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## **BEYOND THE TIPPING POINT: A MULTIDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVE ON URBANIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT**

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**Beyond the Tipping Point:  
A Multidisciplinary Perspective on Urbanization and Development\***

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**Abstract**

By many estimates, the world has just crossed the point where more than half the world's population is urban, a trend driven by rapid urbanization in developing countries. Urban centres offer economies of scale in terms of productive enterprise and public investment. Cities are social melting pots, centres of innovation and drivers of social change. However, cities are also marked by social differentiation, poverty, conflict and environmental degradation. These are all issues that not only matter to cities but also lie at the heart of development. As such the time is right to consider afresh the relationship between cities and development. This paper introduces a significant new collection of multidisciplinary papers focused on urbanization and its implications for development. It raises four questions: (i) What is so special about the urban context? (ii) Why is urbanization and urban growth important to development at the present conjuncture? (iii) What are the strengths and limitations of our current state of knowledge about urbanization and development from the policy perspective and finally, (iv) how can a multidisciplinary perspective on the urban context add value to development research and policy?

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\* Introduction to Jo Beall, Basudeb Guha-Khasnobis and Ravi Kanbur, *Beyond the Tipping Point: Development in an Urban World*

## **1. Introduction**

Working with United Nations population estimates, researchers from North Carolina State University and the University of Georgia predicted 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2007 as the day on which, for the first time, the world's population became more urban than rural (*Science Daily*, 25<sup>th</sup> May 2007). Though this date was merely symbolic it signalled a demographic transformation of particular consequence for low and middle-income countries. The current trend to an increasingly urban world is being driven by urbanization in parts of the world where enormous development challenges remain, particularly Africa and Asia.

Urban centres offer economies of scale in terms of productive enterprise and public investment. Cities are social melting pots, sites of innovation, political engagement, cultural interchange and drivers of social change. However, cities are also marked by social differentiation, poverty, conflict and environmental degradation. So alongside the obvious benefits of agglomeration there are also costs. These are all issues that not only matter to cities but also lie at the heart of development. As such the time is right to consider afresh the relationship between cities and development.

This paper introduces a significant new multidisciplinary collection focused on urbanization and its implications for development. We venture 'beyond the tipping point' in two important ways. First we address the issue of the statistical tipping point by providing evidence that demonstrates the inexorability of urbanization and the imperative for an urban perspective on development. Second, our analysis shows why it is necessary to go beyond statistics and the demographic arguments to better understand the social, economic and political changes wrought by rapid urbanization and the implications for development research and policy in an urban world.

The volume is divided into three main parts. The first is concerned with methodology and urbanization trends. It looks at issues of definition and measurement as well as

different investigative techniques for producing evidence on the urban context.

Contributions include a thorough assessment of current official global data on urbanization; the development of a new index of agglomeration which has been used extensively in the 2008 World Development Report of the World Bank; and illustrations of the value of longitudinal research and how qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis can combine to produce powerful understandings of urban situations and processes. The second section takes up the issue of geography and infrastructure, focusing on the benefits and costs of population concentration in cities. Drawing on both qualitative and quantitative analysis, the chapters specify, and in some cases estimate, the positive and negative externalities associated with urban agglomeration, for example in relation to slums, residential segregation, the environment, urban services and infrastructure. The last section addresses the dynamics of governance and conflict. Grounded in a broad social science perspective the chapters address the ordinary conflicts that positively infuse the everyday terrain of urban political contestation and governance. They also engage with the more extreme and negative situations of crime, urban violence and the impact of war on cities. These features of contemporary urban life need to be set against the ‘benefits of agglomeration’ argument more often advanced by economists.

In this paper we introduce the volume by addressing four overarching questions. First, what is so special about the urban context? Second, why are urbanization and urban growth important for development at the present juncture? Third, what are the limitations of our current state of knowledge about urbanization and development policy? Fourth, what is the value added of a multidisciplinary perspective on the urban context for development research and policy?

## **2. Disciplinary Perspectives on the Urban Context**

The American historian Lewis Mumford once observed that ‘there is not a single function performed in the city that cannot be performed – and has not in fact been performed – in the open country’ (Mumford 1937:34). So what is so special about the urban context? Attempts to understand this date back to 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century social

scientists, such as Marx, Weber, Simmel, Durkheim and Polanyi, who were concerned to understand the dramatic changes that accompanied the Industrial Revolution. Next the Chicago School sociologists (Park et al 1925) recognized the benefits and challenges of large numbers of people living in close *proximity* under conditions of relative *density* and *diversity*. Most famously, Lewis Wirth defined a city as a ‘relatively large, dense and permanent settlement of socially heterogeneous individuals’ whose proximity gave rise to a distinctly urban way of life (Wirth, 1938). Some contemporary sociologists suggest that: ‘our societies, in all latitudes, are and will be multicultural, and the cities (especially the large cities) are the places in which the greatest diversity is concentrated’ (Borja and Castells 1997:89). Showing evidence of the enduring salience of the Chicago School alongside the influence of what has been called the ‘spatial turn’ in urban studies, the qualities that make up urbanism have been summed up as: ‘the economic and ecological interdependencies and the creative – as well as occasionally destructive – synergisms that arise from the purposeful clustering and collective cohabitation of people in space’ (Soja 2000:12).

The late Jane Jacobs saw diversity as fuelling economic innovation, with cities as incubators of innovation that operated to the advantage not only of urban but also national economies (Jacobs 1984). Economists too have long recognized the impact on economic performance of proximity, density and diversity. Almost a century ago Alfred Marshall argued that the close proximity of economic agents could improve the performance of a firm or industry, allowing access to a wider and more diverse pool of skilled and unskilled labour and of other inputs including the exchange of information and ideas which, he argued, facilitated learning, innovation and diffusion (Marshall 1920:267-77). A central premise of urban economics is that urbanization and urban growth lead to agglomeration effects, being the benefits and costs that flow from density and proximity (Henderson, 2003; Venables, 2005; Venables, Chapter 7 in this volume; World Bank 2008, Uchida and Nelson, Chapter 4 in this volume).

Diversity in cities has been viewed both as a negative and a positive (Beall 1997). Some claim an urban identity forged by processes of creolization that are thought to

emerge as a result of urbanism. Others are more circumspect about hybridization and focus rather on the challenges of difference as signaled, for example, by the subtitle of Lindsay Bremner's book on Johannesburg, the quintessential 'world in one city': *One City, Colliding Worlds* (Bremner, 2004). Johannesburg is not the only city characterized by residential segregation, a common response in multicultural and divided cities. Urban diversity is at the centre of current debates on cosmopolitanism, characterized either as a trajectory towards global democracy and post-identity politics or the challenge of living with and governing cultural diversity and difference (Vertovec and Cohen 2002). Urban cosmopolitanism is associated mostly with the latter perspective and focuses on the kinds of spaces within cities where cosmopolitanism is located and can be fostered (Binnie et al 2006).

To the combination of *density* and *diversity* is added the rapid *dynamics* of urbanization and urban growth as a characteristic feature of the urban context. If several rural areas send migrants to the same urban area, the rate of population increase in the urban setting is much faster than the rate of population decline in the sending rural areas. New migrants create new opportunities and new needs, offer new skills and new perspectives, and new requirements for institutional innovation. Added to this is the rapid rate of change in the economics of the urban setting itself, set in train by the rapid rate of economic change and accompanying agglomeration externalities.

*Density, diversity* and *dynamics* in the urban context are closely associated with, and perhaps lead to, *complexity*. It is a notion first introduced by urban anthropologists who wished to counter the discipline's seemingly unwavering emphasis on 'primitive' society, which they saw as ignoring or misrepresenting the complexity of urban and industrial societies (Basham 1978). The contemporary sociologist, Kian Tajbakhsh, argues that cities have the potential to offer people 'the ability to comprehend and master the complex, multicultural realities of the modern world' but that by virtue of their very complexity, cities might 'thwart and limit this aspiration' (Tajbakhsh 2001:1) From our perspective, complexity is a particularly useful concept for understanding urban politics and governance in low and middle-income cities. Conventional political science seeks to understand, the

negotiation of interests and the formation of bargains, alliances and coalitions of power and this pertains for urban politics as well (Judge et al 1995). However, urban institutions are particularly knotty in cities of developing countries and it is helpful to be alert to the complex ways in which formal and informal institutions do and do not mesh.

A question that confounds is whether these various features of urbanism – *proximity, density, diversity, dynamics and complexity* – are forces for good or ill. Urban optimists see cities as not only as driving economies but also as ‘privileged places for democratic innovation’ (Borja and Castells 1997:246-251). Borrowing the term propinquity – meaning physical or psychological proximity among people – from social psychology, political geographers have applied the term to the constructive political effects on urban social actors resulting from proximity to one another and to decision-making processes (Amin and Thrift 2002). Cities are identified with the formation of citizenship (Holston and Appadurai 1993). Over a longer timeframe Dyson (2001: 17) suggests that urbanization focuses attention on the distribution of political power in society that helped bring about modern democracy.

Urban pessimists see cities in more negative terms. As pointed out by Dennis Rodgers (Chapter 16 in this volume), they have tended to focus on the ennui and social breakdown generated by the fragmentation of city life, pointing to the social differentiation and exclusion generated by urban living. Contemporary discussions characterize cities as sites of urban dystopia that play host to social violence, malaise, poverty and inequality (Baeten 2002; Davis 2006), while environmentalists argue that cities absorb a lion’s share of the world’s renewable and non-renewable resources, creating large and devastating ‘ecological footprints’ that reach way beyond their own boundaries and carrying capacity (Rees 1992).

In a partially tongue-in-cheek review of urban studies Dennis Judd (2005: 125) talks about the ‘love affair between urban scholars and *noir*’. Judd gently mocks the gloomy predictions about urban futures in advanced economies and the hyperbolic anticipation of Mad Max cities. As we explore the relationship between urbanization and development we



must inevitably address the *noir*. However, we pay equal mind to the positive opportunities and outcomes arising from the specialized social, economic and political activities that are spawned by the frequent and near encounters of diverse people in cities across the world.

### **3. Urbanization and the Current Conjuncture**

Bloom et al (chapter 3 in this volume) and Satterthwaite (chapter 4) critically analyze issues of definition and measurement of urbanization and urban growth. They point to problems associated with relying on UN projections (UN, 2006), especially for countries where there are no regular or reliable census data, yet even more conservative estimates lead to sobering conclusions about the challenges of rapid urbanization. Between 1993 and 2002, the number of people living on US\$1 a day or less fell by 150 million in rural areas but rose by 50 million in urban areas. Thus ‘Poverty is clearly becoming more urban’ (Ravallion et al 2007:27). This confirms earlier findings from health studies (Pryer 2003; Pryer and Crook 1988).

The most disadvantaged among the urban poor rely on employment in the dynamic but insecure informal economy (see Guha-Khasnobis, Kanbur and Ostrom, 2006). Absent or inadequate services render their living environments threatening to people’s health (Harpham et al 1988). It is in relation to basic urban services that urban inequalities are often most evident, with poor slum dwellers paying a water vendor up to fifty times more for clean water than a resident living a stone’s throw away in a fully serviced neighbourhood. As has been bluntly observed, ‘the poor pay more for their cholera’ (Stephens 1996:13).

The relationship between cities and the environment works in two directions. Cities are environmental culprits but they are also susceptible to environmental risk. The devastation to poor urban populations as a result of extreme weather events is increasingly evident. Particularly vulnerable are urban centres located in low-elevation coastal zones, which contain ten per cent of its total population (over 600 million people) and 13 per cent of its urban population (around 360 million people) (Satterthwaite et al, 2007:22). This points to

the added risk of economic loss in low lying cities, which are host to between 60 and 95 per cent of economic activities in low and middle income countries (McGranahan et al, 2007).

A key manifestation of urban poverty is the growth of slums and informal settlements. UN-Habitat (2003) estimates that one billion people live in slums. As indicated in the chapter by Ben Arimah (Chapter 10 in this volume), Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest incidence of slums, followed by Asia and the Latin America Caribbean (LAC) region: although Asia is home to the largest number of slum dwellers in absolute terms. Similarly, urban inequality is signaled by the proliferation of gated communities in which the urban middle classes live and secure themselves against ‘the urban badlands they have left behind’ (Davis 2006:202). As such elite residents become disconnected from public space and local governance, privately providing for their own services and amenities and in turn failing to lend their weight to addressing collective concerns at the city scale (Beall et al 2002).

Insecurity has become a fact of life in cities across Africa, Asia and Latin America Caribbean. Urban areas can be socially, culturally, ethnically and religiously diverse and some see this as an important contributory factor in making them principal locations of conflict. Others point to demographic risk factors. Rapid urban population growth is likely to contribute to a youth bulge in the distribution of urban populations, especially if driven by migration (Cincotta, 2004). A high youth bulge and high rates of urban growth are said to place countries at greater risk of conflict (Gizewski and Homer-Dixon, 1995).

Cities have also been targets of war. Contemporary conflicts are fought increasingly in and around cities even though urban warfare is particularly destructive and in the past has been avoided at all costs (Graham 2004). Today ‘The geography of terror has moved on to the global stage largely by way of cities and specific urban symbols’ (Beall 2006: 107). There has also been an increase in the number of political murders in the city, pointing to what is often a difficulty in distinguishing between political violence and urban crime (Vlassenroot and Büscher 2008). Yasser Nassin (chapter 12 in this volume) suggests, urban violence impacts negatively on community and inter-group relations leading to further

spatial segregation and fragmented urban governance that serve to deplete the social, economic and political vitality of cities.

Urban governance is very much about how heterogeneous populations negotiate space and mobilize resources, with outcomes that range from sharing, to segregation to extortion and plunder. Classical debates in urban political theory between ‘pluralists’ and ‘elitists’ reverberate with development research in cities of Africa, Asia and Latin America. Debates are polarized between those who focus on urban social movements and see urban politics as characterized by activism and those who emphasize the political passivity of the urban poor and focus on clientalism (Walton 1998). Urban politics and governance do not take place in a vacuum and we need to analyse how what happens at the metropolitan level articulates with other spheres and tiers of governance. As Nick Devas has observed, certain political arrangements provide more opportunities than others for poor and marginalised people to influence urban decision-making and among these are good interaction between city level authorities and other tiers of government (Devas et al 2004:84).

If we left our discussion of the contemporary urban condition here, we could justifiably be characterized as Judd’s urban ‘end-times prophets’. However, cities in low and middle-income countries offer hope and advancement as well. These opportunities explain why rural urban migration remains an important dimension of urbanization and why, despite often appalling living and working conditions, it continues. Informal settlements might not be ideal but they provide opportunities to people wanting to better themselves and when security of tenure and title is assured sometimes they flourish. This argument has been advanced strenuously by Hernando de Soto (2000) and is tested by Ignacio Navarro and Geoffrey Turnbull (Chapter 15 in this volume) in their analysis of informal settlements in Cochabamba, Bolivia. Janice Perlman (chapter 5 in this volume) and Caroline Moser and Andrew Felton (chapter 6 in this volume) present findings from longitudinal studies in two Latin American cities. They show that while urban poverty and deprivation persist for some, for others they diminish.

Broad social scientists have suggested that we have to think beyond the straightforward models offered by economics and embrace the chaos, edginess and informality of cities in developing countries, characteristics that ‘act as a platform for the creation of a very different kind of sustainable urban configuration than we have yet generally to know’ (Simone 2004:9). Put another way, what constitutes a growing norm in cities of low and middle-income countries offers a spectre of a broader global urban future (Beall et al 2002). In her book *Ordinary Cities* Jennifer Robinson seeks to set an agenda ‘for a new generation of urban scholarship that will move beyond divisive categories (such as Western, Third World, African, South American, South-East Asian, or post-socialist cities) and hierarchies (such as global, alpha or world cities)’. In doing so she chastises the ‘world cities’ approach for being myopically Western-centric and developmentalism for labeling cities of the Global South as ‘developing’, thereby condemning them to a game of perpetual catch up (Robinson 2006: 1).

#### **4. Urbanization and Development Policy**

Development economists have paid insufficient heed to the economic dynamism of cities as spatial entities, perceiving economic growth simply as a function of national level investment, institutions and innovation. Instead of regarding urbanization and urban growth as nothing more than side effects of industrialization, recent commentators have suggested that privileging industrialization as the motor of development underestimates the force of geographic concentration (Scott and Storper 2003) and as Anthony Venables observes (chapter 7 in this volume), the renaissance in urban economics is long overdue. Urbanists more generally have tended to adopt a narrow perspective, emphasizing the persistence and growth of urban poverty and social disadvantage in order to put urban social dynamics on the development agenda. A recent example of this has been in relation to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). This has included attempts to ensure that goal seven is addressed, especially target 11, which is to significantly improve the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020 and to ensure urban areas are not neglected across all eight goals. Admirable though this is, development research and policy has suffered from both

neglect and myopia and as a result of the growth and distribution discourses talking past each other.

We know cities can provide social, political and economic opportunities so why have they not been a stronger feature of development policy? An argument from the 1950s that still has some resonance in development discourse is that of over-urbanization. (Davis and Hertz 1954; Hozelitz 1957), based on the observation that the degree of industrialization in low and middle-income countries was and continues to be lower than that of advanced countries at comparable levels of urbanization. Apart from the moot assumption that all countries necessarily follow the same path to development, it has been pointed out that urbanization without economic growth is a fairly common phenomenon (Fay and Opal 2000). So despite its continued currency the over-urbanization thesis has analytical limits.

As influential on development research and policy if not more, has been Michael Todaro's model of migration (Todaro 2000). He argued that rural-urban migration is inevitable because of the imbalance in economic opportunities between rural and urban areas in most developing countries and that investment in rural economies will benefit the countryside and prevent migration to the cities. While the first proposition carries obvious weight the second is not supported by the evidence. Most policies aimed at discouraging rural-urban migration no matter how draconian or assiduously pursued, as in South Africa and China, have failed dismally.

One reason why Todaro's migration thesis endured is that it chimed with another hardy perennial of development theory and research, Michael Lipton's urban bias thesis (Lipton 1977), complemented and supported by the work of Robert Bates (1988). Both posited that rural areas received too little by way of public spending relative to their need, influencing a generation of policy makers to resist urban bias in development investment and support rural poverty reduction strategies. The most recent example of this can be found in Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), planning documents agreed between national governments and international donor and financing agencies. Two recent reviews show that nearly all PRSPs have a strong emphasis on the relative importance of rural poverty and

most show a general lack of focus on or understanding of urban poverty issues (ComHabitat 2005; Mitlin 2004).

Stuart Corbridge and Gareth Jones suggest that the urban bias thesis can be restated as an argument against predation without speaking of ‘a single urban class exploiting a single rural class’ in spatially bound ways. They conclude: ‘To the extent that the urban bias thesis has encouraged a neglect of urban poverty and the economic dynamism of many cities in the developing world, it has also had an unwelcome effect on policy. What is required now is a re-balancing’ (Corbridge and Jones 2006:38). The generic question, however, is how exactly policy makers should allocate development funds and attention between rural areas, where the incidence of income poverty may be higher and (for now at any rate) the number of poor is also higher, versus urban areas where the incidence of poverty is growing and where the number of poor may soon eclipse the numbers in rural areas. This is a question to which do not, as yet, have an answer.

Another question is if agglomeration is beneficial why is that states do not try and promote urban concentration? The answer is that when they try they have generally failed. Regional planners thought that spatial inequalities could be mitigated through targeted interventions and devised policies to encourage the growth of urban centres in peripheral regions. One mode of achieving this was through creating new capital cities, such as Brasilia in Brazil or Dodoma in Tanzania. Another was industrial decentralisation where incentives were offered to firms to relocate or set up business away from the main urban centres. The establishment of urban ‘growth poles’ was undertaken by investing in stimulant industries with the idea of generating wider economic activity in their wake. It was believed that in developing countries growth poles offered a solution to urban primacy and they became so fashionable between the 1950s and 1970s that they assumed a normative aspect (Parr 1999a). However, growth poles fell into disfavour as a result of implementation failures. A major problem was that they were often set up in depressed areas with low levels of infrastructure and a poor fiscal base. Another handicap was that decisions on the location of growth poles were made on political rather than economic grounds (Parr 1999b).

Today growth poles are thought to be most successful when they evolve naturally and spontaneously, rather than when they are planned (Friedmann 2007). As urban economies receive greater policy attention, the trend now is to build on areas of economic success or potential. This is especially the case with the current focus on city- regions, promoted on the grounds that cities in the narrow sense are less viable units of local social and economic organisation than metropolitan functional regions or regional networks of urban centres. The advancement of city-regions is informed by the global cities paradigm and the view that cities and regions have an important role to play in ensuring the competitiveness of local enterprises (Porter, 1999). This is fine as far as it goes but competitive cities are dependent on the spatial concentration of infrastructure and in many of the large urban agglomerations in Africa, Asia and Latin America infrastructure provision is poor or fragmented (Graham and Marvin 2001). It has been observed as well that ‘Models of strategic planning, originally developed in northern cities are being applied in southern cities with considerable energy but with mixed success’ (Stren, 2001:209). In this volume Somik Lall, Hyoung Gun Wang and Uwe Deichmann (chapter 8) examine the relationship between infrastructure and city competitiveness.

Our approach in this volume avoids utopian excesses as well as the suffocating constraints of urban ‘noir’ and demonstrates the value of multidisciplinary perspectives. In the next section we look towards overcoming disciplinary myopias through multidisciplinary perspectives on the urban condition.

## **5. The Value of a Multidisciplinary Perspective**

The American economist James Duesenberry once remarked that economics is the study of the choices that people make while sociology is the study of why people have no choices (cited in Boudon 1981:6). Thus explained, economics offers to interdisciplinary urban research the optimism and possibilities associated with analysis of scale economies while sociology focuses on the constraints people face. Economics is limited by its

preoccupation with equilibrium, which renders it less able to investigate how societies change. By contrast, historical understanding is central to sociology (Giddens 1990) which is concerned to know how change happens, by who's hand, on whose behalf, and by way of what sorts of institutional and organizational evolution or rupture? Social anthropology adds to the mix but exploring rituals, codes and conventions between and within societies and over time. While economics separates, categorizes and orders information and ideas, broader social science 'defamiliarizes' things and critically interrogates what appear to be obvious or 'natural' phenomena (Bauman 1990). Political science focuses on power, negotiation, interests and institutions. And geography as a discipline brings space and place to centre stage ((Harvey 2001; Lefebvre 1991; Shields 1999).

In his book *For the City Yet to Come*, sociologist AbdouMaliq Simone presents the real world of urban institutional complexity in African cities as follows:

Cities are sometimes sites of substantial intersections. As such they are more than the infrastructures, codes, and inputs necessary to manage population sizes and built environments. They are full of unanticipated associations, visions, confluence, noise and things to consume .... For as African cities increasingly suggest, the city in general is a nebulous world where security operatives, freedom fighters, terrorists, corporate raiders, gangster, rebels, activists, militants, presidents, smugglers, communication technicians, hackers, accountants, consultants, and priests are all like each other but not the same thing .... It is in navigating these murky relations – operating in a world with incessant criss-crossing of identifications, allegiances, and collaborations – that new spaces of urban economy are being made (Simone 2004:240-1).

It should be abundantly clear that the proximity, density, diversity, dynamics and complexity which characterize cities and define the urban cannot be encompassed by any one discipline. For a complete understanding we need economists with their toolkits of rational choice, scale economies and agglomeration externalities; sociologists for their exploration of group dynamics and social constraints on individual choice; anthropologists and their focus on ritual and contextualized meaning in explaining behaviour; political



scientists and their analyses of coalitions and urban politics; and of course geographers for whom space and place are the organizing principles of discourse and analysis.

The chapters in this volume individually show the enormous value of each discipline in analyzing urban development. Standard economist approaches (for example Bloom et. al., Chapter 2, Venables, Chapter 7; Naude, Chapter 11) are presented side by side with the broader social science approaches, for example, of Bryceson on ethnicity (Chapter 13), Medina on urban waste (Chapter 9), or Rabinovich and Catenazzi on urban governance (Chapter 14). Information is generated by longstanding engagement with specific urban areas in the papers by Perlman (Chapter 5) and Moser and Felton (Chapter 6), while Satterthwaite (Chapter 3) provides an antidote to the uncritical use of standard “comparable” national level data. Uchida and Nelson (Chapter 4) use the theory of economic geography to develop an agglomeration index, Lall et. al. (Chapter 8) analyze the effect of infrastructure on competitiveness again within an economic geography framework, while Navarro and Turnbull (Chapter 15) use economic theory and econometric techniques to study the economics of informal settlements. In a very different approach, Yassin (Chapter 12) examines in detail urban violence in Beirut and how it is shaping the structuring of urban space.

Indeed, reflecting on Simone’s account of the urban, it is difficult to see how a multidisciplinary perspective could *not* be used in the urbanization discourse. This is particularly true in the policy arena. Take, for example, the age old debate on how much public spending there should be in urban versus rural areas. An economist would frame this in terms of (i) a national objective such as economic growth or poverty reduction, (ii) a model of individual behaviour, including migration, in response to public spending and (iii) an account of economic agglomeration externalities and their impact on productivity and incomes. Political scientists would start by going beyond the notion of a given national level objective and looking at the balance of power and interests between rural and urban areas, to investigate the conditions under which the polity would in fact come to a decision to, say, increase public spending on urban areas. Within the urban area, they would

disaggregate further and ask how that spending would be channelled given local level institutions and balance of power.

From a sociological and an anthropological perspective, the historical structures explaining poverty in rural and urban areas, in particular social structures like ethnicity, caste and patriarchy, would be the first step in understanding how expenditures would flow to and through communities and households. Migration behaviour would be explained by a broader set of factors than individual choice in the face of differing economic returns. Social networks would be important, imparting a path dependence and stickiness to migration channels that might respond only slowly to public expenditures. Even more broadly, a detailed analysis of social interactions, and the meaning individuals and groups attach to seemingly straightforward acts like house construction or water consumption and use, would be important in guiding the nature of public expenditure and its impact. For the geographer, especially environmental geographers, the national objective would have to include an appropriate valuation of environmental resources and risks, including the built environment.

So no discipline can on its own adequately explain the urban condition. It is important for each discipline to understand and appreciate the value of other disciplinary approaches. Multidisciplinarity—the respectful juxtaposition and absorption of the analyses of different disciplines—is a first step to an interdisciplinary approach. This volume provides a vehicle for illustrating the value of such multidisciplinarity.

## **6. Conclusion**

Let us return to the four questions posed in the introduction to this paper.

What is so special about the urban context? From the literature we have highlighted proximity, density, diversity, dynamics and complexity as the key features that characterize the urban. If anything, the “three D’s”—density, diversity and dynamics—are probably the irreducible characteristics of the urban, since density carries within it proximity, and

complexity. Important though they are as separate categories for analysis, proximity, complexity and other features of urbanism are ultimately the result of density, diversity and dynamics. These key characteristics span the different disciplinary approaches. Economists focus more on density (agglomeration effects) and dynamics (migration). The broader social sciences pay greater attention to diversity and heterogeneity in the urban population, and how this interacts with density and dynamics to produce urban politics, culture, social relationships and change.

Why is urbanization important for development at the present juncture? In 1900, just 13 per cent of the world's population lived in urban areas; the United Nations (2006) projects that 4.9 billion people will live in cities by 2030, representing 60 per cent of the global population. In a globalized world the sources efficiency and dynamic growth are increasingly in urban centres. However, poverty in low and middle income countries is increasingly taking on an urban character. Urban centres of population concentration, particularly of the poor, will be particularly vulnerable to climate catastrophes. And cities have become sites of violence and criminality, and perhaps sites of "Urban Wars of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century" (Beall, 2007). Both on the positive and the negative side, therefore, cities loom large among the development challenges of coming decades.

What are the limitations of our current state of knowledge about urbanization and development policy? In this paper we have tried to steer a middle course between utopian excesses of a rosy urbanized future on the one hand, and the doom-saying of the "urban noir" viewpoint on the other. The urban setting, towards which the world seems to be moving inexorably, presents opportunities as well as challenges. The different disciplines considered in this volume have developed a great deal of detailed knowledge about the urban setting, and about the impact of different policy instruments on wellbeing in cities. But it seems to us that each discipline and the disciplines together, lack an adequate framework for addressing broad questions on the balance between urban and rural orientation in public expenditure and policy.

Finally, what is the value added of an interdisciplinary perspective on the urban context for development research and policy? We hope to have shown that urban realities, urban evolution, and urban policy imperatives are sufficiently complex and multi-faceted to require the strengths of each of a number of disciplines to understand urbanization, urban growth and urbanism in all their fullness. There is considerable value added in using the strengths of each discipline to complement each other. But it is only a first step.

*Interdisciplinarity*, the integration of different approaches to develop a deeper analysis of the urban condition, is clearly some way away in the study of urbanization and development. Critical to advancing research on urban development is for economists to inform their data analysis with insights from the broad social sciences that allows them to accommodate the messiness and complexity of city life and the urban context in which choices (rational or otherwise) are made. By the same token, sociologists and anthropologists need to scale up household and community level studies to embrace dynamics at the metropolitan level, while political scientists need to disaggregate national level data and findings to the level of the city. In doing so and by taking on board methodological insights and tools from across the social sciences, it will be possible to generate deeper understanding of the urban condition and more coherent policy repertoires operative across a range of scales but focused on cities.

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