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## ⇒ In Praise of Other Views: The World of Cities and the Social Sciences

**Abstract:** Profound changes in the urban realm are now challenging the conventional reading of cities. This paper argues for an epistemic reshaping of current urban knowledge by (1) re-reading today's city across disciplines, not within them; (2) bringing small and mid-sized cities into the picture, alongside metropolises; and (3) taking the *other* cities of the global South into consideration. Some Latin American contributions to this endeavour are also considered.

**Keywords:** Urban studies; *Other* cities; Epistemic reform; Latin America.

**Resumen:** Los profundos cambios en el ámbito urbano constituyen un desafío a las lecturas convencionales de las ciudades. Este trabajo aboga por una reformulación epistémica del conocimiento actual de la ciudad por la vía de (1) releer la ciudad de hoy a través de las disciplinas, y no dentro de ellas; (2) incluir en el cuadro a las ciudades pequeñas y medianas junto con las metrópolis, y (3) tomar en consideración las *otras* ciudades de los países del sur. Al final se presentan algunas contribuciones de América Latina a este esfuerzo.

**Palabras clave:** Estudios urbanos; *Otras* ciudades; Reforma epistémica; América Latina.

### Introduction

Since the beginning of the twentieth century cities all over the world have undergone profound changes. In Western and non-Western cities, and in cities of the “global South” in both the New and Old Worlds, such changes have been accompanied by diverse attempts at theoretical reinterpretation. New concepts and hypotheses are being brought to the academic agenda, challenging conventional wisdoms and forcing the city and its frameworks to be rethought.

Coming from an Iberian academic standpoint, this paper makes three different suggestions for how we might improve our current understanding of the realm of the city. It attempts to address a wider urban context than the one we consider to be the Latin Amer-

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ican one. Indeed, despite their enormous internal diversity, Latin American cities share certain socio-anthropological, urbanistic and political features that inspire much of the thinking on the urban question that I aim at developing here. Latin American cities have played a relatively marginal role in academic thinking on urban issues; this is a field guided by the Western canon, particularly North European and North American urban wisdom. Moreover, urban life in the Latin American regions mostly unfolds in demographically mid-sized and small-scale settlements, conforming thus, as I hope to show, to a conjuncture whose enormous heuristic value for urban studies remains unexplored thus far. Last but not least, the Latin American urban experience that underpins my thought is part and parcel of what I consider to be, in the wake of other recent reflections, the *other cities* universe; in other words, a universe of cities that may further innovative theoretical and methodological contributions to the now indispensable epistemic reform of the urban question.

These preliminary reflections address the three theoretical suggestions I intend to dwell upon in this paper. First of all, one way of rethinking the contemporary city is to read it across disciplines. The city is such a multi-faceted social and cultural terrain that we should no longer attempt to encapsulate it within the conceptual confines of any existing discipline. A discipline-transgressive re-reading of the city is an absolute necessity. Second, the city cannot continue to be seen through the lens of the “metropolis”. Hence, another challenge to our understanding of today’s cities stems from the need to evaluate the theoretical and interpretative figurations derived from the notion of “metropolis” or from other conceptual categories often used to sum up the intriguing conflation of the social, political, economic and cultural attributes of huge urban complexes. These concepts clearly disregard the workings of and within small and mid-sized cities. In fact, most of today’s urban living in Europe and elsewhere takes place in small and mid-sized cities, and yet this broadly non-metropolitan world has scarcely been considered as a separate domain. Finally, and closely related to these two points (the need for an urban view able to trespass conventional disciplinary knowledge, and the need for the theorisation of small and mid-sized cities), I intend to discuss the likelihood of a contribution originating in subaltern academic contexts, i.e. from that kind of urban research which, in a sort of international division of the academic labour model, has been pushed towards the provision of empirical, but not theoretical or methodological, knowledge. Theoretical work is what largely typifies the most influential research centres and universities of the core countries in Northern Europe and North America. Consequently, potential contributions from the social sciences in Latin America (and elsewhere) are still generally neglected to the detriment of a more appropriate and sounder understanding of the current city world – and not only in South American contexts.

### **The limits of the disciplinary view**

Analysis of the urban world is all about recently gathered demographic information and trends in its development. In fact the most recent reports show that most of the world’s population is now urbanized (United Nations 2010). Needless to say the political consequences of this urbanization vary inasmuch as it occurs at different rates in different areas. Data shows that the highest percentage of global urban growth occurs in the

less developed countries of Asia and Africa rather than in the regions with the longest tradition of urbanization (Europe and North and South America), where cities, though still rising in numbers, display far less intense rates of growth. According to UN estimates, this unprecedented concentration of humans in cities of all kinds and at all latitudes is likely to increase worldwide for the foreseeable future, and this will fuel indeterminacy on the social and political horizon. This makes part of what I shall call the contemporary *world of cities*, a term that refers not only to the historically ever-present majority of urban dwellers around the globe, but also to the fact that such *world* involves a degree of uncertainty for the urban realm as a whole, megacities and small cities alike.

We do not know for sure what the dominant form, if any, of this changing *world of cities* will be. It seems clear, however, that our present knowledge and analytical tools are in need of a serious overhaul. We require a novel framework that will allow for a more clear and above all a more consistent interpretation of the urban question as a whole. That is to say, we must be aware of the limits of current knowledge about the city and attempt the city's epistemic reform. We shall take the example of urban sociology, one of the oldest sub-areas of the social sciences focusing on the city.

By and large, today's urban sociology remains a hostage to a theoretical historical construct distinguished by the singularity, and even the exceptionality, of its empirical ground, i.e. the large Euro-American (post)industrial metropolis. A brief digression into the evolution of urban sociology shows that its first steps as a domain of knowledge were taken about the time of the profound transformation undergone at the end of the nineteenth century by a very small group of cities in the developed (industrialized) nations – Berlin, Vienna, Paris, Manchester and London. Following the inter-war “emigration” of urban thought from Europe to the USA, the special cases of Chicago and New York were added to this group. In the late 1930s the Chicago School thinkers caused the analytical corpus of urban sociology to become hegemonic in academia. The *Chicagoans* not only adopted a particular conceptual and methodological stance towards the interpretation of the urban, above all they made their sense of territoriality rather ambiguous by implying that Chicago's specific spatial order was likely to be reproduced as the spatial order of any city anywhere in the world (Hannerz 1980: 57). In the last three decades of the twentieth century, following quite a fruitful period of scholarship initiated by Henri Lefebvre (1968), who denounced the Chicago School's extreme positivistic position and called for a fresh theorization of the city, Manuel Castells (1972) and others, including John Friedman (1986) and Saskia Sassen (2001), displayed a new approach to the city which helped enlarge the number of exceptional cities within the restrictive perimeter of urban sociology (Fortuna 2011).

Manuel Castells has brought about a new epistemological focus on urban sociology, but he was also responsible for Southern American urban reality entering the agenda of international sociological reflection. The conspicuous growth of cities such as São Paulo and Mexico City since the 1950s that accompanied the economic transformation of the Latin-American economies encouraged this unusual opening up to a marginal urban context. However, the urban sociology that stemmed from the expansion of these metropolises focused largely on the effects of the growth of industrial capitalism in the economies of Latin American nations and its impact on the intense internal migration to the cities. Underpinned by a macro-focus on the reality of cities, this outbreak of urban sociology that bestowed international academic recognition on Latin American urban reality in the

1970s turned out to be short-lived. This was firstly because leading socio-economic and political research centres concerned with Latin America, such as CEPAL – the Economic Commission for Latin America – were deeply involved in highlighting the effects of the Latin American uneven and dependent economic growth and modernisation model in which cities remained a side object with no autonomy as a research object (Roberts 1978; Robinson 2002). This “developmentalist” orientation actually muddied the waters with respect to the analysis of the *other* cities of the global South. The second reason was that throughout the 1970s and 1980s Europe was regaining, under the powerful influence of Henri Lefebvre’s works, ground within the international *urban question* agenda, accompanied by the urban studies renewal in the North American academic setting, where David Harvey’s critical analyses were starting to punctuate.

In the 1990s we would witness the ‘return’ of the Latin American city to the front line of academic debate. In my view the discussion that the works of John Friedman (1986) and Saskia Sassen (2001) triggered on “world cities”, and afterwards on “global cities”, played a major role in this regard. In the heart of the globalisation era the question turned to the ability of cities to function in the aggressive scenario of inter-city global competition. The economic and financial resources found in cities and their ability to command the worlds of finance, technology and information, taken as the newest political facet of today’s cities, naturally favoured the contexts of large metropolitan agglomerations worldwide. So the re-entry of the Latin-American city into the international arena of urban sociology that we are about to see is once again based on the experiences of metropolises such as São Paulo, Mexico City, Buenos Aires or Rio de Janeiro. This said, however, I ought to stress that since the 1990s we have also seen remarkable growth in and the multiplication of research units and university departments devoted to the Latin American urban question in Brazil, Mexico and Argentina. Their influence on the realignment of the objects of study, the languages employed and their interdisciplinary attitude stimulates and helps to refresh the understanding of today’s urban question, as I shall argue in greater detail later.

This state of affairs leads me to say that inasmuch as sociology and the other social sciences continue to look at the contemporary world of cities largely through the lenses of Western metropolises, they remain inadequate. Following Immanuel Wallerstein (2001), it can be argued that we stand before a major challenge which is to *unthink* social sciences rather than simply to *rethink* them.

Let me point to three main reasons, derived from urban studies, to underline the need for epistemic change. First, demography is forging more and more metropolises, leading to a growing accumulation of urban exceptionalism and thus helping to turn knowledge into an increasingly abstract system of principles. Second, the referential exclusivism of the Western metropolis has turned out to be an insufferable exercise of aggressive rhetoric leading to the epistemic exclusion of non-Western *normal cities* from any significant contribution to the discipline. Finally, nearly everything about the modern metropolis has changed drastically over the last three or four decades, as shown by rapid changes in the built environment and in architectural styles, alongside the abysmal change in the various social, political, economic and cultural aspects of urban life. Unable to fully grasp these changes and their effects, therefore, urban sociology needs to *unthink* itself and find the most suitable and coherent framework to update its reading of the present-day urban scene.

But other fields of academic knowledge are also facing the need for a similar revision of their theoretical premises and methods. Geographers and architects, political scientists, social psychologists, anthropologists and philosophers of various epistemological orientations are all arguing that urban knowledge needs to keep pace with ongoing change and renew the whole edifice of social sciences accordingly. As the “bird’s-eye view of the cities”, the social sciences in general are called on to embrace a more philosophical view, so as to be able to expose the cities that a view limited by discipline renders invisible (Meagher 2007; Mendieta 2001). But, one may ask, what city has been made invisible by conventional academic wisdom? Certainly the cities that Mendieta calls “invisible” share a variety of features with the “ordinary”, “normal” and “postcolonial” cities, to use the language of other scholars (Amin/Graham 1997; Bishop/Phillips/Yeo 2003; Robinson 2006), which by and large covers the universe of the postcolonial metropolises of the twenty-first century’s global South. Alternative epistemologies, then, help one to envisage a relatively new facet of such would-be “invisible cities” of today, and play a crucial role in the process of “denationalizing politics in which global actors, capitals and moving peoples enter into conflict across a transnational urban system” (Mendieta 2001: 15-16). In other words, an alternative view to the disciplinary canon is likely to be the best way to try to shed light on the “invisible” city that, once unveiled, reveals some of the thoroughly fundamental features of globalization.

Yet I believe *other cities* have been somehow removed from our sight by conventional, biased, disciplinary knowledge. I am thinking of the flood of recent writings with a socio-psychological-literary flavour, which, by renewing a tradition emanating from Benjamin, Hessel, Kracauer and de Certeau, capture the “sentiment” and the cultural reading of the city, or of some strands of it. The city as virtue, or the city as vice, and a great many other variations, run throughout the vein of texts in which the city is far more “cultural” or “lettered” than “built” and “economic”, quite “sensorial” and “affective” and less “material” and “objectified”, a “text” rather than a “plan”. No doubt, the city is more than its constructed environment. It is a continuous process of modification of social behaviour and the stage for the unending search for human satisfaction. Time and again this pursuit involves the city’s reconfiguration into an aestheticizing object. Embezzlement of city spaces and cityscapes is not uncommon in Latin America as it is not uncommon in any other part of the world. Not seldom it induces a simulacrum of history as in many city centres from which local history has already been expelled, despite the persistent rhetoric of local authenticity (Zukin 2011). Capturing those and other *qualities* of the city requires a thoughtful epistemic revision of the theoretical assumptions and analytical instruments at hand, as has been methodically argued by Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2006), among others. The reconceptualization of the city therefore requires a degree of vision that can span disciplinary boundaries and assert itself in doing so.

I do not mean to say that urban sociology is, like any other urban-oriented discipline in fact, wholly unsuited to guide our inquiry into the actual *world of cities*, which would result in a long-lasting tradition of over 150 years of accumulated knowledge being declared totally useless. Nor do I intend to argue that we are now forced to build a fresh understanding of the current city world from scratch. Disciplinary reasoning, in my view, is still well able to help formulate questions, though not to provide answers, to open up our intellectual digressions on current city life, not to bring it to a cul-de-sac closure. Starting from its own disciplinary heritage and ability to ask questions, we should accept

the discipline-transgressive approach which, bearing in mind the city as fragmented territory, simultaneously objectified and sensitive, is opening up new questions and fields of analysis and bringing to light new topics for research. The present reinterpretation of the city and its plural geographies and cultural renewals revives a discourse of diversity that, given its polysemy, cannot be confined to the inevitably narrow bounds of any discipline. No matter how open to inter-sexuality and inter-discursive dialogue it may be, any discipline is limited when it comes to containing such a multifaceted and plural discourse on today's *world of cities*. As I have argued elsewhere (Fortuna 1997), we have never been so close to recognizing that only at the virtuous intersection of different discursive fields and intellectual traditions will the city be able to find its full multi-vocality and versatility.

### **A world of small cities**

The United Nations 2009 population estimates (United Nations 2010) state that 58 per cent of the world's 3.4 billion urban dwellers live in urban agglomerations with fewer than 750,000 inhabitants. Moreover, most populations that fall into this category live in cities with fewer than 100,000 people (Clark 2003). This means that if we continue to uncritically adopt certain premises of the conventional urban disciplines, in particular the favouring of the study of megacities, the fact of the matter is what this large population segment that lives in agglomerations with fewer than 750,000 inhabitants – hereafter designated small cities – remains consigned to the dustbin of urban knowledge. It would be quite a loss to academia if the more than 2 billion people living in settlements were cut off from the main academic frameworks and international research agendas. Setting other considerations aside, as a rule, these small cities are seen as a sort of vacant territory, of interest only to local researchers, thus bringing no substantive awareness whatsoever for the international academic rhetoric. As they receive scant attention from academics, small cities remain vulnerable to the indirect and unsystematic understanding derived from the study of megacities, and subject to models designed for other urban realms.

In their introduction to a rather stimulating collection of articles on the conceptualization of small cities, David Bell and Mark Jayne (2006: 1-2) raise two inclusive issues: (1) the effects of the adaptation of big-city policies and ideas in small-city contexts and (2) how small cities are to carve a place for themselves out of the *bigness* of cities as the dominant defining urban feature. Various possibilities are provided through the detailed study of individual cases that highlight the need to promote local culture as a route to improving (small) city visibility, local self-esteem and attractiveness. Two lines of reasoning are advanced to prevent reading city smallness as a pernicious effect of metropolitan-led bigness: first, avoidance of the “developmentalist” view which measures any local policy in terms of a city's ability to deal with ongoing worldwide urban competitiveness; and second, insistence on considering smallness as a cultural trait, or a socio-psychological tendency that might “alchemically” induce self-esteem and local pride (Bell/Jayne 2006: 1-2).

I am not going to develop arguments for any of these positions here. But there is one group of studies that should be mentioned which has exposed the bankruptcy of the

“developmentalist” rationale that assesses the quality of the economic and social life of cities according to neoliberal market criteria and competition (Amin/Graham 1997; Escobar 1995). At the same time, I shall not get bogged down in the detail of the studies with respect to promoting the cultural identity of cities and exploiting their endogenous cultural, political and environmental resources as a strategy for affirming them.

In order to argue in favour of small cities, analysts have called attention to some of the social and cultural features that differentiate them from larger metropolitan areas. Thus, small urban agglomerations are seen as displaying virtues such as being more human in scale, including being greener and easier to walk round, having less traffic congestion and lower crime rates, while being not frantically dominated by corporate capital; as a consequence they have fewer social and residential inequalities and enjoy a closer relationship with local history and culture. No doubt, the socio-political condition of small and medium-sized cities also bears the risks of inefficiency and lethargy, as discussed recently for a number of Brazilian cities (Endlich 2009; Sposito 2007). These are all signals that the social sciences should re-capitalize their contents in terms of renewing their framework for conceptualizing the contemporary city.

The local distinctiveness of small places goes back to Patrick Geddes’ well-known discussion of the place-work-folk triad. Geddes’ famous “thinking machine” covered geography, economics, anthropology and nature in quite a multidisciplinary way, thereby making sure that all knowledge related to the human condition would encompass a wide range of specialties (Meller 1990). This selfsame tradition holds today, if we accept that much of the cultural dimension of small cities is concentrated around the challenges of the city’s multidimensional downtown, particularly in Europe and Latin America (and to a lesser extent in the USA) (Capel 2009). Questions of local history and memory or geography and the regional integration of cities as ingredients of site identities are certainly essential. Themes like neighbourhood spirit, the preservation of historic buildings, downtown gentrification processes, employment and the like are a central part of today’s small cities’ policies. The preservation and promotion of local culture, for instance, is a central topic that distinguishes small-size cities’ concerns from those of megacities and metropolises.

Rhetoric on small cities’ policies generally tends to turn to their quintessential cultural dimension, which is often a strategy for local sustainability and is supportive of community spirit. The recently published detailed study on Kamloops, a small city in British Columbia, is a reasonably successful effort to rescue the cultural dimension from the default association with big cities (Garrett-Petts 2005). The study focuses on cultural sustainability and creativity and, remarkably, shows that small cities have plenty of self-reflexive opportunities to use popular local culture and find a way out of the dilemma of whether to be different from or to emulate big city cultural policies. What is at stake, it is argued, is “promoting the multiple faces and facets of the city, generating a strong sense of place, and taking advantage of scale to promote community involvement” (Garrett-Petts 2005: 2).

Let me briefly consider where the line is drawn between small and big city cultural scenes. The query recalls Simmel’s classical essay on the *Großstädte*, although I am turning the terms upside down and giving primacy to the small agglomeration rather than the metropolis. For the sake of argument, insofar as we take literary *récit* as being quite sensitive a contribution to the new multidisciplinary understanding of today’s *world of*

*cities*, we turn to Toni Morrison, the American winner of the 1993 Nobel prize for literature, for whom what really distinguishes the city fiction from the small town or village fiction is the continuous presence of the ancestor. In her words: “The advising, benevolent, protective, wise Black ancestor is imagined as surviving in the village but not in the city” (Toni Morrison, 1981, quoted in Sharpe 2002: 244).

The cultural memory of the permanent presence of the ancestor in small cities can in truth be a sign of the resilience of the small city’s social forms and functioning. But this relationship with history and socio-urban memory is also at risk of vanishing, as is the case in the large metropolises. According to Néstor García Canclini (2008: 85), under the effect of globalization and media power, cultural memory in the non-metropolitan urban agglomerates is also being subordinated to the rationale of flashes and the short-lived and fragmented messages of media accounts which undermine the cultural self-preservation of the locale. In this respect, Giselle Beiguelman (2000: 185) has called our attention to the loss of this relationship in S. Paulo, one of the most illustrative Latin American metropolises, where “erosion is everywhere and the ruins evoke nothing but the arbitrary nature of the real estate market”. She continues to argue for the discontinuities of S. Paulo whose “creeping ruins of avenida Paulista can be read... [as] exposed scars of a lost physiognomy” (192).

We are thus left with a description of the decrepitude of metropolitan memory, which, far from the representation of a walkable (and slow) small city, addresses a city of rushing passers-by whose pace of life allows for no linear sequence of time and events in the metropolitan space. To what extent will this also happen with small cities in the whole Latin American geo-cultural universe, or from anywhere else? We cannot actually answer this question, which, without doubt, remains an effect of the hegemonic narrative available for the metropolitan territories alone. In other words, the scarcity of available literature on the universe of Latin American small and mid-sized cities prevents us from evaluating with empirical backing their input to the rebuilding of the urban studies theoretical apparatus for which I have been arguing. This is what I will discuss in the coming section of the article, in which I consider some of the most significant contributions from recent Latin American, and in particular Brazilian, studies to the current urban studies theoretical apparatus.

### **The need for other views**

This brings us to the last aspect of this article, which explores the contribution we can expect to derive from the thoughts on normal or *other* cities that have been excluded from the history of the urban narrative, to the detriment of a more appropriate overall view of the *world of cities* of today.

In fact I shall now mention some of the Latin-American, and specifically Brazilian, contributions which, in my view, can remake the theoretical and analytical corpus of urban sociology. Throughout this article I have been arguing that to fully comprehend the cities of today we need an interdisciplinary interpretation and, at the same time, a broader understanding of urban experiences originating in geo-cultural contexts beyond those of Europe and North America. I include in this epistemic review, too, the urban situation of small cities, which is missing from the dominant discourse, as this focuses

solely on the large metropolises. These are the required ingredients for reconfiguring urban sociology and perhaps other views of the city cultivated by the deeply Western-centric social sciences which have erected such views as a universal urban narrative. Today, this theoretical and analytical apparatus is showing signs of interpretative exhaustion when it comes to explaining what determines the heterogeneous world urban condition of the present time. I accept that the urban reality emerging in the “other” cities of the global South may be a more significant political and epistemic challenge the heuristic value of which is broadening and will help reformulate the prevailing boundaries of city inquiry.

But what do I mean here by *other* cities? The answer is two-fold. On the one hand, *other* cities as used in this article is a matter of smallness and refers to those small and medium-sized cities that remain somehow invisible to the mainstream of the social sciences literature devoted to the urban, despite the huge aggregate percentage of the urban population living therein. Their absence, as argued before, is mostly the outcome of the hegemonic view that evolved from the seminal sociological studies on the late nineteenth-century megacities. Emphasizing this sort of *other* city reinforces the urgency of my call for an effort of intellectual production on these geo-cultural realms following the lines indicated before. On the other hand, *other* cities are a question of urban complexity and refer to those huge human agglomerates of the global South that were insidiously turned invisible by the hegemonic epistemological option of conventional Western urban studies which gave primacy to Northern European and North American cities. They are metropolises and megacities that remain absent from the dominant academic concern on quite different grounds than small and medium-sized cities. What makes these megacities invisible – despite their bigness – is the deliberate marginal attention given to them by the dominant *world of cities* narrative. Hence, forcefully marginalized, these *other* cities appear to the eyes of a self-ascribed solid body of Western academic interpretation as eccentric and complex social particularisms with very little to contribute. These are the *other* cities that I will be looking at in the next pages of this article as a way of arguing for the remaking of the conventional urban body of knowledge.

In adopting such a view I am basically following the critical position put forward by Sophie Watson when she denounces the danger, prevalent in urban studies, of deploying analyses of American and European cities “to describe cities in other parts of the globe, notably Africa, Asia and Latin America, in ways that are utterly inappropriate and even pernicious” (Watson 2006: 3). In fact, such theoretical elitism has left *other* cities with almost no claim to a space of their own within urban studies, as noticed by several critical views levelled at conventional “urban theory” and its “non-applicability” to cities of the “third world” throughout the 1980s and 1990s (King 1990; Jacobs 1995). And so, inasmuch as *other* cities are the theoretical constructions of the real cities of the global South, whose post-colonial socio-political processes and dynamics defy their poor perception of urban life (Hannerz 1980), they help question the current discursive hierarchy of cities and thereby launch a possible new theoretical understanding of the whole *world of cities*.

The pioneering spirit brought to bear on this in studies such as those by Jennifer Robinson (2006), Eduardo Mendieta (2001) and Amin/Graham (1997), is another influence on the exercise in which I am engaged here. I should make it clear, however, that my approach is different and more restricted in scope since I have confined myself to

sustaining de-canonization hypotheses for the ongoing urban rhetoric, looking almost exclusively at the Brazilian research experience and, in a more marginal way, at other areas of South America.

Well aware of the limitations of this option, my choice stemmed directly from the relationship of academic cooperation that I have established with Brazilian institutions over the last two decades. Quite apart from the ease of linguistic access, for a Portuguese researcher such as myself this decision was also grounded in institutional similarity. As joint coordinator of the Brazil-Portugal Urban Studies Network, which embraces seven Brazilian university departments engaged in urban studies research, I have found structural similarities between Portugal and Brazil insofar as a global division of scientific work is concerned. In fact, both countries are at an intermediate stage of scientific development that allows us to consider their ability to re-arrange some of the structural features that typify the conditions of scientific production prevailing in countries situated at the core and the periphery of the international scientific production system. This is not a side issue to the question that I am trying to address.

I have borrowed the idea of a global division of scientific production from Syed Farid Alatas, who argues that knowledge production unfolds in a matrix of “scientific imperialism” regulated by the principle of “dependency” and is therefore unequal in nature (Alatas 2003). Alatas further believes that the social sciences in the core countries of Europe and USA with their well-equipped research units are mostly engaged in theoretical work that focuses as much on national realities as on those of other countries. This has yielded an enviable body of relevant widespread comparative studies on the international urban scene. Peripheral countries with scarce scientific resources, meanwhile, are limited to exploring primary sources and data, and so they remain confined to producing empirical studies that tend to tackle the local, regional or national situation and have little impact beyond that. Adopting this schematic view for a while as we take into consideration the scientific research in social sciences carried out in both Brazil and Portugal, we would immediately conclude that these are countries that do not fit into either of the categories presented.

In fact Alatas’s twofold interpretation excludes hypotheses of intermediate situations where the domestic scientific communities have successfully recombined the structural “attributes” of the two opposite situations. Hence, Portugal and Brazil are regarded as being examples of scientific communities which have undoubtedly managed to achieve a given level of theoretical, methodological and conceptual re-development in the field of social sciences, the outcomes of which have received some international recognition.

This was made possible by the political and academic democratization processes undergone by both countries in the last decades of the past century, as a result of which the scientific communities adopted quite an open stance towards the international circulation of knowledge and ideas. Breaking out of the localist and restrictive frameworks that once prevailed in Portuguese and Brazilian approaches to the social sciences, the countries paved the way for new avenues of scientific creativity.

This was my rationale, as a Portuguese researcher, for looking to Brazil for ideas that, coming from a non-core locus of scientific production, nonetheless constitute a particularly rich source of thought renewal in social sciences and urban studies.

In the case of Brazil, it should be noted that its generous academic market underpins an impressive domestic and international dissemination of knowledge – both of people

and ideas – which clearly requires and justifies a dense federal and state network of universities. A collateral effect of this impressive academic market is the easy access to the latest publications in the social sciences. Major works in the social sciences are quickly translated into Portuguese, promoting a close relationship between Brazilian scholarship and international academic debate of a kind rarely seen outside the Anglo-Saxon world. To a certain extent, such ease of access to foreign academic output in Brazil was promoted through the trade-off between, on the one hand, the universities which eschew the current practice of writing in foreign languages and, on the other hand, the local book retailers who benefit from the rather impressive national demand for translated books. By way of compensation, Brazil's scientific community can today rely on a powerful and dynamic system of support for research that enables a sizeable community - lecturers and postgraduate students alike - to benefit from international academic mobility. Alongside this, in the domain of federal and state scientific policy, Brazil encourages the signing of international conventions, promotes the activity of research centres and research networks and also sponsors meetings and conferences of outstanding academic calibre. All this places Brazil in the context of a broader discussion on contemporary reality, and especially on the current *world of cities*.

The first point that should be made with regard to the contribution of Latin America, and especially Brazil, to the renewal of urban studies is the fact that social science studies in Latin America have tended to abolish the traditional boundaries between disciplines. By this I am not minimizing the existence of discipline-oriented departments (sociology, anthropology, political science, history, and so on). I simply want to say that while these departments enjoyed a relatively long period of consolidation in the twentieth century, the languages of the various social sciences are nowadays undergoing a miscegenation with respect to urban research. Specialised languages and conceptualisations that originated in the previously strongly fragmented field of urban studies in Brazil are coming together, I believe, as research projects, modes of enquiry and forms of approaching urban reality increasingly cross disciplinary boundaries. The ongoing production of intertextuality in Brazilian urban studies today is rather promising of the ways open ahead to re-reading the *world of cities*. The epistemic intercourse of old disciplinary "specialties" and discourses help single out new urban objects of study and creatively reframe older ones. The question of the metropolises in Brazil and other Latin American countries illustrate this. Contrary to what happened with the European vision of the large agglomerations of the nineteenth century, here the whole conceptual apparatus soon focused on the socio-spatial fracture that the metropolis comprises. As I said before, the first approaches to the Latin American metropolises took stock of their accelerated and disorderly urban development in a top-down or institutional vision of the metropolis, highlighting the issue of urban development and its unruly growth. As mentioned above, this accounts for the short-lived period in which Latin-American urban issues integrated international urban studies agendas.

The Brazilian example seems to illustrate quite clearly that when the metropolis *reenters* the international urban research agenda, it does so from a bottom-up perspective, that is, with a clear political and human concern highlighting the socio-spatial segregation of the urban poor (Seabrook 2007). This is not the metropolis that the conventional academic view adopted as a symptom of civilization after Simmel (Simmel 1997). Rather the opposite is true. The experiencing of this new metropolis implies rather another

er set of representations and vocabularies of what modernity is (Jaguaribe 2007). The idea to which Brazilian scholars drew our attention in the 1980s and 1990s is that the metropolis of the global South requires a full redesign of the conventional approaches to it. This “new” Latin-American metropolis of the late twentieth century encompasses the *favela* and all the other forms and designations of the “non-city” that proclaim the blatant social inequality and total failure of the modernization of the 1960s and 70s. The Latin American metropolis that clamours for justice and rights has no functional equivalent in the European urban milieu. It had no adequate framework of interpretation. This has had to be created anew from a semi-peripheral scientific community spread out through Brazil and other countries of South America.

It is just as hard to find Western equivalents for the social movements demanding decent housing, fighting for dignity and claiming citizenship. In contrast to the European urban research agenda of the 1960s and 70s, which focused on emigration and the presence of the “other”-foreigner, cities like São Paulo or Mexico compelled a turn around in terms of research. Here, the “other” was a socially excluded fellow citizen, not a foreigner demanding to be accommodated. Borders are shifting and the urban world that seems in the core countries to be constituted only of social and political estrangement is, in the experience of the South, an inner, neighbouring world of exclusion and inequality. This may well account for the different ways of dealing with cosmopolitanism. In many regards what is at issue today in the European cities is the fact that borders are no longer at the edge of an urban territory, a sort of cartographical divide between “we” and “the others”. Borders are somehow brought inside the city, marking the point between “we” and “the same”. This is a radically new view of urban space which is at the bottom of democratic cosmopolitanism. A view that deals with the complex agenda of human and political rights that can be grasped in the research that the metropolises of the global South managed to open up three or four decades ago.

In relation to this issue the question of urban security and safety in the representation worlds of the middle classes also arose in Latin America with unprecedented vigour. Most research on city security derives from the reaction to the representation and the reality of fear in the realm of the city. Interestingly, this problem goes hand in hand with the theoretical and political meaning of space in relation to the city. The Brazilian tradition is particularly notable for its discourse on the social uses of space. There is a particularly interesting focus on the world of streets and public squares. Sociologists and anthropologists of various epistemological sensitivities and nationalities see the street and public areas as the essence of democratic urban life (Huet et al. 2001), sometimes with an undisguised sense of nostalgia. They do so alongside their historical perspective on the street and we may well argue that such an approach signals the spirit of interdisciplinarity. There are instances where analysis of the street is simultaneously the social, political and historical analysis of lifestyles, memory and spectacle, in a genuine inter-course of views and disciplines (Frehse 2005; Magnani 2008).

But the street or public square is also an object of the singular strategies of groups and social classes. Research on the sociabilities and modes of symbolic and material appropriation of these city spaces and scapes are continuously refreshed in what is one of the most creative benefits that urban studies can retrieve from the contexts of the *other* cities in Latin America. As a matter of fact a plethora of monographs on urban sociability in public urban spaces in Latin America are quite enlightening of the political impor-

tance of the street and the public square in the making of urban democracy and cultural citizenship (Frúgoli 2007). Moreover, those very same studies nourish a creative discussion about the memory of places in association with policies of urban gentrification, their advances and retreats. In Argentina, for example, research on *lieux de mémoire* in the streets and squares of Buenos Aires has indeed inspired a renewed relationship, perhaps imagined, of the citizens with the city's spaces (Lacarrieu/Pallini 2007). The public space and old town are treated here on a scale that broadly exceeds many of the predominant visions in the West. Very often, instead of bemoaning the socio-cultural retreat of these meeting spaces under the impact of global factors (tourism, urbanism of consumption or generic architecture), we are invited to "excavate" the collective memory (Sarlo 2001; Huyssen, 2003) which, according to several Western academic views, is supposed to have been irretrievably lost in European and American cities and elsewhere (Sieber 2008). In this regard, sometimes research re-routes us towards a consideration of the revanchism of the city and asks us in how far the utter failure of urban gentrification processes (as in Pelourinho, in Salvador da Bahia, or Recife Velho) is not the allegoric triumph of the urban memory that violently re-emerges amid the gaps of the simulacrum (Leite 2004).

The study of major cultural events or the question of monumental architecture is less important in Brazilian social-anthropological thinking and in other parts of South America. But an unusual interest in the political and social impact of the staging in Brazil of the FIFA World Cup (2014) and the Olympic Games (2016) is developing in that country. This is a realm in which Western academic wisdom has demonstrated a long tradition of studies and quite outstanding analytical experience since the mid-nineteenth century. Most of these studies today limit themselves to assessing the tourist impact of these great happenings on places. But as events such as the Olympics or the FIFA World Cup are brought into the southern hemisphere, new socio-political interpretations can be expected, not simply a mimetic reading of what has been done in Europe. In the various cities in Brazil that will accommodate some of the coming events, the *dossiers* are already attracting plenty of research resources. In the meantime preliminary accounts appear to be focused either on measures for urban social pacification, involving the demolition of parts of the *favelas* and *aglomerados* and the forced removal of residents alongside some urban developmental projects and regeneration interventions and their profound mass media impact. Hopefully, the Brazilian community of researchers and social scientists will uncover new lines of assessment for these initiatives and their urban and societal impact.

We are living in a world that is witnessing the unstoppable removal of the *other* cities from the prevailing academic agendas in which, by the same token, the lexicon of urban theory is reoriented around "world cities" and "global cities" issues. Among other pernicious effects, such a move takes place contra-cyclically, that is, precisely at a time when globalization has brought about an intense dissemination of information and knowledge crucial to fostering the heuristics of contrasting situations instead of ignoring and getting rid of them. When democratic cosmopolitanism and migration appear to be fuelled by acute diaspora crises, this helps to connect real cities to one another, rather than detaching them from each other, regardless of their scale or geographical location, allowing for the emergence of complex webs of relations between them (Sassen 2002). Inasmuch as such a move is unable to open itself up to other views and to the experi-

ences of the *other* cities, this political trend amounts to quite a retrograde step for urban theory. It is my contention here that many Latin American researchers show how cities have used urban and electoral democracy to modernize urban governance and expand their political, economic and cultural importance as a way of sharing socio-economic and political histories (Navia/Zimmerman 2004). Some are even examples of urban democratic and participative governance, based on the tool of the participative budget. Despite some setbacks, this is an instrument for the democratic governance of cities to which the West must pay more attention, since it envisages enhancing both the relative cultural autonomy of cities vis-à-vis the nation state and the political empowerment of citizens.

I would like to make a final reference to the contribution of *other* Latin American cities to the body of urban studies. I firmly believe that recent literary narratives produced *in* and *on* Latin American cities are good examples of the tendency to re-imagine the city in terms of immaterial elements of a socio-psychological and symbolic nature. I am thinking of some analytical contributions key to understanding the very close relationship between the city and literature in the Latin American and, for that matter, the Iberian context as well. There is nothing new in emphasizing how literary output can be inspired by the most diverse social worlds of cities. It is important to mention here, however, that this literary output can be a factor in renewing our interpretation of the city. To me, the pioneering works of Angel Rama (1996, 2008), José Luis Romero (2001) and others (e.g. Franco 2003; Rovira 2005; Salvador 2006; Schwartz 2010) are singular contributions to the necessary interdisciplinary matching of narratives required for the epistemic reinterpretation of the city. Coming to a close I cannot help but mention the newly celebrated role of the affects and the senses in the making of urban sociability (e.g. urban sounds and scents) (Fortuna 2009). The design of new urban cartographies of the senses, which is now attracting a growing number of social-anthropological researchers in Brazil and elsewhere, is a potent way of reading the city anew. These are all signs of a renewed form of producing essential knowledge for the desirable new episteme discussed above, that is, for the much-needed renewal of urban sociology and its precarious framework. The city sounds. Quite particularly, the *other* city sounds rather vehemently. Are we not listening to it?

The advantage of a new theoretical framework that can bring together new political views and epistemologies is that it would help to improve the intelligibility of a world that is unstoppably an urban one: a *world of cities*, some large and some small, but present in every latitude and all equally important to our future.

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