

HOT RESEARCH IN URBAN STUDIES

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ABSTRACT: In this paper, we make a preliminary advance in the effort to identify the Hot Research themes in current Urban Studies. The mayor interest to this approach is the concentration of the international research in the same global questions. We focus a special attention on traditional and modern research questions, concepts and common terms in Social Sciences disciplines, like Urban Sociology, Social Geography, Social Psychology, Human Ecology, Demography, Planning and Design, Social Education, Environmental Psychology, etc. The main provisional findings help to build up a research agenda in this field and the related areas, specifically, local and regional studies. Finally, we underline the need to solve the problem of a common research program, with political and social connections, around the chances and changes of our actual urbanized world.

KEYWORDS: Urban Studies, Research Agenda, Local and Regional, Urban Futures

INTRODUCTION

In the last years, the working progress on Urban Research from everywhere has been characterized by a great diversity of institutional, political, and social frameworks around the world, with different chronological and geographical overviews about urban problems and solutions. Starting from the contemporary debates on urban universe, this approach aims to review the scientific literature about such subject, in order to support the beginning of a new research agenda for the future.

For that, we try to search the gap between knowledge-city and urban arena, including familiar explanations, like to the urban size and agglomeration theories, as well as those based on more subtle and complex interpretations. This approach could draw new agendas and insights for city managers and urban scholars. And it would be helpful to identify urban morphological and typological principles for improving socio-spatial configurations and producing a better daily-life to people and social groups.

Following this argument, we can recover research about the transformations of urban setting in the global era and outcomes to explore ways of managing more sustainable and equitably cities. And we can attempt to understand how particular aspects of urban morphologies are on the basis of their great potential for (a) promoting better conditions to Human and Social Development and (b) generating a sustainable balance between people and places.

The results indicate the relevance and potential of current international trends in the study of urban question. We conclude that a detailed knowledge is the key to the development of appropriate urban design, planning and policies, and can be used to inform a more closely targeted policing strategy. Some recommendations for improving a new urban challenge and for further research would be described.

DISCUSSIONS ON URBAN NATURE AND PROPERTIES

The city is an interdisciplinary study object. Commonly, the research themes in Urban Studies include segregation, time-space behavior and demography; history and cultures of planning; economics and space; institutions, and networks; and many others. Furthermore, they include relations between ecology and economy, global and local, public and private, sanctions and shadow order, permanent and transitory, standard and appropriation, tradition and modernity, people and places, etc.

Briefly, scientific debates around all this themes tend to show that city is a really beautiful place, but it is also a chaotic and stressing area. On the one hand, many scholars think that we are right when we consider the nature of the city as a different and special settlement. And urban ecosystems are often faced with distinctive issues arising from their unique social, environmental and economic characteristics, because cities offer the lure of better employment, education, health care, and culture; and they contribute strangely to national economies.

On the other, cities and metropolitan regions are not successful in several recent challenges including urban sprawl, auto dependence and congestion, and related environmental and human health effects. Not exhaustively, concepts like urban ghettos, poor places or slum areas are linked to inequality and disadvantaged, segregation, and also social exclusion. These themes have received increasing attention in the literature due to the negative impacts that it has on urban populations.

So, the epidemiology of the urban crises show a lot of problems that we need to face up to an integrated and complex perspective, calling to mind concerned queries on city troubles. Shields (2008) remarks that Urban Research is un-reflexive toward its own study object, and it compromises methodologies

and theoretical capacity. Thus, is proposed to bridge the divide which marks urban studies and other research fields in Social Sciences, rediscovering the urban needs as a central question. Go back over the same ground, we ask about the Social Scholars role for redefining urban spaces, practices, norms and discourses in contemporary cities.

Nothing new under the sun, because of the city has been a mayor interest in the historical tradition of Social Sciences. Nevertheless, the renewal interest in Urban Research is reasonable if we observe the contradictions, complementarities and controversial debates linked to the most known definitions about city. This debate is summarized in the conceptualization of “urbanicity”, that is to say the degree to which a geographical, political, economical, and social unit is an urban fact and response to the veritable urban character.

For ones, cities are viewed as a special manifestation of the human agglomeration with consequences in the environmental form. Hence, urban distinctiveness is the spatial organization of urban densities according to decreasing gradients from centre to periphery (Guerois & Pumain, 2008). Here, the urban-rural dichotomy is used to designate the degree to which a geographical and demographical unit is “urban”. It means to compare the city with a collectivity whose character is derived from a spatially organized system of increasing returns effects and social needs (Scott, 2008). Frequently, this procedure presents the city form as a physical entity, or the built city that is the most familiar perception of the city, largely because it is relatively easy to visualize (Parr, 2007).

But there is a distinct vision from that one. For others, city is basically considered as a living system involving a way of life. Many empiric results around the world suggest that the way urban space influences residents’ daily routines and personal experiences, providing a lot of evidences that urban spatial form is important for understanding the geographic unevenness of support for the production of common ideology and lifestyle. However, citizens have interests and value which impact on their own and others’ lifestyles.

To Social Sciences, both conceptualizations help to understand that urban idea is a plural concept, which can be approached from many different perspectives. In order to present some of the most important contributions and results to urban knowledge, we differentiate four parts that confirm the need of considering the conditions to Urban Development: (1) Healthy Cities, (2) Safety Cities, (3) Equity Cities (4), and Sustainable Cities.

URBAN HEALTH CONDITIONS

Urbanization can and should be beneficial for health. In general, nations with high life expectancies and low infant mortality rates are those where city governments address the key social determinants to health. Better housing and living conditions, access to safe water and good sanitation, efficient waste management systems, safer working environments and neighborhoods, food security and access to services such as education, health, welfare, public transportation and child care are examples of social determinants of health that can be addressed through good urban governance.

However, other conditions place human health at risk. Rapid and often unplanned urban growth is often associated with poverty, environmental degradation and population demands that outstrip service capacity. Work papers focus on the growth of urban consumption as a leading cause of mortality and morbidity and describe how the food, tobacco, automobile, and other industries promote unhealthy behaviors and lifestyles in metropolitan settings (Freudenberg & Galea, 2008). At the same time, cities are also sites for developing alternatives to unhealthy practices, and research can assess strategies used to modify practices that harm health. But, previously, we need to recognize the extraordinary impact of the current mad and insane urbanization in our unhealthy life conditions.

The situation calls for new definitions of health and well-being, as well as for a new demarcation of the field of environmental quality. Scholars suggest that environmental health should be part of an integrated, multi-disciplinary, multi-sectoral approach towards deprived urban areas, incorporating policies on socio-economic, spatial and environmental aspects of neighborhoods (de Hollander & Staatsen, 2003). As a consequence, environmental health science should also widen its scope, integrating urban planning, architecture, social psychology, epidemiology, public health and environmental sciences. Really, urban health risks and concerns involve many different sectors, including health, environment, housing, energy, transportation, urban planning, and others. Available data indicate a range of urban health hazards and associated health risks: substandard housing, crowding, air pollution, insufficient or contaminated drinking water, inadequate sanitation and solid waste disposal services, vector-borne diseases, industrial waste, increased motor vehicle traffic, stress associated with poverty and unemployment, among others (Moore, Gould, & Keary, 2003).

Typical study of urban health combines two perspectives: one related to urban design and other related to the urban way of life. On the first, it comes to planning cities to promote healthier lifestyles. For that, there is a huge literature about the characteristics of environments that support or hinder physical activity. This literature shows that physical activity is associated with objective and subjective measures of accessibility to recreational facilities and local

destinations, as well as with neighborhood safety and visual quality (Lee & Moudon, 2004). Consequently, walking and biking emerge as prominent forms of physical activity and occur primarily in neighborhood streets and public facilities, suggesting that building walkable and bikable communities can address to health as well as transportation concerns.

Certainly, public health, planning, and urban design research is occupied to determine, first, how walking and bicycling might be critically important exercise behaviors for improving public health, second, how urban form affects the frequency of walking and bicycling as a form of physical activity, and third, how the public health considerations outlined might reorient planners' thinking toward the realization of health-promoting environments. The current lack of emphasis on the interdependencies between built form and overall quality of life, as measured by health, safety, and welfare considerations, suggests the need for a rethinking of public policy approaches to transportation investment and land development (Frank & Engelke, 2001).

This type of studies can help to advance environment-behavior research related to urban and transportation planning. They identify behavioral and environmental determinants of physical activity and employ rigorous data collection methods and theoretical frameworks that are new to the planning field. For that, multidisciplinary research will likely yield promising results in identifying the aspects of environments that can be modified to encourage physical activity and physically active travel.

On the second perspective on Healthy Cities, medical status, obesity, mental health, children asthma, and many others illness are also related to urban lifestyle. The most known are unhealthy risk factors associated to urban people: drinks, drugs, tobacco use, sexually transmitted infection, school bullying, mortality and high levels of neighborhood crime and disorder, etc. But there are comparative data to evidence that urban context is a major issue on health people and communities. In fact, research suggests that there are significant differences in health between urban and rural areas. For example, the links between residential location, urban environment, and mental health (Whitley, Prince, & Cargo, 2005). Or the more elevated causes of neonatal mortality in urban areas than rural in the Spanish context (Alonso, Fuster, & Luna, 2006) or the same differences in mortality rates reported by Gartner et al. (2008).

The relationship between obesity and Urban Development patterns where individuals reside seems to be other phenomenon linked to "urbanicity" (Plantinga & Bernell, 2007). The same to the depressive symptoms associated with several socio-demographic factors in older adults psychological distress consequences among older residents of urban public housing (Grunebaum, Oquendo, & Manly, 2008), and schooled children and adolescents with

academic problems and consequences (Carleton, Esparza, Thaxter, & Grant, 2008).

The influence of urban lifestyle on health is so high that the neighborhood disorder may negatively impact on urban residents. For instance, neighborhood violent crime and unemployment increase the risk of coronary heart disease (Sundquist et al., 2006). Also, across the 7 European cities, data from European Housing and Health Status Survey, show the effects of neighborhood physical disorder – i.e., litter, graffiti, and the absence of vegetation on facades, balconies or windows – on smoking behaviors, and the extent to which it is mediated by perceptions of safety (Miles, 2006).

These empirical results give support to recommendations by Kegler et al. (2008), underlining that healthy cities and communities model has the potential to strengthen the organizational infrastructure of communities to promote health. And Froding et al. (2008) suggests the need to create healthy neighborhoods, as like the global *Healthy Cities Program* led by World Health Organization (WHO).

URBAN SAFETY CONDITIONS

Urban security and public safety, social disorder, risk factors are concepts that focuses the preoccupations to crime, terrorism, murder, etc. The results in this field confirm the importance of supplying for community conditions in understanding and preventing crimes, dangers, violence and aggressions like robbery, burglary and assault (Fitzgerald & Carrington, 2008).

The concept of “community safety” when is applied to the city is problematic. The early Chicago School’s geographical perspective on criminology suggested that residents in rural areas were less confronted with crime because of higher levels of social cohesion and informal social control and lower offender rates in a well-ordered physical surrounding. This explanation argues that criminals live more frequently in cities in which their crimes are concentrated in city centers and their surroundings (Bruinsma, 2007).

Most extent research in the economics of crime literature has focused on explaining variations in crime rates. Certainly, there is a strong support to the assertion that neighborhoods with high levels of violent crime may also increase residents’ risk of experiencing violence (Curry, Latkin, & Davey-Rothwell, 2008). Additionally, the “urbanicity” seems to impact on the practice of the most violent suicide methods (Walker, 2009).

Nonetheless, relations between population size and crime – in US cities – become complex and non-shortest (Rotolo & Tittle, 2006). In fact, many studies report a relationship between city population size and suicide rates, and often are assumed that the explanation of suicide is based on its relationship with

urbanization. On the contrary, other results call into question the notion that larger city population size is conducive to suicide as well as the assumption that studies of suicide and urbanization can be substituted for studies of suicide and city population size (McCall & Tittle, 2007).

Anyhow, the environmental interventions are worth pursuing in conjunction with other approaches to promote healthier human well-being and safer cities. For that, public opinion might have an important role in mobilizing public action against crime, considering that there is evidence that interventions to prevent crime and other substantial neighborhood physical disorder are often dependent on the level of concern about public safety that is expressed in perceptions surveys (Nielsen & Smyth, 2008).

Continuing this discourse, recent security programs emphasize “community safety” and the ways in which the planning process can be reformed in order to achieve this. The new emphasis is on the responsibility of the neighborhood communities with the police becoming more “citizen-focused” in the design and implementation of their strategies. To Raco (2007), this practice is used as a discursive cover for a series of potentially repressive and counter-productive policy measures. Rather than increasing a sense of security within newly built and regenerated places, he argues that the new focus of policy may encourage the formation of new governmentalities of insecurity and fear. On Beck’s formulation, “Risk Society” is a significant concept progress to Urban Research (Ritter, NetLibrary, & Lash, 1992.).

URBAN EQUITY CONDITIONS

The increased research and policy interest in social exclusion forms, risk and violence in cities has included a focus on the concentration of disadvantage within communities. The role of neighborhoods in the dynamics of social exclusion is consequently receiving greater attention. Understanding the role of neighborhood in social exclusion involves attention to different levels of analysis and different fault lines and to the resources that are produced within neighborhoods. The results raise important issues related to the differential opportunities associated with neighborhoods and the conceptualization of neighborhood effects as well as issues for policy (Murie & Musterd, 2004).

Street, neighborhoods, and districts are urban micro-levels research. Inside the city, those areas are important to understanding how cities are produced and it must also be linked with analyses of wider processes that shape contemporary Urban Development (Proudfoot & McCann, 2008). At those micro-levels, some qualitative research has long suggested that the relationship between neighborhood conditions and individual outcomes varies from person to person and group to group. For that, Casciano (2007) suggests future research

on “neighborhood effects” should continue to move beyond homogeneous explanations for how neighborhoods influence behavior and instead seek to determine the specific conditions under which neighborhoods exert influence on individual outcomes.

This notice has been very productive. Concerned by living conditions in low-income urban settlements, Urban Researchers recognize that social polarization in the urban landscape means that there are a lot of neighborhoods with a concentration of residents suffering from high crime rates, a loss of feeling of safety, ethnic conflicts and general decay. In this situation, we need to remember that for poor people in petty jobs, poor housing and living conditions, social and economic rights are indivisible (Frota, 2008).

Beyond the factorial studies on population concentration, the fact is that metropolitan areas have experienced an increase in neighborhood poverty over the last few decades. Two lines of explanation for such poverty growth focus on the role of economic transformations and increasing welfare dependency. Growth of extreme poverty is related to a number of complex economic changes at the metropolitan level that have had variable impacts on the nature of poverty neighborhoods. Results provide no support for the “conservative hypothesis” linking concentrated urban poverty to the availability of welfare benefits (Strait, 2001). Empirical analysis incorporates the concept of metropolitan contingency, or the notion that the impacts of economic change on poverty are significantly conditioned by the nature of metropolitan economic structure.

In a third way, there are other housing and residential explanations for neighborhood poverty. Empirical analysis indicates that housing-sector performance can be evaluated in terms of six distinct dimensions: poor housing conditions, house price appreciation, public-sector housing provision, home-ownership, housing finance and the absence of homelessness. The intercity variations in these dimensions can be accounted for by differences in the levels of economic development, the macroeconomic environment, demographic characteristics, the efficiency of the construction industry, expenditure on infrastructure and the regulatory and institutional environment governing the housing delivery process (Arimah, 2000).

Examining the governmental interventions, urban public housing seems to be strongly associated with neighborhood disadvantage, and neighborhood poverty of this areas have little or no direct effect on either social capital or labor force activity, and indirect effects appear to be small (Reingold, Van Ryzin, & Ronda, 2001). But that is a conflict argument. During the US 1990s, local and federal urban policymakers, neoliberal politicians, and advocates for the poor came to a broad consensus: the geographic concentration of low-income, minority residents in public housing projects located in the inner city constitutes the fundamental problem facing US cities. Accordingly, to solve the

problems allegedly associated with the spatial concentration of poverty, public housing, which concentrates low-income people in the inner city, must be demolished and the residents relocated. And this is not an exclusive discourse of US cities.

In opposition to this argument, Crump (2002) notes that there are federal public housing policies based on a conceptually inadequate understanding of the role of space and of spatial influences on poverty and on the behavior of poor people. The use of spatial metaphors such as the “concentration of poverty” or the “deconcentration of the poor” disguises the social and political processes behind poverty and helps to provide the justification for simplistic spatial solutions to complex social, economic, and political problems.

Anyhow, one thing is clear. The big failure of governance in today’s cities has resulted in the growth of disorder settlements and slums that constitute unhealthy living and working environments. An inclusive and equity credible agenda is one that benefits all people in cities, especially the urban poor who live in insane settlements. We need to remember that today some one billion people – nearly one-third of the world’s urban population – live in slum settlements, deprived of safe and adequate housing, often lacking access to adequate food, education, health and other basic services. Actually, the poor have been urbanizing even more rapidly than the population as a whole, and that proportion has been rising over time (Ravallion, Chen, & Sangraula, 2007).

In developing countries, but not also, we need to intensify the research efforts to link poverty causes with human and social life consequences, and offer the tools and strategies in order to promote conditions for Human Development. In particular, we need to consider that poor residents in many cities of the world occupy land and build their dwellings before infrastructure is provided, and after that expanding the infrastructure networks for the poor is a long, expensive and complicated affair (Fernandez-Maldonado, 2008). For example, in the State of the World’s Cities 2006/7 report, UN-HABITAT showed a new urban reality where slum dwellers die prematurely, are victims of hunger, are less educated, have fewer opportunities of employment in the formal sector and suffer from ill-health at a greater rate than the rest of the urban population.

The promotion of social equity and inclusiveness is urgent in our urban world. Make cities economically productive and more equitable means to identify policy options that can contribute to reducing income disparities in cities around the world. The reduction of income inequalities is also critical for promoting the harmony of cities through increased access to services, increased sense of territorial balance for all areas within and between cities, and the ultimate corporate well-being of citizens. It is clear and accepted that a society cannot claim to be harmonious if large sections of its population are deprived of basic needs while other sections live in opulence. But, for the moment, in many

cities, rich, well-serviced neighborhoods and gated residential communities exist next to dense inner-city or peri-urban slum communities that lack even the most basic of services.

URBAN SUSTAINABILITY CONDITIONS

More than half of the global population now lives in urban settings. As cities and towns increase in population and size around the world, there is a growing interest in the outcome of urbanization on humans and the environment, for studying changes in ecological patterns and processes across urbanizing landscapes. Urban systems, presenting specific characteristics necessary for creating welfare with high density, ask for particular conditions for their environmentally sustainable development. In general, scholars agree that these conditions differ substantially from those defining sustainability in broader geographical systems. But, some of them concur that we also need to estimate the benefits derived from agglomeration economies in metropolitan areas. The debate is on the air.

Certainly, there is not doubt that the new urban lifestyles are associated to some of the challenges presented by urbanization in relation to environment. Globally, cities are viewed like the major sources of greenhouse gases emissions and their high population densities make them potential focal points of vulnerability to global environmental change. Moreover, their reach, in terms of flows of materials and resources, extends far outside their borders. And many sources suggest that cities are responsible for 75-80 per cent of all such emissions.

Contrary, findings by Satterthwaite (2008) suggest that the contribution of cities to global anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions is often overstated. So, it would be misleading to attribute this to cities in general, since these emissions would be heavily concentrated in urban places in high-income nations and they should be ascribed to the individuals and institutions whose consumption generates them, not to the places where they are located. To Eaton et al. (2007), cities and towns require resources from beyond their geographic boundaries, but rural communities also take advantage of the modern infrastructure and services typically provided in an urban setting. So, the notion of sustainability can only realistically be applied in a broad geophysical context, and consequently the land use planning effort might more appropriately be focused on a city-regional scale and metropolitan areas.

Anyhow, there is a undeniable increasing concentration of people and economic activities as well as a growing vehicle fleet have contributed to high levels of air and noise pollution in the large cities of developed and developing countries. And, unless the problems of motorization can be effectively dealt

with, the world faces sharp increases in greenhouse gases, accelerating climate change, and rapid depletion of a range of non-renewable resources.

In response, sustainability has emerged as a major theme in planning: it is a new or the definitive paradigm. Urban environmental planners frequently recommend greenways as one approach to making places greener, healthier, and more livable. On this way, they focus on the role of urban places in protecting the environment and enhancing natural, cultural and social biodiversity. Concerning to the last comments, the efforts to transform the way we build neighborhoods and cities suggest important lessons for a research agenda and a sociology-of-place more usefully connected to place-making practice. These lessons support that urban infrastructures and sustainable social practices may be two connected issues, considering that sustainable living requires people to want to live in close proximity in an attractive, affordable urban environment (Banister, 2000).

Debates around appropriate urban forms have been a major concern for planners, because of urbanization and economic development rapidly increased during the last three decades, creating great pressures on and challenges for sustainability. In truth, the process of rapid urbanization and growing cities is critical to the long-term sustainability. For that, Urban Research should examine the conditions for environmentally sustainable development in urban systems. In this trying, many studies about urban world try to determine the role urban form has for sustainability, evaluating urban systems for their environmental performance. Also they illustrate the role of cities and their complex interaction with their peripheries, and it suggests that a systemic method should be adopted in order to analyze and understand the complexity of the entire picture. This type of approaches emphasizes the importance of taking full consideration of resource/environmental capacity and an integrated systems approach for problem solving.

Of course, it is usually argued that high-quality livable cities must be the basis for Sustainable Urban Development. So, the role of Urban Research in achieving the sustainable development of cities will be examine the implications for planning linked to heritage, culture, way-of-life, well-being and culture implicit in the notion of harmonious development. In all this areas, the importance of urban planning for sustainability is well known because it plays an important role in the possibility of shaping the quality of urban living conditions. For this reason, it is important to study urban dynamics in connection with the issue of environmental quality. Also, we need have a construction of a multidisciplinary conceptual framework of environmental quality and quality of life is required to advance the field of Urban Development, environmental quality and human well-being, such a framework would allow for a more theory-based choice of indicators and for the

development of tools to evaluate multidimensional aspects of urban environmental quality (van Kamp, Leidelmeijer, Marsman, & de Hollander, 2003).

Complementarily, social sustainability is implied in the literature through the elements of social equity, social exclusion, and quality of life. Several well-established research areas provide potential theoretical, methodological, and applied insight into the development of future socially sustainable research agendas, including (Boschmann & Kwan, 2008): urban form, location and individual-based accessibility, and city/regional planning for sustainability. Also, here is advised about the role of civic engagement in sustainable cities programs to improve their livability and defines a research agenda by identifying hypotheses about the importance of public involvement in shaping and implementing these programs (Portney, 2005).

In summary, the sustainability concept and its meanings when applied to Urban Development suggests a framework for thinking about sustainable development in the metropolitan context, analyzing ways in which a context can be created for regional sustainability planning. Sustainability is seen by Wheeler (2000) as requiring a holistic, long-term planning approach, as well as certain general policy directions such as compact urban form, reductions in automobile use, protection of ecosystems, and improved equity. This concept suggests a long-term strategic approach in which vision statements, coalition building, institutional development, intergovernmental incentive frameworks, indicators, public involvement, and social learning help create a regional context in which sustainable development is increasingly possible.

CONCLUSIONS

Examining some the highlights of the most disseminated papers in Urban Studies field we learn a lot of things. Commonly, Urban Scholars focus particularly problems, such as suburbanization, segregation, globalization, security, and the environment. Other urban current issues are studied too, like concentration and growth, ghettos, conflict, family and residential changes.

Although there are studies that focus on specific elements of urban performance, there is very little empirical work that incorporates feedbacks and linkages to assess the interactions between the dynamics of Urban Development and their various impacts on many environments (Gueneralp & Seto, 2008). According with various authors, we need to recognize – again and again – that urban phenomenon is a multidimensional phenomenon that is best qualified and quantified by various conceptual perspectives and technical measures (Frenkel & Ashkenazi, 2008). In contrast, the role of urbanization can be misunderstood if not properly specified in many fields.

In order to contest urban crises, many authors recognize that there is a need to “re-invent” urban planning and design (Hague, 2008), taking into consideration that New Urbanism – under appropriate conditions – may be a particularly effective mechanism for stimulating community change and addressing locally-determined goals in order to get health, safety, equity and sustainability cities. While these diverse literatures have provided needed theoretical advancement to rethink the urban phenomenon, they also run the risk of conceptualizing, studying, and representing cities without sufficient attention to the spatial co-presence of multiple actors (Fraser & Weninger, 2008). The result is that some treatments of the city reproduce a unified story line that conceals human agency, reads as if there is only one trajectory on which all cities are moving, and does not engage in imagining alternative urban futures. For that, there is a continued need to critically examine the spatial narratives mobilized both by researchers as well as by the other actors they encounter. It means take into account the importance of working partnerships between the urban people, local government and other stakeholders is clearly recognized in urban studies field.

Obviously, we need to diversify our attention to different populations, bearing in mind to many city neighborhoods that are often not recognized by local and central authorities. It is crucial, because in many parts of the world, however, these “invisible” or informal parts of cities are growing faster than formal parts of the city. There, wealth and poverty often coexist within cities, and at close proximity, with wealthy and well serviced neighborhoods being situated alongside densely populated inner-city or peri-urban slum communities, which often lack even basic services. Thus, from an educational perspective, this attention to everybody city-habitants is an essential question to learn to live together.

Following a discussion of recent policies for the city, this work explores the contribution of Urban Research to build better places for living, drawing on a range of empiric evidence finding round the world. Here, there is an opportunity to explore whether the process of world urbanization and “urbanicity” is somehow specific in a situation of urban crises and what its outcomes might be for both urban form and urban policy. The debate over the urban crisis reinforces the importance of empirical studies in this field, which has become not just relevant but also crucial to many places.

The recent findings of the Urban Studies may have important policy implications for urban planning, highlighting the need to target social groups and the urban population within urban areas in the provision of health care services, safety places and a better urban experience. The findings also hold important implications for further research.

Through a review of the literature, we can identify the achievements as well as the deficiencies in the study of urbanization and “urbanicity” in the second half of the 20th century. A number of issues that merit scholarly research are suggested and the need for theorization is emphasized: the economics transformations, a more heterogeneous urban population, rural-urban migration, spatial reorganization through urban land-use change, new housing development, global cities hypothesis, rapid urban growth and suburbanization, polycentric restructuring of urban form, and changes in the spatial/administrative systems of cities. More important: urban lifestyles and subcultures experiences.

This new approach to urban studies seeks to contribute to a better understanding of the complexity of everyday life in urban communities in terms of both ongoing analytical debates as well as operational solutions. It suggests that an ecological approach should be adopted in order to analyze and understand the complexity of the entire picture.

Finally, we are entirely agreed with the speech of the well-known Spanish Urban Sociologist Manuel Castells in the conference “Frontiers of the Mind in the Twenty-first Century”, realized in the Library of Congress, Washington DC, on June 14-18, 1999. Then, he affirmed that now that the 20th century is under way, it is safe to predict what will be the four main axes of the next phase of Urban Research, stemming both from the intellectual debates of the last century, and from the new urban problems, as identified in this chapter. These revolve, essentially, around four major questions. The first is the transformation of cities, and of urban space by information and communication technologies. The second is the place of the local in a world of global networks. Both are, already at this pint, well established field of research, with a steady stream of scholarly contributions, including a growing number of doctoral dissertations around the world. But Castells goes on to say that there are tow other themes which link directly to policy debates and bring back, under new terms, the century-old debates about Urbanization and Society. One of these is the issue of environmental sustainability. The other is the survival of cities as specific societies, which is tantamount to considering the conditions for urban social integration in the age of globalization, fragmentation and individualization.

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