

Divergent and convergent shifts in northern and southern city regions

Alan Mabin

Wits City Institute, University of the Witwatersrand

Capital Cities Programme, University of Pretoria

alan@alanmabin.org

+27828565606

This paper extends my work on three large city regions – São Paulo, Paris and Gauteng in South Africa – and its meanings for urban theory (Mabin 2014) as well as varied challenges of comparative research. These three city regions in electoral democracies with multi layered and oft-changing urban government, definitely show changing landscapes of capital accumulation, dispossession, displacement, urban planning, and governance in differentially changing spaces of urbanism (Mabin 2012 for example). They suggest limits to the notion of urban theory from the south, but do not deny a need for new conceptual vocabulary that can transgress current city thinking. A central question concerns divergence and convergence in city region change – not only between south and north but also between different ‘regions’ of the conceptual global south. Key themes of memory, citizen voice, professional practices and visions of the future are deployed as axes of drawing these city regions and burning questions of urban theory into confrontation.

Whilst the paper would hardly claim to span the world of cities, it does bring into contact – perhaps even intersection – three city regions in different settings, with obviously diverse histories, distinct demographics, and varied linkages into global changes, linguistics, aspirations and perceptions. In the world of cities none of these are ordinary except that all contain the ordinary struggles of *citadin(e)s* to build, maintain, extend and direct their lives in the face of power – places where people make their own histories but not under conditions of their own choosing, to cite the well known phrase.

Sources of materials deployed include participant observation in social and political events, ranges of secondary materials and media in several languages, some interviews and other primary sources drawn together over some decades. The paper reaches no integrated conclusions but sets out thoughts on ways to expand thinking – if not practice – in the contested cities of the present time.

A Mabin 2012 Metropolitan democracy: themes and possibilities in São Paulo, Johannesburg and Paris, *Governing the metropolis: powers and territories. New directions for research*, International Conference – Hôtel de Ville, Ville de Paris, November 28-30, 2012

A Mabin 2014 Grounding southern city theory in time and space, in S Parnell and S Oldfield (eds) *Routledge Handbook on Cities of the South* (London

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