Over time, they strengthened their relationship with the state, especially ministries at the national level. Housing policies now focus on the needs of the poor and affordable housing, as well as human rights protections against forced eviction. Today, Ghana has a very progressive urban policy framework that places the poor front and center in its National Urban Plan and the Spa-

tial Development Framework. The government even formed a Ministry of Inner Cities and Zongo Development to provide more resources to poor urban neighborhoods. However, as in South Africa and as the next sections document, in the process of implementation progress in providing affordable housing comes into contact with local struggles.

### The Politics of Belonging

The process of implementing national housing policies often gets wrapped up in tensions between local understandings of power. The cases of Accra and Lagos illustrate how customary land tenure and the politics of belonging—which are both experienced at the neighborhood level—constrain the successful implementation of housing for the urban poor. While Ghana and Nigeria both boast multiparty elections and democratic constitutions, the politics of belonging in Accra and Lagos undermines some residents' ability to claim rights to the city. Powerful indigenous populations claim ownership of the city through customary tenure, to the exclusion of migrants and “strangers” who have been living in the city for decades. Legal pluralism—the existence of multiple legal systems within one geographic jurisdiction—can undermine the universal claim for rights to the city. This is especially true in postcolonial settings where the “land question” is most intense and politically salient (Berry 2002).

An important part of “seeing like a city” in urban policy analysis involves dealing with intense land conflicts at the local level. While property rights are often treated as a given in urban studies, China and India's experience of urbanization (Ren 2021; Zhang, this volume) demonstrates how variation in land tenure arrangements shapes patterns of urban development. In the African context, ambiguous property rights, and the narratives that emerge from these settings, shape contours of peaceful existence and prospects for violence (Klaus 2020).

In many African cities, especially those in West Africa like Lagos and Accra, families and traditional authorities who claim indigenous rights to the territory own and administer land. These claims are heightened in the multiparty context, because politicians align with powerful landowners to advance their electoral interests. Customary land tenure also shapes claims to urban space, because indigenous populations label “stranger” and migrant communities as outsiders and as not always deserving a “right to the city.” Alternatively, indigenous communities often lose out in the context of rapid urbanization because

rising property values can displace poor indigenes, contributing to a powerful source of resentment that is often politicized by politicians (Njoh 2017). This is not so different from cases elsewhere, where host populations are displaced through the process of gentrification (Morel et al. 2021).

A complicating factor in the housing policies of urban Ghana is the role of indigenous chiefs and their control of land. In the neocustomary land tenure regimes that are prevalent in West Africa, host populations claim ancestral rights to the land based on their indigenous or first-comer status (Boone 2014). The Ga people are the indigenes of Accra and Ga families control ownership rights and make claims to state resources as first-comer entitlements. This has significantly hampered the implementation of pro-poor housing policies, because a loud and vibrant Ga nationalist movement has mobilized against migrants, especially in its squatter settlements. For example, the Ga Mashie Development Association (GAMADA)—an organ of the Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA)—serves the interest of the native Ga ethnic group and prioritizes a “city for indigenes.” This group is vocal in improving the lives of Accra’s inner-city residents, but only those of the Ga ethnic group who “came here first.”

To complicate matters, the Ga nationalist interest group has significant influence inside the city government. This coalition is closely aligned with GAMADA, which tries to gain as much influence as possible in city government. Most chief executives of AMA come to power because of support from the Ga chiefs. The consequence is that a pro-poor housing agenda directly conflicts with indigenous claims to the land, forcing housing rights advocates to work within a limited framework that appeals to customary land claims. It also undercuts a powerful pro-poor coalition that could pressure the government to take seriously the needs of all Ghanaians and their housing requirements.

The result is that the housing rights movement and the ethnic nationalists have competing relationships with the state. This forces poor urban residents to seek inclusion in Ghana’s democracy via different pathways. For example, GAMADA bolstered their connections to the city government and sought in situ slum upgrading for neighborhoods with large numbers of indigenes, like Ga Mashie and Chorkor. They sought international financing from UN-HABITAT, among others, but captured these resources for specific indigenous neighborhoods. Therefore, the major goal of this movement focused on urban renewal, seeking renovation of public markets like Salaga Market, the James Town Harbor, and the construction of multiple-story buildings that could accommodate a growing population.

Alternatively, migrant and squatter populations are forced to align with

NGOs and other national agencies, often competing against municipal authorities. These dynamics have led to the proliferation of administrative units. For example, AMA now encompasses a much smaller share of the Greater Accra population than it has in the past, making multisector coordination more difficult and contentious.

Land and ownership conflicts are at the center of urban development challenges in Lagos as well. Today, powerful traditional authorities align with government representatives to secure property deals, invest in real estate development, and displace the urban poor. The NGO Justice & Empowerment Initiatives estimates that more than 2.3 million Nigerians have been forcefully evicted from their homes in the past twenty years (Kazeem 2020). Dating back to 1996, Lagos State identified eleven slums for eviction, setting the stage for contention for years to come. They evicted fisher folk from waterfront communities, traders from markets, students from universities, and shack dwellers from at least eight informal settlements.

Lagos's population is estimated at 23.5 million people, and grows by 85 people each hour. It is the financial powerhouse of West Africa, and the cultural heart that produces cutting-edge art houses and birthed Nollywood. The city is now celebrated for quality regional government, enhanced tax collection, and the development of a social contract between citizens and Lagos State. It has become "a model city" in West Africa (Kaplan 2014). But the transformation of Lagos has come with serious costs. Rising inequality and crime persist, and the traffic can bring life to a standstill. The urban poor feel the brunt of the urban transformation. Many have been displaced from their neighborhoods as their homes are demolished.

For example, in November 2016, approximately 30,000 residents of the Otodo Gbame slum in Lagos were forcibly evicted from their homes. Otodo Gbame is an ancestral fishing village located on the valuable waterfront. The Elegushi family of local chiefs claims ownership and custodianship over the land by customary law. Politicians and developers maintain close ties to the family; they use these land claims to advance their own agendas.

These families point to history to back up their land claims. Several villages of Yoruba people originally inhabited Lagos Island, and developed a growing trade network with other Africans, Portuguese, and freed slaves from Brazil. The legal system institutionalized the authority of indigenous landowners after independence, giving them considerable control over land. These authorities, called White Cap Chiefs, were also members of the Senate (see Section 34 [ii] of the 1963 Constitution) in the First Republic in 1963. They are legally and traditionally regarded as the overlords of Lagos, and control land alloca-

tion today (Akinyele 2009, 114). In 1978, the government standardized land tenure in the country to spur development with the passage of the Land Use Act, which vested all urban land within a state (there are thirty-six states in Nigeria). In practice, however, this strengthened alliances between the White Cap Chiefs and politicians. Other populations—especially many of the fisher folk and traders—who have been living in the city for decades, cannot claim this indigenous status.

Real estate deals are often not documented in the official record, and property rights and land titles remain ambiguous and insecure. In the case of Otodo Gbame, community members suspect that the Elegushi family plans to sell the land to developers who will build homes for wealthy people. The family allegedly hired thugs to evict the slum dwellers, set fire to their homes, and demolish them, with the backing of the police.

The action directly violated a recent court injunction that ordered a halt to the planned demolition of waterfront structures by the Lagos State government. While the slum dwellers appeared to have the court ruling on their side, the state government nonetheless moved forward with the demolition. The Nigerian Slum/Informal Settlement Federation, an advocacy group, sent a letter to the judge arguing the importance of human rights and emphasizing the residents' "right to the city." The group argued, "We belong to the city and we have a right to the city as well as a right to shelter and livelihood. Forceful eviction is not only unlawful, it is also ineffective." Yet "traditional landowners" dispute this right to the city, and politicians engage in corrupt deals to essentially "sell them off."

The situation was quickly politicized. Officials offered their support for the demolition, despite the fact that most residents support the ruling party. The governor was slow to issue a statement, and the local government did not strongly defend the community. The residents protested and received backing from internationally funded human rights organizations such as the Justice & Empowerment Initiatives. Amnesty International issued a statement declaring, "The authorities involved in this destruction are in flagrant violation of the law." In November 2016, a Lagos State High Court ordered the state government to consult with residents and provide relocation options before taking further action. The court found that the recent demolition was "inhuman and degrading."

Residents still do not have legal ownership of their homes. In March 2017, Lagos State authorities allegedly violated the court ruling and demolished some 4,700 structures in Otodo Gbame without proper notice. Residents were forced to move to other waterfront communities. The other waterfront com-

munities continue to face the threat of imminent demolition. For example, high-end development projects like Eko Atlantic—a six-square-mile filled-in island modeled after Singapore and Dubai—prioritize the needs of a small slice of the population, leaving behind millions of Nigerians who reside in the city.

In Lagos, the lack of political representation, connections with traditional authorities, and the state government leave the urban poor without strong advocates for their cause. Similar dynamics are at play in Accra, where the politics of belonging undermines potential cross-ethnic coalitions that could prioritize the needs of the poor above those in the elite class. Ambiguous property laws and a weak rule of law further magnify the politics of belonging and undermine the housing rights of ordinary residents. Just as importantly, the coalitions that form between community-based organizations and government agencies often depend on underlying land struggles and politics of belonging, and thus deserve a central space in urban policy analysis.

### Challenges of Multilevel Governance

A key aspect of the “seeing like a city” urban policy framework is to uncover the actors and institutions operating at different levels and scales of governance. This complicates the relationship between local communities and the state. Events in Accra and Nairobi demonstrate how interagency feuds and multilayered governmental authorities contribute to uneven implementation of housing policy.

On May 4, 2020, bulldozers demolished hundreds of structures in Kariobangi Sewage Slum in Nairobi to make way for a sanitation project. This was despite a court order halting the eviction. The government agency blamed politicians, churches, and businesses for grabbing land, which got in the way of mass transit expansion. Politicians quickly took sides: Some blamed the residents who were illegally squatting on waterways, and others the state for engaging in corruption and not providing enough affordable housing. Policymakers and experts blamed poor planning and documentation. But the scope and scale of these efforts also expose the importance of the capital city to economic empowerment and political advancement, as interagency feuds, struggles between politicians, and the capture of public services undermine sustainable development (Goodfellow and Jackman 2023).

The recent history of Nairobi is also a history of political struggle between the national government and local authorities. This struggle came to a head in mid-2020, when the national government formed Nairobi Metropolitan

Services (led by a military leader), which took control of the administrative functions of the city from the county government. The central government reallocated the budgeted resources for Nairobi through this unelected body, appointed a military leader to serve as city administrator, and asserted the power of the presidency in local affairs. This intervention undermined the body elected by the people; it also undercut the decentralization and devolution reforms passed in the new 2010 Constitution that was widely lauded for its stances on rights and justice.

This intervention is also part of a longer set of power grabs by the national government, including the Nairobi City Commission of 1983, the Ministry of Nairobi Metropolitan Development by the Grand Coalition Government of 2008, the Nairobi Metropolitan Area Transport Authority of 2017, and the Nairobi Regeneration Committee of 2018 (Ngumbau 2020). The national government implemented all of these “reforms” to help “save” the city from impending collapse and crisis blamed on the corruption of elected officials. While the special administrative unit was eventually discarded from a proposed constitutional referendum bill, tensions between the central government and local authorities persist.

In 2014, the county government of Nairobi completed the Nairobi Integrated Urban Development Plan to replace the city’s master plan developed in 1973. In practice, however, national agencies like the Kenya Urban Roads Authority and the Kenya National Highways Authority commissioned huge infrastructure projects that did not consider the needs or desires of residents, and did not follow the guidelines set out in the urban plan. National agencies ignored the plans altogether, working within their own frameworks for infrastructure development; large contracts for infrastructure projects can bring substantial economic windfalls for elites.

Most of these national interventions were followed by ruthless slum demolitions. The most famous of these were the Muruto demolitions in 1990, which targeted urban opposition, quelled popular dissent, and highlighted the military might of the governing Kenya African National Union (KANU) regime (Klopp 2008). In August 2018, the National Environmental Management Authority demolished all “illegal structures” on riparian lands. Politicians quickly politicized these demolitions. In addition, government companies and agencies such as Kenya Railways, Kenya Pipeline Company, and Kenya Urban Roads Authority evicted thousands of people, including 20,000 people in Kibera, to make way for a highway. Many demolitions took place in the middle of the night—called “midnight demolitions”—and residents claim they did not receive proper notice, despite court orders mandating that they

be notified in advance. While the challenges of multilevel governance and coordination are clearly evident, these decisions reflect the national government's desire to control the city and profit from large-scale infrastructure projects to bolster their strength.

As in Cape Town, these demolitions and evictions—and power plays by the central government—do not occur in a historical vacuum. Kenya has a long history of exploitation, marginalization, and segregation (Ese and Ese 2020). Colonial authorities founded Nairobi in 1899 as a railway depot. British authorities settled in the “leafy” areas, while the black laboring poor settled informally in low-lying environs near employment opportunities. Landlord-tenant agreements developed into entrenched patron-client relationships between politicians and residents, as well as ethnically defined residential patterns. In the early years of settler colonialism, the city demolished “African villages” to make way for modern development. Toward the end of colonial rule in 1948, the city developed a master plan that envisioned Nairobi as a “green city”; it was even referred to as the “green city in the sun” (Igadwah 2020). But as the population grew, formal development could not keep pace with the growing masses of urban poor coming to settle in the city.

Over the years, informal settlements have provided significant opportunities for land speculation. Residents in these neighborhoods face the threat of displacement, giving politicians more power to serve as a powerful voice and protector of their livelihoods. For example, former governor of Nairobi City County, Mike Sonko, declared after one demolition, “I will be the first to die before you are evicted. We don’t want that nonsense. God knows why you are living in slums. It is not your choice” (Ndonga 2019). Moreover, Sonko directly contradicted the order of the Nairobi Metropolitan Services (discussed above), signaling a power struggle between the two authorities. An additional consequence of Nairobi’s urban growth and decentralization of power is the proliferation of criminal gangs and shadow authorities (Haysom and Opala 2020). Many politicians support and protect these criminal entities through patronage and protection, relying on them as vote banks while turning a blind eye when it comes to their squatting.

These eviction threats spur countermobilization—social appropriation of existing organizations and innovative forms of collective action. As in Ghana, slum-dweller associations emerged with the help of the international alliance Slum/Shack Dwellers International. Like Justice & Empowerment Initiatives in Lagos and People’s Dialogue on Human Settlements in Accra, Muungano wa Wanavijiji in Nairobi reframed slum-dweller rights as human rights, with the support of Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. Their affiliated



groups, such as Pamoja Trust, employed technology—especially mapping and GIS—to document areas under the threat of eviction, enabling their residents to have a voice in the urban redevelopment process (Pamoja Trust 2020).

Nairobi residents have recently adopted innovative forms of collective protest against urban development projects that threaten the environment. The most recent example is growing dissent against the seventeen-mile Nairobi Highway that cuts through the city. Protesters first expressed outrage that it cut through Uhuru Park, and then fought against cutting down an iconic fig tree (Dahir 2020). Others worry that the highway is making the country more indebted to China. Urban development in Nairobi is threatening the environment, as public parks, gardens, and public green spaces all feel the toll of rapid housing and infrastructure projects (UN-HABITAT 2020). These collective protests are necessary in a legal context that does not protect against eviction (Zhu 2020). Kenya does have safeguards in its law, including the 2009 Evictions and Resettlement Guidelines, which require the government to publish the order with ninety-day notice (Kenya Ministry of Land 2009). There have also been numerous court cases that honor a human-rights-centered housing policy (Zhu 2020). Yet government agencies—and the politicians who profit—continue to act with impunity.

As in Nairobi, party politics and political clientelism shape urban development in Accra. Housing activists' strategies have changed depending on the regime in government, as well as which parliamentarian represents the residents. Perhaps the most difficult period for housing activists supporting squatters was from 2000 to 2004, when a New Patriotic Party (NPP) government governed the country and controlled an important central Accra (Odo-diodiodoo constituency) parliamentary seat, while most residents supported the opposition. During this time, residents in the slum Old Fadama lost their court case, and also faced late-night detentions that people recount as "join the line." For urban policy analysis, it is critical to understand that the party in power plays the most important role in implementing urban policies.

The tension between the government and the residents softened during the election campaign of 2004. During the primary campaign, the opposition candidate made strong inroads with squatters in an effort to win votes. The party inaugurated new branches—local offices with party executives—in order to increase the number of delegates. The opposition parliamentarian's victory in 2004 also affected the movement, providing a new avenue for residents to have their voices heard. Perhaps more importantly, it enabled a platform of engagement for the leaders of the movement to influence policy and slow evictions.

Over time, housing activists sought close linkages with political parties.

NGOs could serve as power brokers between residents and potential contractors for the city government. Given the long history of multiparty politics and state-led planning, housing movements made claims on the state in terms of democratic inclusion. Leaders in squatter settlements organized with help from nonprofit organizations, which established close ties with the Ministry of Water Resources, Works, and Housing; the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development; and the Ministry of Tourism and Diaspora Relations, as well as the mayor of Accra (Braithwaite 2010). By 2008, significant progress in resettling squatters had been made.

But the 2008 elections changed these tactics. The incoming government appointed a new mayor, and internally disputed what to do about Old Fadama. The mayor allied with Ga nationalists and Ga chiefs, and promoted eviction and demolition without supporting compensation. The chiefs viewed the squatters as trespassers on their land and city, which was an impediment to potential kickbacks on development deals. The president, on the other hand, urged the protection of human rights and “eviction with a human face.”

Meanwhile, as neighborhoods continued to grow, politicians relied on new migrants for votes. From 2008 to 2016, for example, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) extended its organizational machinery in the squatter settlement of Old Fadama, expanding from eleven local branches to twenty-seven. Unable to demolish all the structures at once, the mayor targeted outer sections of the neighborhood. Demolitions occurred in 2012 and 2015, a sign of the coercive capacity of the metropolitan government. Residents strengthened their clientelistic linkages with the governing party, seeking patronage relationships for a narrow segment of the population (Donaghy and Paller 2023).

In both Nairobi and Accra, urban development cannot be separated from party and power politics. Multilevel governance is not a technocratic distinction—it mirrors deeply entrenched political blocs in the city. Urban policy-making depends on political settlements between competing government agencies, as well as overcoming the “contentious governance” involving alliances between nonstate actors and the state to challenge the implementation of national urban policies (Bazurli and Verhoeven, this volume).

## Conclusions

This chapter demonstrates how urban policy analysis requires that we pay close attention to the dynamic interaction between policy designs, governance systems, and modes of resistance. Critically, citizens directly participate in the

process of urban policymaking, shaping policies and enabling or constraining successful implementation. To “see like a city,” global urban policymakers need to understand how citizens experience their city from the vantage points of their neighborhoods. This framework highlights how the rule of law and urban policy processes are embedded in contentious political and governance struggles over urban space. National initiatives and local desires do not always align.

The dynamic interactions among diverse stakeholders at the local, national, and global scales are evident in the four African city case comparisons in this chapter. These comparisons offer some important conclusions. First, progressive housing policies built on constitutionally mandated access to affordable housing and participatory problem-solving provide an avenue for achieving a just housing policy, but they do not on their own overcome historically rooted social inequalities. Second, the “right to the city” is not a given. Populations on the ground compete over ownership, land use, and tenure, which are often subject to deep-rooted struggles over belonging in the city. A just housing policy requires directly strengthening the land rights of residents, as well as understanding how the politics of belonging shape everyday politics in urban neighborhoods (Paller 2021). Third, multilevel governance is not merely administrative, but political. Coordination and collaboration are not enough; political settlements are required that will inevitably lead to winners and losers.

The interactions among housing policy, governance systems, and modes of resistance contribute to city-making across Africa. This chapter suggests that constructing a just housing policy requires an analysis based on “seeing like a city” (Enright 2020; Kaufmann and Sidney 2020), in which diverse stakeholders have competing visions of how urban space should be used and who can extract value from it (Kohn 2016). Importantly, this involves getting local communities, municipal authorities, and politicians on the same page—to buy in to urban plans that are in the best interest for all.

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## Conclusion





## Constituting Elements of an Urban Policy Analysis

David Kaufmann and Mara Sidney

The diverse chapters in this book underscore the need for place-based contextual analysis to understand urban policies and processes. Despite the importance of context, we nevertheless detect similarities among policies enacted in and for urban sites around the world. We see the iterative movement between identifying distinctive and similar patterns as key to urban policy analysis; it enables scholars, practitioners, and activists to collectively build urban policy knowledge both from inside and across dynamic, complex urban settings. It allows for a simultaneously *global and local* urban policy analysis.

In this conclusion, we discuss the common threads that weave through the book, those that we find particularly interesting as we sketch a way forward for an urban policy analysis of global relevance. First, we recognize the centrality of housing and urban development as core contestations, alongside several other important urban policy issues. Second, we consider the simultaneous importance of both everyday and formal processes to urban policy and policymaking and analysis. Following from this, we describe urban policy conflicts across chapters—their rootedness in the everyday and in sociospatial settings, and the tendency of these conflicts to produce highly unequal outcomes, mostly to the disadvantage of already marginalized groups of people. Next, we discuss the dominance of qualitative contextual and comparative research in

the book, its importance for urban policy analysis, and how it might be further developed. We then think about how research methods connect to research ethics. While stressing the need to account for and counter urban inequalities and injustices, we end with some glimpses of hope that the study of urban policy can offer in contemporary times.

### Housing and Urban Development: Inequality and Contestation

The chapters cover a broad range of urban policies, including public safety, migration, environmental protection, economic development, and public finance; they examine whether urban residents feel a sense of belonging in the city and its politics, and how various people and groups participate in urban policymaking. The chapters show the breadth of urban policy measures in what are typically considered urban issues, and beyond. While authors examine a variety of urban policy fields, at least half of the chapters focus on housing and urban development, issues that play critical roles in the lives of urban residents and in today's urban policy contestations.

Around the world, cities struggle to provide adequate and affordable housing, especially for low-income residents (Debrunner et al. 2024); the housing crisis is global (Rolnik 2019). Our chapters show that the conflict between the exchange and use values of urban space remain at the center of many contemporary urban policy struggles (Lefebvre 1968; Logan and Molotch 1989). Moreover, these conflicts occur locally but also very much globally. The struggle over urban space and its de/commodification is an intense site of urban politics, where diverse actors have competing visions for how land should be used and who should extract value from the city (e.g., Sassen 2014; Kohn 2016; Pasotti 2020).

In this book, for example, both Jeff Paller, studying African cities, and Yue Zhang, comparing Guangzhou and Mumbai, stress that there is a shortage of affordable housing due to rural-urban migration, rising property values, influxes of foreign capital, insecure land rights, and political corruption and rent-seeking. Together these factors drive the poor into informal settlements without tenure security, or out of informal settlements when public or private sector actors are redeveloping them with more modern housing. Paller compares contestations around affordable housing policies in Accra, Cape Town, Nairobi, and Lagos, in the context of international financial investments in housing:

African cities offer incredible opportunities for investment, land speculation, and construction contracts, contributing to infrastructure developments, new construction booms, and urban renewal in city centers (Gillespie 2020). This has contributed to what some scholars call “urban land grabs,” where they are promoted as the new frontier for global capital flows.

Yet profit-maximizing urban development actions are not only observable in the cities of the Global South. Wilson (in this volume) uses racial capitalism as an analytical framework to examine unjust governance arrangements and adverse outcomes of public actions in Detroit. In this regard, a lot can be learned by comparing and discussing housing and urban development in cities across the world (see also the section, “Comparisons in Urban Policy Analysis”).

Our authors point to the fact that government officials often respond to crises in affordable housing with a double logic aimed to appease both market actors and urban residents in need of housing. They mix market-oriented deregulation with social housing policy. Maureen Donaghy describes the housing policy in São Paulo, Brazil:

Housing is viewed alternately as a human right for all or a market good to be allotted based on the ability to pay. Government programs for housing generally mediate between these two opposing dynamics by aiming to provide housing to those who cannot afford market rates while working within the system of housing finance and development.

Local governments therefore have an ambiguous role: They protect powerful financial interests under the rationale of urban renewal or slum upgrading, but they also sometimes develop innovative housing policies, work toward decommodifying housing by collaborating with housing cooperatives, engage in the acquisition of land, provide social housing to the poor, or organize participatory processes around housing developments.

It’s not surprising that this double-sided urban housing policy agenda is contested and often fails to deliver. Diverse actors and social movements worldwide call for the democratization and decommodification of urban housing policy (e.g., Kadi, Vollmer, and Stein 2021). Beveridge and Koch (this volume) describe how housing activists in Berlin aimed to decommodify housing stock by making use of direct democracy and bypassing entrenched party and

electoral politics. The successful local referendum in Berlin proposed to buy the housing stock of large private housing companies at below-market prices to transfer them to common property. In this way, Berlin aimed to create an urban housing commons. However, the chapter by Hinze and Smith (this volume) presents different dynamics within urban development initiatives in Berlin. The authors discuss a local referendum against a large proposed urban waterfront development project called Mediaspree. The coalition of actors involved was complex, and the actors were difficult to clearly distinguish from one another, to the extent that so-called “grassroots protest” was a frame used by private development interests. The coalition itself did very little for actual residents facing increasing rents or displacement. As this comparison of urban development initiatives in Berlin suggests, urban policy initiatives and the constellations of actors’ around them can be ambivalent, used simultaneously to include and to exclude.

It is not just that urban development initiatives and housing policy ideas are contested. These policies have material outcomes, mostly at the expense of the already marginalized and vulnerable. Urban development can be a violent process that forces existing low-income residents out of their homes and communities. As Paller (this volume) describes, forced evictions and demolitions of settlements throughout African cities clear land for new infrastructure or high-end housing:

To make way for these high-end developments, cities engage in what some scholars have called “urban cleaning,” where government forces including the police and military destroy “illegal” slum settlements (Raleigh 2015). Large-scale evictions and displacements have occurred in Zimbabwe (2005, 2007), Angola (2007), Kenya (2008, 2009, 2010), Nigeria (2000, 2009), Sudan (2005), South Africa (2010), Ethiopia (2011, 2017), Uganda (2011), and many other countries.

Yet there is also resistance to these extractive practices of urban development. The chapters document cases where residents and communities fight back to remain in place. Wong (this volume) accompanied immigrant women activists in New York’s gentrifying Chinatown who fought for their communities against multimillion-dollar housing developments, through subtle and everyday practices of resistance. Zhang (in this volume) studied how informal settlement dwellers interact with governmental authorities to gain a voice in urban development policies. Beveridge and Koch (this volume) illustrate how housing activists aimed to “common” the housing stock in Berlin. Paller (this

volume) describes how urban residents in African cities protested and bargained with traditional authorities and landowners, and took governments to court. Activist, pro-poor, and community organizations used the knowledge and experiences that they acquired while resisting evictions and demolition to become better informed about housing policies more generally, giving the urban poor a stronger position, voice, and capacity to intervene in the future.

### Formal and Informal Actors, Policy Processes, Practices, and the Urban Everyday

As authors in this volume investigate sites of policymaking and the diverse actors involved, they demonstrate the importance of considering the *urban everyday*. They explore how urban policies are situated in the urban everyday, meaning that diverse actors negotiate and implement policies in their everyday activities and practices, and that policies and institutions in turn shape everyday activities and practices. By doing so, the authors often employ and extend long-standing urban governance and policy studies approaches, which draw attention to interactions between formal and informal actors, and to the material outcomes of public policies.

This key finding of the book, that formal and everyday policy processes should be considered simultaneously in an urban policy analysis, might be attributed to the multidisciplinary nature of this book, which fuses urban studies with public policy studies and studies of urban politics. Marques (2024, 23) discusses a disconnect between the fields of urban studies (a multidisciplinary field mostly dominated by geography and sociology), policy studies, and political science. The disconnect among these fields has led to the creation of separate bodies of knowledge and theory.

Our book tries to overcome these conceptual and theoretical separations. When our authors conceptually discuss the everyday aspects of urban political life, they are likely to refer to urban studies literature. When they stress the importance of institutions, policy processes, and path dependencies, they tend to engage with policy studies and political science literature. In the words of Marques (2024, 23), “While urban studies focused on politics in (and around) society, political science and policy studies were interested in politics in (and around) the state, institutions and governments.” Overall, we advocate for a combination of policy studies and urban politics with urban studies (see also Kaufmann and Sidney 2024). This is one of the essences of our book. While some chapters are more embedded in urban governance and policy studies,

others start from a more urban studies perspective. Our book thus contributes to urbanizing policy studies and conceptualizing policy within urban studies.

The book therefore proposes giving more consideration to urban everyday activities and practices that are not normally considered by traditional policy studies, nor always by urban governance approaches. What policy studies and political science can offer in return is sensitivity to the roles that both formal and informal policy processes and institutions play in these everyday practices, and how policies aim to shape material sociospatial outcomes for diverse groups. One key takeaway from this book is that urban policies influence everyday urban activities, and they influence fundamental decisions, such as who can live where, who has access to various services and (land) uses, and who is excluded from them. We try to highlight these two aspects in this section, proposing that an urban policy analysis should be attentive to formal and informal policy processes and their entanglements with the urban everyday.

### *The Urban Everyday*

We mentioned the involvement of diverse actors and the importance of everyday activities in the discussions about resistance to urban development and housing policies. Beveridge and Koch (in this volume) most directly articulate what an urban everyday understanding of policymaking requires—a shift in understanding of the agents, processes, and institutions through which policy unfolds (see also their book *How Cities Can Transform Democracy*, Beveridge and Koch 2023). This means that a focus on governments and formal institutions and the actors who populate these formal political processes (such as parties, interest groups, policy entrepreneurs, public administrations, and organized business) should be complemented with an analysis of activists and residents and their spatial practices. Through a lens of urban everyday practices, we can observe multiple claims and practices of self-governing in the urban, while the apparent sovereignty of state authorities is challenged or deferred.

The consequences of shifting the key actors through which to study urban everyday policy is also apparent in Wong's chapter (this volume), as she stresses that

a renewed focus on urban everyday politics expands how we understand where transformative changes unfold in cities, and also the constellation of diverse actors who are critical in shaping urban policy processes, including migrant workers, street vendors, taxi drivers,

domestic workers, massage parlor workers, sex workers, and those who are unhoused, disabled, or chronically ill.

Such workers have too often been relegated to the peripheries in urban studies research. Urban policy analysis therefore should examine local and often tacit knowledge. This knowledge can then be compared to the knowledge of professional practitioners, academic experts, and government officials. We would expect disparities between the more delocalized and technocratic expert knowledge and rationalities, and the local everyday knowledge and rationalities of diverse actors on the ground. Our assumption follows the work of the planning scholar Vanessa Watson (2003, 404), who describes how policymakers, planners, and academics all too often base their interventions or recommendations

on values, beliefs, or rationalities of those for (or with) whom they plan, which frequently do not hold. The only way to counter this is to explore, in context, examples of planning intervention which illustrate the various rationalities at play and how they interact with each other in a planning or development process.

Following from that, we believe that an important part of urban policy analysis is to reveal and expose these conflicting and competing rationalities and to identify planning interventions and policy designs that take seriously the lived realities of the most disadvantaged urban dwellers. Turning again to Watson (2003, 404–5), who discusses the work of Donna Haraway (1991), we find it important to see “from the perspective of the ‘subjugated,’ not because people who are oppressed are ‘innocent’ but because in principle they are least likely to allow denial of the critical and interpretative core of all knowledge.”

Everyday practices also cast light on how we understand formality, challenging the often-constructed dichotomy between formality and informality. Zhang (in this volume) conceptualizes informality as a mode of urbanization in China and India that is not beyond the reach or capacity of states. This is more an entangled relation, and it is important to consider how state actors produce informality by actively determining informal practices and strategically utilizing formality and informality (see also Roy 2005; Haid and Hilbrandt 2019). In his analysis of security governance in Medellín, Moncada (this volume) stresses that in this specific urban policy landscape, “formal and informal politics overlap in complex ways to shape lived urban space, and more precisely, everyday practices, norms and behaviors within this space.”



At the same time, and not contradictorily, urban policy can be conducted with a focus on materialist outcomes. The simultaneous everyday and materialist aspect of urban policies is sometimes captured in the “coal face” metaphor (Yates 1977), meaning that we see urban policy processes of propinquity (John 2009), where politics extends beyond the formal institutions into the realms of society with material outcomes that can be studied on the ground. Urban policy thus rests on a politics of proximity stemming simultaneously from local knowledge and resources and bottom-up collective action by diverse everyday actors, as well as the potentially conflicting top-down knowledge, technocratic rationalities, and state orders.

### *Formal Institutions, Processes, and Actors*

While we are inspired by the *seeing like a city* literature, urban everyday policy practices and formal institutional practices can be analyzed simultaneously. Many of the authors in this book have training in political science, policy, and governance studies and they apply the vocabularies, concepts, and frameworks of these fields. Several chapters employ and challenge conventional public policy and urban governance approaches that theorize about the involvement of powerful actors (e.g., businesses, landowners, experts) and their interactions with the state. For example, Bramwell (in this volume) discusses the absence of firms in postindustrial economic development policymaking. Her work shows that the business sector is heterogeneous. Firms cannot be subsumed under the label of “private sector,” their actions predicted only by the common goal of profit-seeking. Many authors challenge and further develop urban governance concepts, such as urban regime theory. They apply these vocabularies and the acquired policy studies skill set to a more diverse and harder-to-grasp setting, but policy studies is still helpful in understanding urban policymaking.

In a case study of São Paulo, Donaghy (this volume) describes how the municipal government acted as a mediator that negotiated between the interests of social movements and the private sector, but was slow to act on its own without significant pressure from either side:

Business leaders and social movements often play leading roles with the city government sometimes acting as mediator and sometimes as absent landlord. In the absence of the state, social movements coordinate residents for autoconstruction and other autonomous governance and support while real estate companies and developers provide new housing according to their own interests rather than participating in government housing schemes.

Bazurli and Verhoeven use the concept of multilevel governance to show that urban-based strategies and actions can target actors beyond the city, while also aiming to address issues inside the city. City officials and advocates seek local policies that will leave a mark on national or global policy agendas. This is most evident in climate change and migration policies, because national states struggle to formulate effective and inclusive policies in these two policy domains (Hughes 2017; Bazurli and Kaufmann 2022). We see how local initiatives can threaten the policymaking primacy of the national level, and the multilevel contestations between cities and national states that emerge (Bazurli and Verhoeven, this volume).

Yet authors also depart from classical urban governance concepts. Wilson (this volume) examines the urban governance and public finance arrangements of Detroit, applying racial capitalism as a sharp analytical concept that exposes how budget restructurings and financial risks are instituted on the backs of marginalized Black communities. Other chapters, such as Moncada and Landau and Bule, challenge the central role of the state in urban policy; they found the state to be partially absent and even irrelevant to the lives of urban residents, existing alongside such structuring actors as criminal, spiritual, or diaspora organizations.

Combining the analysis of urban everyday processes with formal policy-making processes allows us to reiterate two interrelated aspects that we find to be central for urban policy analysis. First, it is important to consider the phase of co-construction and negotiation of policy in the urban everyday (also known as the “policy upload” or “policy-input” phase in more traditional policy studies literature). Second, we find it crucial to study how policies unfold (typically studied through policy implementation studies) and how they influence diverse residents in their everyday activities and practices (typically studied through policy evaluation or policy impact studies). And urban policy analysis ensures that implementation and impact are studied spatially and include the most disadvantaged, who typically are intersectionally burdened on the basis of race, class, and gender.

Yet these two phases can occur together rather than in a linear fashion. Beveridge and Koch (this volume) argue that in urban policymaking, goals and means tend to be mixed and the process of implementation cannot be strictly analytically separated from the process of goal definition. An urban policy analysis then shifts away from the institutionalized procedures of the state and public administrations to also consider the practices, rhythms, densities, and proximities of urban everyday life. In this way, we base our understanding on *seeing like a city*, and acknowledge the decentered role of the state as well as the policy-relevant practices of diverse urbanites.

The chapters include careful analyses of the interactions and interdependencies between formal political processes and how they are negotiated, shaped, and unfolded on the urban ground. They reveal how urban policymaking is constructed by diverse actors, among whom some are state actors. They show how urban policy can produce or withhold material outcomes for urban residents and communities. While we think that policy studies and urban governance literature are still handy, their vocabularies and frameworks have to be dusted off; some should be archived, and others adapted toward a more contextual and spatial lens. We believe that our sketched conceptual framework for an urban policy analysis and the research questions we raise (see the introduction in this volume) outline a more contextual and spatially sensitive type of policy analysis.

### Methods of an Urban Policy Analysis

The chapters in this book showcase the importance of place-based and context-rich case-study research for urban policy analysis. The value of case study research is well known (e.g., Gerring 2006), and its value seems to be confirmed for urban analysis by the independent methodological choices of the authors in this book. A focus on a specific site enables the researcher to identify and consider various elements of the context that together produce policy-relevant outcomes. Place-based analysis that is mindful of path-dependent processes, complex actor constellations, and nested contexts has methodological implications. Often, the authors had spent time over many years in the locations of study to gain a deep understanding of and familiarity with the case sites. While the case study approach is not well suited to generalize to other cases or populations, it allows urban researchers to better document the rich complexities of urban political life, to juxtapose case findings against conceptual and theoretical propositions, and thereby to build urban policy research from multiple cases as a collective endeavor.

In their case studies, the authors in this book collected data using interviews, focus groups, surveys, and documents; they engaged in participatory research and ethnographic observation, and consulted archives. These data allow researchers to trace the processes, relationships, and interactions involved in policymaking, policy contestation, and policies' impacts on places and people. Working with respondents, researchers also used more experimental methods, such as *testimonios* (Wong, this volume), and visual methods (Moncada, this volume). To analyze these qualitative materials, researchers

tend to turn to interpretive methods by using discourse analysis and thematic coding; they mirror data against conceptual frameworks derived from theories (e.g., Yanow 2007; Sidney 2010). The possibilities for qualitative and spatial data in urban policy analysis go beyond those described in this volume. For example, participatory mapping, visual and sensory methodologies, counter-mapping, or quantitative and qualitative sociospatial analysis (e.g., Gandy 2017; Roy et al. 2020; Bathla 2024) would be useful in building contextual analyses of urban policies. By taking spatial considerations seriously, urban policy and urban politics scholars can learn a lot from more spatially conscious disciplines such as geography or planning.

Although this book showcases primarily how urban policy research can be conducted through case studies and qualitative social science research, we emphasize that what matters most in our framework is attention to contexts and processes. Quantitative methods are used sparsely in this book, with the exception of the chapter by Landau and Bule, which draws in part from survey data. Yet quantitative data analysis can also be part of this type of urban policy analysis, as long as the researchers are attentive to contexts, to space, and to the diversity of everyday realities and actors. In this regard, we see great potential for a mixed-methods urban policy analysis that combines quantitative and qualitative methodologies, an assortment of data sources, meta-analyses of multiple case studies, traditional case study research, and more spatially conscious methods such as participatory mapping and socio-spatial analysis.

Survey research, for example, can certainly offer insights about a diverse set of perspectives. It allows information to be gathered from a large number of urban residents, and permits residents' insights to be compared within and across cities. In this way, survey research can attend to the realities of urban residents and can carefully articulate accounts from people from a wide range of sociodemographic backgrounds. It can be combined with in-depth interviews or focus groups, either before the survey is conducted to inform the survey instrument, or after the survey to make sense of the survey findings. For example, Auerbach (2020) first conducted ethnographic case study research about political organization and urban development in informal settlements in the two northern Indian cities of Bhopal and Jaipur, before he used survey research to examine whether the patterns uncovered through case study research are also visible in a representative sample of informal settlements in the same two cities. Conversely, Hofer et al. (2024) first conducted experimental survey research about how people want to participate in infrastructure development in a low-income settlement in Johannesburg. In a later research

step, they organized group interviews with some of the survey participants to deepen their understanding and make sense of the survey findings.

Statistical data analysis, especially of geolocated data, could complement qualitative work by allowing us to examine the sociospatial effects of policies across different localities in a city, or over time. For example, effects on housing and land-use policies can be quantified, allowing us to measure gentrification and displacement effects for a diverse set of populations (e.g., Lutz et al. 2024). Studies that use statistical local data can help us describe the prevalence of a critical urban policy issue over space and time or evaluate the impact of certain policies (e.g., Collingwood and O'Brien 2019 on sanctuary policies, or Rutan and Desmond 2021 on evictions). Quantitative text analysis techniques (e.g., natural language processing) have been fruitfully deployed to analyze unstructured contributions from residents gathered through a participatory geographic information system tool with the goal of detecting public opinion and value conflicts about urban planning in Hamburg (Herzog et al. 2023).

We think that an urban policy analysis as a research endeavor is pluralistic on many dimensions, and thus with regard to the methods chosen for data collection and data analysis. While there is potential for incorporating quantitative methods into urban policy analysis, we urge that it be done with attention to contextual settings, to spatial manifestations, and to the idiosyncrasies and indeterminacies in which urban policies unfold. This means that averaging out or aggregating up sociospatial differences is not what we envision for urban policy analysis. Given the importance of everyday aspects and place dependencies, urban policy analysis methods should sensitively incorporate the varying realities of diverse urban residents without burying these potentially diverging realities in the presentation of large average effects.

### Comparisons in Urban Policy Analysis

While demonstrating the power of qualitative methods for urban policy analysis, many of the chapters also reveal the analytical advantages of comparisons across cities, countries, policy issues, and time. Six of our book's eleven empirical studies use cross-national comparative urban research designs. These studies demonstrate that comparison shows patterns and divergences across cases such that a broad and nuanced understanding of urban policy phenomena emerges.

Comparative research can highlight the varieties of specific phenomena that exist across cities and thereby offer researchers the opportunity to iden-

tify some of the factors that bring them about. It can be used to build typologies that can be explored in further work. For example, Bazurli and Verhoeven study forms of contentious governance, using comparison to discover how institutional context and policy issue characteristics differently shape the politics of immigration and decarbonization in two European cities. Hinze and Smith's comparison of large-scale urban development institutions and outcomes in Chicago and Berlin enables them to identify two institutional forms, even though both cities are located in national federal contexts. The authors show how each form differently limits the influence of everyday residents on these projects, and they point to the varieties of exclusionary processes that operate. Bramwell's comparison of three midsized cities across Europe and North America identifies three types of configurations of public-private collaboration on postindustrial digital economic development. Her comparative design allows her to trace the presence or absence of a set of contextual variables that shape these collaborative efforts. Zhang built a comparative research design to examine the governance of informal housing in two megacities, Mumbai and Guangzhou. Unlike Hinze and Smith, she selected cities in countries with very different political systems. But because Mumbai and Guangzhou both experience rapid economic growth and urbanization, along with high levels of informality in their housing sectors, Zhang could analyze the impact of urban governance systems on the policies, politics, and management of informal settlements. These chapters illustrate how the selection of cases in comparative research produces detailed knowledge of the intricate and varied workings of policy processes and governance in context. This type of contextual understanding can contribute to developing fine-tuned and practical strategies of intervention.

While these chapters use typical forms of cross-national comparative research, other chapters alter or relax some aspects of comparative designs. For example, Paller uses sequential paired comparisons of Accra with three cities, rather than presenting a four-case comparative study. He compares Accra first with Cape Town to explore the impacts of progressive housing policies, then with Lagos to explore challenges to resident claims of their rights to the city, and then with Nairobi to explore impacts of multilevel governance on housing politics. This allows him to build a deeper, layered contextual analysis of Accra than would be possible with four equal cases, and offers insights into patterns and divergences that emerge through analysis of a comparative case. Finally, Landau and Bule assemble data they collected over twenty years from several different cross-national comparative projects about population mobility, access to resources, and belonging in African cities across six countries.

This broad set of comparative data provides the basis for their exploration and ultimately their challenge of northern understandings of the role of individual participation in policy processes, of the centrality of state action, and of the boundaries of “urban” in urban policy.

### New Directions in Comparative Urban Research

While comparative designs have a long history in social science research, urban scholars and theorists have questioned some of the conventional approaches to case selection (e.g., Enright 2020; Robinson 2022). Traditionally, social scientists select cases to control for a set of explanatory factors and to isolate variables of interest, such that generalizations may be attempted due to systematic case selection (e.g., most-similar-systems research design, see Przeworski and Teune 1970).

Such case selection strategies are valuable, as our chapters demonstrate, and should not be discarded, but the limits of controlling for contextual factors in urban comparative research can be acknowledged. Our chapters show that there are simply too many contextual factors simultaneously at work in urban contexts to reasonably argue that we can control for them through a case-selection strategy. We find that looking for conjunctures, assemblages, or new vocabularies may offer more nuance and hold onto complexity, rather than reducing it. In other instances, studying and describing a place in detail, as a unique instance, might be more suitable.

One important consideration is that traditional case-selection strategy can limit comparisons in ways that prevent a truly global urban analysis (Robinson 2015). For example, it has been frequently argued in the past that cities in the Global North cannot be compared with cities in the Global South, and that cities in liberal democracies cannot be compared with cities in socialist countries, because these types of places are simply too different (for a review of this argumentation see Robinson 2022, e.g., chapter 2). Similarly, smaller cities are not typically compared with larger cities. But when we compare only what we judge in advance to be similar types of cities, we reinforce this idea of quintessential difference, and foreclose serendipitous and innovative discoveries about places and processes. In studies of urban informality, scholars have started to make comparisons across the Global North and South, finding much more nuanced similarities and differences in pairs of cities that researchers would formerly have eschewed (e.g., Haid and Hilbrandt 2019; Tucker and Devlin 2019). Such comparisons can challenge long-standing understand-

ings and assumptions about how life in particular types of places operates and about relationships between public policy, states, and diverse actors.

Urban scholars have put forth alternative models of comparison, arguing that innovation and learning can occur when researchers use “heterodox and reflexive” comparisons (Enright 2020, 31). Studying places with a new lens or comparator, making unusual comparisons, can be generative—they show what might not otherwise be seen. Robinson (2022, 1527–29) points to comparative case studies of infrastructure governance in London and Chennai that question long-standing stereotypes about the value of technical sophistication. In another example, she discusses a comparison of housing developments in Israeli and Palestinian cities that raises questions about the degree to which neoliberal urban changes could be understood as a continuity of colonialism. Robinson (2016) calls for “thinking through elsewhere” as a principle, with the implication that urban research and theory-building can “start from anywhere”:

Such an approach would mobilize the potential to start conceptualization from any city and to draw insights from a wide array of contexts while acknowledging the locatedness of all theoretical endeavor. New concepts might then be initiated from anywhere, and inherited conversations about the nature of the urban refined or refused. (Robinson 2016, 188)

When engaging in such comparisons, Boudreau (2019, 597) calls specifically for “theoretical translation,” which involves “translating concepts across contexts.” She urges urban scholars to cross cultures and languages to find inspiration from a much broader set of theories. Comparisons and a constant dialectical relationship between theory and empirical research (i.e., a transductive research strategy) can help to build new vocabularies and frameworks stemming from the inductive analysis of different urban regions (e.g., Schmid et al. 2018). Another basis for choice of comparators is to follow the connections between places, where networks link cities, or interdependencies exist due to trade, international financial linkages, historic relationships such as colonialism, etc. (Enright 2020; Robinson 2022).

Many chapters in this book challenge scholars to take another look at (Northern) assumptions about directions of causation, the linearity of policy-process theories, the relative importance of the state, and the value for urban residents of participating with the state. Southern theory and findings have relevance globally. For example, Paller (this volume) and Landau and Bule



(this volume) challenge the primacy of state action for urban policy and urban life more generally. Donaghy (this volume) argues that linear policy processes are not present in cities of the Global South. We suggest that what she writes has broad relevance:

[T]he traditional policy process, in which policies move in a linear fashion from decision-making through implementation, does not capture the dynamism of policymaking and practice in cities such as São Paulo. Issues of multilevel governance, impediments to producing state accountability, and institutionalized norms of conflict among actors create complexities that cause chaos and inefficiencies. An urban policy process that responds to these complex dynamics across diverse cities recognizes the hurdles that exist and the back-and-forth process or discontinuation between the decision-making and implementation stages. (Donaghy, this volume)

### Research Ethics of Urban Policy Analysis

Several important ethical issues are raised by the work in this volume. Authors demonstrate their commitment to giving voice to the people they study in a way that recognizes that communities have long been stewards of their own knowledge construction, production, and dissemination. Doing so is one way to challenge the extractivist logic that often seems to inherently mark academic research. Landau and Bule (this volume) discuss the importance of respecting urban residents' desire to be left alone—they may not wish to engage with the state or with researchers for reasons related to their own goals and life trajectories. Experiences of daily marginalization and limited decision-making power can raise doubts in urban residents about the usefulness of participating in democratic but also academic processes (see also Nuamah 2021). Moncada's decision (this volume) to request that vendors draw their workplaces and their interactions with police and criminal organizations enabled them to communicate more comfortably than in the traditional interview format. Wong's participation and longer engagement in anti-eviction initiatives alongside neighborhood residents also generated trust and connections across the potential scholar/resident divide (this volume).

This book is not explicitly positioned as a decolonial contribution or as a contribution to the development of Southern theories. The editors and many authors have been trained in Europe and North America. Urban theory and

approaches to policy analysis have most often been informed by the Euro-American experience. We recognize the need for awareness of, and expansion beyond, the dominance of Euro- and Anglo-American theory-making in urban and policy studies. We think that urban policy analysis should be collectively built through in-depth analyses of place-based and path-dependent urban policy processes. Thus, an urban policy analysis should be theorized and studied from different perspectives, realities, and places.

Analysis from cities around the world also helps mount a “constructive critique of the analytical and normative shortcomings of much urban policy analysis” (Landau and Bule, this volume). This is reflected in other chapters, about cities in Africa (Paller), Latin America (Donaghy, Moncada), or Asia (Zhang). Accounts of cities in North America and Europe, observed through lenses of racial capitalism (Wilson), the activism of marginalized communities (Wong), everyday urban policymaking (Beveridge and Koch), and contestations of multilevel governance arrangements (Bazurli and Verhoven) contribute to such a critique, since they challenge established concepts in governance and policy studies.

Parnell and Pieterse (2016) call for translational praxis rooted in reciprocal scholar-community collaboration and aimed at generating concrete ideas for improving life. Such an endeavor is more important than striving to make research conform to the norms of traditionally understood “science,” especially given the resource constraints and long-standing inequalities in many urban areas of the world. This translational practice includes “a normative stance, committed to modes of working that are cognizant of local constraints in the design, execution and implementation phases of research” (Parnell and Pieterse 2016, 3). Also Joy and Vogel (2022) urge urban politics and policy scholars to concentrate their activities on studying how transformative change can be realized through local activism and movement-building, policy implementation, and evaluation. This would allow for an urban policy analysis that better supports the much-needed transformative changes in our cities. We very much agree with this call for an urban policy analysis that is transformational and aims to improve the lives of residents, especially the most marginalized.

### **Glimpses of Hope: Concepts and Prospects for Urban Futures**

Beyond the conceptual, ethical, and methodological aspects of conducting an urban policy analysis, this book’s chapters bring to the forefront several

worrisome commonalities regarding how urban policy is coproduced and the effects it generates for urban populations. Recurring issues in the chapters are the ambiguity of urban policy, the asymmetrical power settings in which they are formulated, and their production of unequal sociospatial outcomes. The chapters also highlight the dominance of economic interests and profit-making in urban policy in general, and in urban development in particular. We read about rentiers who want to extract profit from the city—that is, from urban land, urban development, and human labor and thus from residents’ basic needs for work and shelter and their everyday interactions.

While the dominance of economic interests and exchange value in the urban environment is a central concern of the urban politics literature and has been shown throughout these chapters, there are nevertheless some glimpses of hope, instances of solidarity and coalitions for progressive and transformative change. We want to end with these examples, but not sound naïve while doing so. We thereby specifically think about three directions of impact for a more sustainable, just, and democratic urban policymaking: (1) initiatives that build on and further develop normative urban concepts (such as urban citizenship) that can function as the basis for alternative and progressive urban policy, (2) the power of harnessing state-centered policies and institutions, and (3) the importance of social movements and everyday urban initiatives to anchor urban policy through the city and to keep pressure on local state policies and their implementation.

### *Urban Policy Concepts*

Normative urban concepts can work as imaginaries for alternative futures. We think of well-known concepts such as “inhabitation” and “the right to the city” (Lefebvre 1968), “urban citizenship” (e.g., Bauböck 2003), or the “just city” (Fainstein 2010). They are rooted in urban contexts, and can be powerful normative foundations to argue for alternative policy agendas, policies, and practices. They allow for reconceptualizing and recalibrating policy from an urban perspective. As laid out in the introduction, we therefore believe that it is important to *see like a city* in urban policy analysis, whether you operate as a scholar, practitioner, or activist.

We offer the example of “urban citizenship” and the claim of “right to the city” that underpin many of today’s progressive urban policy agendas. Urban citizenship rests on the Lefebvrian ideal of inhabitation (Lefebvre 1968), which proposes that residence and lived presence in an urban space is the most central fact of membership (Purcell 2003; Varsanyi 2006; Kaufmann 2019). Thus,

it can serve as the normative foundation to empower more radical and inclusive policy for all residents who live in and contribute to the city. For example, the articulation and conceptualization of urban citizenship ideas encourage local sanctuary laws in US cities (Cuisson-Villazor 2010). Also, in Zürich, the concept of urban citizenship was instrumental for the social movements that first developed ideas of an urban identity card (Kaufmann and Strebel 2021).

Ideas of urban citizenship and the right to the city also produce progressive urban policies beyond migration policies. These concepts served as the basis for claims about affordable housing in New York City and Tel Aviv, access to education in Santiago, fair salaries in Cairo, job opportunities for young adults in Madrid, and protests over rising public transport costs in São Paulo (see Blokland et al. 2015 and the papers in the special issue). The case of Barcelona is specifically interesting because urban citizenship and the right to the city are used as umbrella concepts to justify a wide range of inclusive policies, from housing, to migration, social security, and the expansion of social and political rights for everyone who lives in the city (Eizaguirre et al. 2017; Bazurli and Verhoeven, this volume).

These concepts ask for an inclusive policy process as much as a progressive policy content, envisioning that the urban setting is where “grassroots practices of collective self-management” can be cultivated across the diverse but proximate populations that characterize cities (Althorpe and Horak 2023, 17). Supported though not necessarily led by state action, this is “a vision of a transformed urban future, in which inhabitants self-govern the city free from the oppressive forces of capitalist exchange value” (19). We also point to concepts of abolition, reparations, and care that have guided and inspired collective action in cities (Care Collective 2020; Dantzer and Reynolds 2020; Wong, 2021, 2022). Although these were not derived squarely as urban concepts, they root in the experiences and concerns of marginalized and racialized groups who demand voice and influence.

### *Progressive Urban Policy*

Progressive urban policymaking can mean harnessing the state, its institutions, and its funding sources for a progressive urban policy agenda. Cities worldwide have been at the forefront of numerous progressive, and sometimes radical, policy developments (e.g., Joy and Vogel 2021). Our authors discuss many of these progressive policies in the chapters, from efforts to create inclusive and equitable economic development policies in an age of digital disruption (Bramwell, this volume), to housing policies in São Paulo (Donaghy, this

volume), and inclusive migration policies regardless of documents and residency status in Barcelona (Bazurli and Verhoeven, this volume).

In this regard, the new municipalism movement is noteworthy in its aim to use and transform state institutions to democratize economic production through local nonprofit networks (Russell 2019; Thompson 2021). These movements focus on protecting and further developing the “foundational” economy that is the “part of the economy that creates and distributes goods and services consumed by all because they support everyday life” (Bentham et al. 2013, 7). In that way, this urban development agenda counters the focus on competitive and entrepreneurial economic development strategies that dominated many urban policy agendas in the last forty years (e.g., Harvey 1989). An example is the economic development agenda of Preston, England (the so-called Preston model), which reversed some effects of declining industry and rising poverty. This initiative of the city council and Labor politicians started in 2013 and focused on local anchor institutions (such as the local hospital) and the spending power of public procurement. They promoted the insourcing of basic services instead of outsourcing, providing living wages, and the use of local pension funds and local savings to support local investment priorities (Thompson 2021).

Yet our book also shows that although there might be progressive policies on paper, cities often fail to deliver. For example, Donaghy (this volume) discusses implementation problems with progressive housing policies in São Paulo, Paller (this volume) shows large gaps between policy goals on paper and actual policy outcomes in many African cities, and Bazurli and Verhoeven (this volume) point to frictions and blockades within alliances of progressive actors in Barcelona.

### *Everyday Transformative Urban Policymaking*

Given the limits, ambiguities, and implementation problems of urban policies and urban institutions, one of the main contributions of these chapters is their accounts of how social movements and ordinary urban residents are instrumental in spurring transformational policy change. We can read about migrant women who resist gentrification in New York (Wong, this volume), residents who oppose a technocratic, top-down imposed carbon capture and storage project in the Netherlands (Bazurli and Verhoeven, this volume), or diverse accounts of activists and groups that engage in housing struggles in Berlin (Beveridge and Koch, this volume). Social movements, civil society actors, and similar collectives can open a way to radically challenge and change the dominant order (Swyngedouw and Wilson 2016).

In this regard, the Indignados movement in Barcelona, and the subsequent formation of a civil-society party platform Barcelona en Comú is a prime example of a successful bottom-up urban movement. The Indignados movement emerged after the economic crises of 2008 and the following austerity politics and welfare cuts of many European governments. The movement was initiated through gatherings in Barcelona's central public spaces and shortly after developed permanent presence and regular protests in Spanish cities (Eizaguirre et al. 2017). The movement then launched the political platform Barcelona en Comú in 2014 that has been led by the housing activist Ada Colau. They won the municipal election in May 2015 and Ada Colau served as mayor of Barcelona from 2015 to 2023. While this is an extraordinary example of an urban movement with substantial impact on various urban policies beyond Barcelona, other more subtle everyday forms of being political in the urban also leave a mark on policy.

### *Combining Concepts, Policy, and Activism for Transformational Urban Policy*

These three directions of impacts mirror to some degree the three conceptual assumptions from the introduction: (1) "Seeing like the city" is reflected in the importance of the urban conceptual foundations of urban policy and practice. In fact, its embrace of indeterminacy and ongoing change is itself an expression of hope. (2) The analysis of the state and its multiple operations highlights the importance but also the limits of local state policy, actions, and institutions. (3) The study of diverse actors and their relationships in urban policy analysis points to the relevance of social movements, civil society, and everyday urban residents. These three directions of impact emphasize elements that constitute transformational urban policy agendas and are thus of more than conceptual and analytical interest.

We believe that combining these three directions of impact can give us hope for an urban policy analysis that can reveal barriers to, but also avenues for, material outcomes that serve and improve the lives of urban dwellers. Progressive urban policy agendas are often based on normative urban concepts. Yet normative urban concepts and progressive urban policies are not enough. Urban concepts such as urban citizenship and the right to the city explicitly call for an inclusive and transformative policymaking process, but not necessarily for a certain type of policy. Urban policy analysis that builds from and includes the actions and ideas of civil society groups and diverse urban residents could anchor urban policy in everyday realities and rationalities, and

could contribute to the transformation of policymaking. We believe that such a democratization of urban policymaking brings us closer to more sustainable, just, and democratic urban futures.

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