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DOI	https://doi.org/10.1080/07352166.2023.2201105
Download date	2026-06-12 11:11:32
Link to Item	https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14694/14813

The state of urban research? The *state* of urban research!

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Abstract

This paper takes Wolman et al.'s (2022) assessment of the 'state of urban research' as its point of departure. While acknowledging the insights produced out of these reviews of the 'urban' elements of five disciplines, we question their framing and to what the collection as a whole ultimately amounts. Of course, stock taking intellectual exercises of this sort are, almost by design, partial and selective. Moreover, this is not the first (and likely it will not be the last) of its kind both in the *Journal of Urban Affairs* and in other urban-facing journals. In the spirit of a sympathetic critique, we highlight three issues we argue might frame any future attempts to represent "the state of urban research": those of disciplinary partiality, geographical partiality, and citational absences.

Introduction

We read with interest Wolman et al. (2022), a collection of reviews of five disciplinary urban subfields. Each contribution (Lin on economics, Harris on history, Clark on planning, Ogorzalek on political science, and Friedman on sociology) provided answers to five questions asked of them by the two editors. These centred on the emergence of their subfield and its focus through to its relationship with ‘urban’ elements of other disciplines. Each tended to combine a look forwards and backwards. These intellectual exercises, which are often part audit and part future gazing, are regular occurrences at conferences and in journals. In some instances, they are contained to a particular subfield; for example, urban geography, urban history, or urban politics (Lees, 2002; Harris & Smith, 2011; Sapotichne, et al., 2007). In others, they are more wide ranging in disciplinary and/or geographical terms, and sometimes with regard to both vectors of difference (e.g., Bowen et al., 2010; Reese, 2014; Khirfan, 2022; Myers, 2022; Sood, 2022).

These past exercises have tended either to emerge out of a particular discipline or a set of disciplines, or from changes in the wider urban world that appear to challenge existing concepts, methods, and theories. Consider the dominant narrating of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s in the US as an era of urban crisis as a case in point. This era asked deep questions of those ‘urban’ bits of disciplines such as geography, planning, and sociology, leading to the incremental and tentative emergence of interdisciplinary fields such as ‘urban affairs’ and ‘urban studies’ (Gutman, 1963; Popenoe, 1965). Associations and journals taking these names were set up in the same era (for instance, in the US, the establishment of *Urban Affairs Quarterly* (now *Urban Affairs Review*) in 1965, the Urban Affairs Association in 1969, and the society’s *Journal of Urban Affairs* in 1979).¹ Writing about that time in the US, Judd (2005: 121) noted:

For a time it seemed that urban studies would evolve as a separate field, complete with separate colleges, departments, and curricula; in these settings political scientists would be able to find a comfortable home next to urban sociologists and other next of kin.

If this era saw the first, if fleeting, interdisciplinary urban turn in some countries, then perhaps the last two decades have witnessed a second. This has had a number of both inter-dependent and inter-related impulses. For one, alongside increased engagement with critical race studies and the emergence of ‘Black geographies’ (Noxolo, 2022), renewed struggles for racial justice on many US streets and on those of cities around the globe have positioned the co-constitution of race, the city, and modern urbanized societies as a pressing concern for urban studies. The Urban Affairs Association itself has supported work in this area with the launch of the *Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and the City* in 2020. Another major

¹ In our own discipline of geography, 1980 saw the establishment of *Urban Geography*, and at about the same time, the formation of the Urban Geography Speciality Group of the AAG (<https://www.urbangeographyjournal.org/aag-ugsg/history>). In the UK, 1964 saw the establishment of *Urban Studies*.

catalyst for a second, more global urban turn is the dominant shorthand of the ‘urban age’ or the ‘urban century’ (Burdett & Sudjic, 2006). These terms – which have gained traction in academic and practitioner circles – seek to capture the urbanisation of the planet. That is, both the recognition that planetary issues, such as climate change, are also urban issues and that the rapid emergence and growth of cities in the global South constitutes a challenge to academic and non-academic studies of cities, rooted as many have been in the experiences of cities in the global North.

Acknowledging but leaving aside the different approaches to theorising this increasingly global urban condition (e.g., Brenner & Schmid, 2014; Peake et al., 2018), it does seem incontrovertible that we have witnessed a renewal of interest in notions of ‘urban studies’. The precise level of disciplinary engagement in shaping something called ‘urban studies’ varies from country to country, and from university to university, of course. In the US, sociology, political science, and public affairs have tended to be to the fore in mapping the focus of ‘urban studies’. In the UK and countries more aligned with British academic traditions (e.g. Australia, Canada, and Singapore), geography and planning occupy positions of prominence; economics and political science less so. Francophone urban scholarship draws from alternative philosophical and sociological traditions and urban studies debates in continental Europe demonstrate strong grounding in regional economics, science and technology studies, and spatial planning. Elsewhere, disciplinary configurations differ further still. As such, the sorts of intellectual exercises of which Wolman et al. (2022) is an example say as much about their authors and their institutional and geographic positionality as they do about the disciplines or subfields they purport to represent. Indeed, we argue against the contention that something called ‘the subfield’ pre-exists its identification and reviewing. Rather, particular interpretations of ‘urban studies’ come into view through the active act of surveying.

This contribution will be no different, of course. We are two geographers by training. Both of us have written with those trained in cognate disciplines, such as planning, political science, and sociology. Moreover, we both draw upon work generated out of different disciplines in our writing, most recently in two edited collections (Addie et al., 2023; Wiig et al., 2023). We both also work through interdisciplinary urban institutes at our respective universities (Georgia State and Manchester) and have made small contributions to the furthering of the field of urban studies, through various activities and initiatives. These include the establishment of the Summer Institute in Urban Studies (Bunnell & Ward, 2021) and teaching urban studies courses premised upon building the cross-disciplinary competencies of our students. We highlight this at the outset to situate our commentary. Yet we also suggest that our own work (and the institutional context in which we carry it out) is indicative of a global expansion in the conducting and organising of urban research outside of traditional disciplines and their departmental configurations (even if the universities at which much of this takes place struggle with its governance). We see this in the relatively recent emergence of urban institutes like our own (and the University of Antwerp’s and the University of Sheffield’s Urban Institutes) which provide space for interdisciplinary dialogue and collaboration, as well as the co-production of urban work beyond the academy. Furthermore, we see it in the emergence over the last few

decades of university-based research and teaching units around the world including (amongst many others): the African Center for Cities at the University of Cape Town, the Brussels Centre for Urban Studies ;the Indian Institute for Human Settlements, the Institute for Future Cities at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, LSE Cities, New York University’s Center for Urban Science and Progress; the University of Amsterdam’s Centre for Urban Studies; the University of Melbourne’s Connected Cities Lab, the University of Sao Paulo Cidades, and the University of Toronto’s School of Cities. We can also add the work of international networks of academics, activists, and practitioners like the International Network of Urban Research and Action (INURA) and Mistra Urban Futures to this beyond-disciplinary list.

In what follows, we present a sympathetic critique of Wolman et al.’s (2022) account of the state of urban research through three interrelated arguments. The first centres on the unavoidable disciplinary partiality of the collection. While we consider with a slightly different set of disciplines in mind what might have been present, we essentially question the wisdom of surveying what is a complex, vibrant, and fundamentally interdisciplinary field from the perspective of discrete (sub) disciplines. Unpacking what we see as this approach’s substantive limitations, our second argument turns to issues of geographical partiality. We mean this in two ways: first, the geographies of those doing the representation and second, the geographies represented through the overviews. The latter is an issue noted by a number of the contributors and by the editors in their conclusion (Wolman & Barnes, 2022a: 30). Our contention is that this problem was both foreseeable and avoidable. The state of urban research is not an absolute. Our third and final argument refers to citational absences. Wolman & Barnes (2022b: 1) might be correct when, in their abstract, they argue, “[a]n “urban” subfield exists in virtually every social science discipline, but these subfields seldom engage one another”. Yet, a robust remedy to this problem demands an acknowledgment of, and citation to, the already-existing sizeable urban studies literature. This seems largely absent from the thinking behind this symposium, however (although there is some brief mention of it towards its end). Past contributions in the *Journal of Urban Affairs* have discussed urban studies as an interdisciplinary subfield (Bowen et al., 2010; Reese, 2014) and they are not alone (Davies & Imbroscio, 2010; Harding & Blockland, 2014; Jayne & Ward, 2016; Iossifova et al., 2017; Bunnell & Ward, 2021). More use of this academic literature – specifically, that on critical urban studies/critical urban theory (Brenner, 2009; Davies and Imbroscio 2010; Roy, 2016a; Leitner et al., 2020a) – and attention to the evolving landscape through which interdisciplinary work is conducted – we argue, would have meant the collection might have a deeper and more lasting impact on the future of urban research.

Disciplinary partiality

Urban studies is an eclectic and ecumenical field. Its lack of “an obvious centre of gravity or an essential and shared core of ideas” is a source of both consternation and opportunity (Harding & Blockland, 2014: 3; see also Iossifova et al., 2017; Leitner et al., 2020a; Bunnell & Ward, 2021). As noted above, the definition of, and engagement with, something called ‘urban studies’ varies depending on the geographic and disciplinary context you are viewing

it from. One discipline's 'mainstream' maybe another discipline's 'Other' (Davies & Imbroscio 2010). With this in mind, we acknowledge that some disciplines occupy a position of prominence in 'state-of-the-field' exercises, whereas others are either marginalized or left on the outside, looking in. According to the editors, their omissions "reflected limits on time that constrained both the original UAA [conference] proposal and space that constrained manuscript length" (Wolman & Barnes, 2022b: 2). Hmm! We do not wish to labour this point. Most of us are subject to word count limits when we submit our work to academic journals. Nevertheless, it is striking that the editors do not state their rationale for selecting the five disciplines that made the cut. The result is an implicit and unquestioned assertion of their pre-eminence. Editorial reckonings regarding whose voices to feature are obviously required as matter of practicality, but there are significant implications arising from the decision as to where to wield the axe and where to raise the curtain. Demarcating what is in and out of the disciplinary purview of 'urban research' invokes an inevitable form of epistemic violence that, we argue, warrants a greater degree of reflexivity.

As (urban) geographers, we may understandably be perplexed by absence of own discipline and its contributions from the conversation. We would certainly suggest that including urban geography would have added breadth and depth to this multi-disciplinary endeavour: the city, after all, is inherently spatial!² Other disciplines, though, from public health to emergent fields including climate science, sustainability science, and even 'urban science', could also justifiably lay claim to a seat at an alternatively framed 'urban studies' table. Expanding disciplinary coverage would be more than simply additive. Surveying urban research across a different set of registers would push us to see the field in a different light, pose alternative questions, and result in a different diagnosis of the state of the field. Unlearning as well as learning might follow. It might also suggest that there are disciplines that (for a variety of conceptual, methodological, and practical reasons) offer a more compelling demarcation of the current and future trajectories of global urban research than those well-trodden outlooks gleaned from economics, history, political science, planning, and sociology.

However, addressing what is in effect a "deficit critique" (Leitner et al., 2020b: 230) by throwing more disciplines into the mix does not suffice. Doing so would not only replicate a staid encyclopaedic formula, but it would also miss a more essential point regarding the limitations of a format that serves to reduce some of the most exciting debates within the contemporary social sciences to an uninspired disciplinary accounting exercise. The omission of geography or any number of other disciplines is a shame, but at the end of the day, it is unimportant. When presenting 'the state of urban research', there is more at stake, intellectually and politically.

² We will defer the task of outlining how geographers approach the urban and the methods we use to Shin (2017) who provides an accessible account much in keeping with Wolman and Barnes's (2022b) prompts in the volume *Defining the Urban* (Iossifova et al., 2017). However, it is worth highlighting a few of the important contributions urban geography has made to the wider study of 'the urban'. While far from exhaustive, listing five here will suffice: advancing the social construction of space, developing networked and relational perspectives on urban phenomena, problematizing questions of scale, refreshing the comparison of cities, and unpacking the reproduction of racial capitalism through post-colonial and Black Geographies scholarship.

Geographical partiality

To start, we need to grapple with matters of geographical partiality. First is the institutional geographies of those tasked with representing their subfields. The US Northeast or Midwest is the institutional home to all but one of the contributors. The outlier is a short hop over the Canadian border in Hamilton, Ontario. This writing from a relatively small part of the world on the state of urban research gives the collection an avoidable one-sidedness. It privileges a particular set of authors, institutions, and locations that are relatively concentrated geographically even within North America. Involving authors from a more diverse set of institutional-cum-locational geographies (and career-stages, we might add) could have been a point of departure for the collection, including, for example, those whose graduate training occurred outside of North America. It might have involved a different and more diverse set of reflections on the future of urban research, shaped by a set of heterogeneous surroundings, trainings, and university contexts.³

The second issue is apparent in the geographies represented through these overviews. There is a clear irony to the editors concluding that “our contributors were virtually unanimous in identifying a common shortcoming: an excessive emphasis on research within the American context and a lack of sufficient comparative research and research on cities in non-western countries, including global cities” (Wolman & Barnes, 2022a: 27). Wolman et al.’s (2022) survey pays scant attention to urban scholarship – from a variety of disciplinary perspectives – that has engaged cities ‘off the map’ (Robinson, 2002; e.g., Castriota & Tonucci, 2018; Montero, 2017; Lawhon et al., 2020) and has taken up the task of mobilizing ‘new geographies of theory’ better adapted to the realities of 21st century global urbanization (Roy, 2009; Croese, Cirolia, & Graham, 2016; Mukhopadhyay, Zérah, & Denis, 2020; Simone & Pieterse, 2017). This intellectual exercise is long overdue. For instance, almost half a century ago, when Africa was the least-urbanized area of the world and largely ignored by those who generated urban Theory (with a capital T), Gutkind (1968: 63) argued, “the political, economic and social influence of Africa’s urban areas is enormous”. Thus, there is a compelling rationale to highlight the work of decentering urban research already underway in a variety of institutional settings beyond the Anglo-American ivory tower. For example, that produced out of the African Center for Cities at the University of Cape Town or the Chinese University of Hong Kong, amongst others. This would begin the work of geographically and politically re-centring from where we consider our urban pasts, presents, and futures.

This is not to suggest the contributors are not well versed in the international literature in their field. Harris, for one, is an authority on the distinctive histories of Canadian urban development and comparative suburbanization beyond the confines of the global North (e.g., Harris & Vorms, 2017). Ogorzalek (2022: 17) notes the increasingly global nature of urbanism and draws attention to the rich vein of comparative cross-national urban political science research undertaken beyond the US (e.g., Savitch & Kantor’s 2002 classic, *Cities in the International Marketplace*). Such comparative literature could well occupy

³ We acknowledge our own accumulated privileges as two white men trained and based in the global North.

a central position in an account of the state of research in urban political science. Again, we appreciate that condensing decades of disciplinary debates and developments is a tricky assignment and we do not take umbrage with what the essays achieve in this regard. However, the end-result is that state of urban research as constructed by Wolman et al. (2022) is obstinately US-centric; written from a US perspective and seemingly for a (predominantly) US audience. Any sense of a ‘Southern turn’ in urban studies, however understood, is missing. With due respect to the institutional and geographic expertise of the contributors and the intentions of the editors, this is not good enough in 2022. The omission of studies engaging cities beyond the global North is challenging not just in geographical terms. The cultural, ideological, and political significance of this shorthand is plainly disconcerting in general (Jazeel, 2019; Roy, 2016b, 2020) and for the *Journal of Urban Affairs* in particular, this multi-dimensional geographic partiality runs counter to the journal’s scope as a multidisciplinary forum that lists publishing “global and comparative urban research” among its five key objectives.⁴

Debates across urban studies have persistently highlighted the importance of grappling with issues of representation and the need to accommodate broader geographic coverage. Drawing upon a large and still growing body of work largely ignored in this collection to this end is, again, more than just additive (Cheng & Liu, 2022; Müller & Trubina, 2020; Roy, 2016b). The problems arising from both dimensions of geographical partiality, we contend, were foreseeable and avoidable. Moving forward, future urban studies overviews would do well to ‘provincialize’ the intellectual narratives structuring particular urban subfields while expanding our geographic sites of enunciation (Sheppard, et al., 2013). This is not to say one account of the state of urban research is necessarily superior to any another. Rather, we want to draw attention to the partiality of urban knowledge and the significance of the positions from where fields are surveyed (recognising our own positionality and again, that ‘the field’ is not there waiting to be surveyed, but rather is giving focus and shape through acts and practices of surveying). There is a need highlight and name the power asymmetries underpinning those whose work often falls beyond surveying (and thus naming and valuing), constructed as “the (post)colonial other”, in the words of Roy (2020: 19).

Citational absences

Starting a survey of the field of urban studies from a disciplinary perspective is intuitively appealing. We get that. The structuring of much (but not all) of academia globally in ways that place urbanists into silos conditions the questions we ask and the concepts and methods we use.⁵ As such, Wolman and Barnes’s approach has the advantages of tracing the intellectual lineages of particular urban research subfields. In uncovering the often-unspoken differences in questions posed, conceptual frameworks mobilized, and methods deployed, ‘the urban’ serves as a constructive boundary space to facilitate cross-disciplinary

⁴ <https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?show=aimsScope&journalCode=ujua20>

⁵ Not to mention the prevalence of institutional processes and external funding channels that tend to direct us to ‘stay in our lanes’.

dialogue – and perhaps even inter- and trans-disciplinary exchange (Ramadier, 2004). If we are not cognizant of the disciplinary languages (and accents) with which each of us speak,⁶ it is difficult to develop the grounds for a “republic of conversation” (Wolman and Barnes, 2022a: 30). Yet is the ‘sameness’, whatever that might mean, to allow comparison and exchange across difference, possible without falling back on the much-challenged theory/Theory distinction (Oswin, 2020; Roy, 2020)?

Hence, while Wolman et al. (2022) have admirably attempted to get us on the path to constructive engagement, disciplinary training and institutional positioning generate and reproduce a number of ‘blind fields’ when it comes to analysing our contemporary urban condition, as Lefebvre (2003) argued back in 1970. Disciplinary partiality limits what we see by selectively illuminating only certain fields of study. Yet blind fields also emerge because of blind spots on our ‘intellectual retina’ – there are things that are not just poorly illuminated, but we *do not see them* because concepts, methods, and canon shaped by previous eras’ practices and theories impede our view. That we see incompletely “[is] not just a question of education, but of occlusion” (ibid: 29). Our resultant analytical gaze is fragmentary and ultimately reductive of our contemporary urban reality.

An earlier paper in this journal by Bowen et al. (2010) succumbed to such limitations after conducting a more exhaustive exercise along comparable lines. With a focus on the US, the authors identified seven constitutive elements, some of which were disciplinary subfields (e.g., “Urban Geography”) while others were themes (e.g., “Housing and Neighborhood Development”). Again, the making up of something called ‘urban studies’ (often mistakenly used interchangeably with something called ‘urban affairs’ – a pervasive discursive slippage...) was reduced to the aggregation of contributions by disciplinary subfields. Yet, our argument – and one that has been made by other before us – is that established disciplines shape, structure, and constrain our capacity to articulate both the state of urban research, and what is involved in ‘urban studies’. The significance of ‘the urban’ (however understood) then tends to either be sequestered in a localized and pre-given territory/scalar unit or is portioned out as a discreet subfield within established academic disciplines (see Magnusson, 2014: 1566 on this challenge for political science; also see Ward et al., 2011).

A sub-field concern with what happens *in* cities offers a *weak* formulation of the field of urban studies and the state of urban research. What this means is that across the Wolman et al. collection, the urban – urban studies’ ostensible object of analysis – is treated as a stable empirical entity; a container for economic, planning, political, social, activity (etc.) to take place. In contrast, a *strong* formulation of the wider urban studies field would be demarcated by an explicit focus on what, if anything, is analytically distinct about the urban (i.e., ‘the urban question’), while at the same time pushing against the limits of ‘methodological cityism’ (Angelo & Wachsmuth, 2015). This first poses a more direct provocation for disciplinary analysis (*not just the defining of ‘the urban’ in differing disciplinary*

⁶ Of course, there are also issues of language *qua* language in the conducting and valuing of a more geographically and intellectually diverse urban studies, including the dominance of English-speaking academic journals in the production of ‘urban research’.

circles, but why it matters in empirical and conceptual terms). Second, it pushes beyond an instrumental assessment of the urban dimensions of disciplinary inquiry to situate the production and experience of urban environments and ways of life as the central problematic of the field (see Lefebvre, 2003), something only really touched upon by Friedman (2022). Maybe this takes us too far into a particular set of theoretical debates that tend to be beyond the purview of this journal. However, our provocation is to get those of us interested in shaping the future ‘state of urban research’ to consider not just the questions we pose of the urban. We argue it is necessary to address the questions ‘the urban’ makes us pose of our ontological and epistemological foundations, whether as a unit of analysis, a process, a condition, or as an analytical tool (per Iossifova et al., 2017).

Asking representatives of disciplinary subfields to define ‘the urban’ *as representatives of these subfields* inevitably sets up a blind-men-and-the-elephant approach to delineating the field of urban research. It is a recipe for partiality, omission, and piecemeal disciplinary readings over the conceptual and practical labour of interdisciplinary urban research. Moreover, it conditions us to content ourselves with urban affairs, stealing away to the city for a brief cross-disciplinary dalliance before returning to the comfort of our traditional disciplinary beds. Can urban studies be more than the sum of its parts? Are there not already grounds for more sustained and meaningful urban connections?

To say that “urban research is inherently interdisciplinary” (Reese, 2014: 543) seems a truism. Yet it reminds us that *Journal of Urban Affairs* has published past surveys that include calls to look beyond the confines of traditional disciplinary boundaries. For example, later in her editorial, Reese notes:

The greatest challenge and promise of urban research is that, to really understand cities, interdisciplinarity and catholicism is more vital than parochialism. Urban scholars can borrow, integrate, and invent new theories based on a wealth of knowledge from disciplines ranging from economics to public health. Because of this, urbanists can understand the world more fully than those that see it only from a narrow disciplinary lens (2014: 547).

We certainly agree with this sentiment and suggest that starting from an *urban-centred field*, rather than *discipline-centred urban* opens a number of intuitive analytical and methodological entry points. There are pragmatic as well as intellectual reasons to step outside of such traditional disciplinary frames. In the US, the National Science Foundation (NSF), for one, has directed significant funding (and subsequent academic labour) towards transdisciplinary ‘convergence’ research around urban systems, sustainability, and climate resiliency (see Ramaswami et al., 2018). Other national research councils are similarly seeking to reorient their funding streams around fundamentally urban ‘grand challenges’ or ‘wicked problems’. These demand the drawing upon *and* moving beyond established academic disciplines in ways that can illuminate what might be needed to galvanise cross-disciplinary exchange and critique (see Acuto et al., 2018; Derudder & van Meeteren, 2019). Where, then, might we find and take the pulse of this thing called ‘urban studies’? We offer the following non-exhaustive suggestions in the spirit of opening our epistemic playing

field. Furthermore, if some of these recommendations seem rote, it is at least in part a reflection of the fact that we collectively have yet fully to take them on-board.

First, we clearly need to address (the politics of) citational absences by acknowledging and citing from the sizable volume of interdisciplinary work already undertaken under the umbrella of ‘urban studies’. Seeing this field of urban research means recognizing what is already out there and engaging it *as more than* a “republic of conversation” (Wolman & Barnes, 2022a: 30) – in other words, as something that is already lively and generative. This is not the places for a comprehensive review, but such debates are currently happening in journals like *IJURR*, *Urban Studies*, and indeed the *Journal of Urban Affairs* itself. In light of Wolman et al. (2022), it is worth reflecting on what holds these forums together as venues for cohesive multi-disciplinary urban debate and how such publications themselves act to demarcate the fields that each covers. Hewing closer to Bowen et al.’s (2010) methodology, recent urban studies textbooks have also collated a variety of disciplinary perspectives and proffered distinct visions for the future of urban scholarship and action. An illustrative case in point is the divergent perspectives forwarded in Davies and Imbroscio’s *Critical Urban Studies: New Directions* (2010) and Brenner et al.’s (2012) *Cities for People not Profit* – not to mention the robust exchanges between the editors (Marcuse et al., 2014). We might also think about how a plethora of urban readers and handbooks (both traditional and more experimental) constructs the field from a variety of intellectual and geographic vantage points (e.g., Bunnell & Goh, 2018; Lancione & McFarlane, 2021). All this to say, a discipline-centric narrating of urban research draws attention to learning between disciplines, but not necessarily learning with other places, other boundary concepts, or fields of practice. This echoes the arguments made by Leitner et al (2020b).

Second, we can think more comparatively within, and between, disciplines and across urban settings. “Cross-national urbanism is not easy”, as Ogorzalek (2022: 17) posits, but it is necessary. The editors themselves note this and call for more in their concluding remarks. However, there is ample work upon which to build, with the last decade or so seeing the notion of ‘comparison’ informing the move towards a global urban studies (for recent summaries see Robinson (2022a) and the associated *Urban Studies* special issue). This is where the view from urban geography is particularly instructive, given the concerted efforts made to bridge comparative traditions and open new relational ways to compare (Hart, 2018; Robinson, 2022b; Ward, 2010) and unpack the methodological challenges of *doing* global urban research, often in interdisciplinary settings (Harrison and Hoyler, 2018; Leitner et al. 2020a).

Third, there would be value in taking existing interdisciplinary ventures – institutions, practices, projects – as a departure point and posing Wolman and Barnes’s questions to a different set of actors. We might garner alternative lessons from those leading already-existing interdisciplinary initiatives, for example around sustainable transitions (Keith et al., 2020), equitable development and infrastructure provision (Hemström et al., 2021), global suburbanisms (Keil & Wu, 2022), or governing the city at night (Acuto et al., 2021). The view from academics and practitioners working on the

science-policy interface in a variety of global forums and city networks, not to mention community-engaged scholar-activists, could extend the (somewhat narrow) importance of urban practice highlighted by Clark (2022) in the context of planning. Returning to our own positionality, the charge of helping to build interdisciplinary urban studies institutes means the scope and state of urban research have been to the fore as we read Wolman et al.'s survey. Those involved in forging interdisciplinary spaces within (and beyond) their institutional homes have an active, vested interest in how the urban is interpellated as a field of study beyond a piecemeal set of disciplinary concerns.

Ultimately, the challenge of surveying, and thus bringing into being, an *urban-centred* account of the field is an invitation to be both more ambitious and generative. Of course, we understand traditional disciplines and subfields will continue to significantly to inform content knowledge in the field (Bowen et al., 2010: 207) and despite an increased interest in interdisciplinary research across much of the social sciences, many universities globally still look to hire into disciplinary departments. We also recognise that the task of defining where 'urban studies' stops and starts, and who gets to lay a claim to it, remains both an intellectually and politically thorny issue that matters to some much more than it does to others. And yet, forwarding a strong and inclusive account of urban studies, we contend, is necessary both to justify the creation of intellectual and institutional spaces that transcend the narrow confines academic disciplines and support urban research with the capacity to meet yet unrealized equity, ecological, and economic goals (see Addie, 2017; Schafran, 2014: 327-328).

Conclusion

So, what are we to make of these five disciplinary contributions, on their own and in summation? For the editors, Wolman and Barnes (2022a: 24), "Our hope and expectation were that these essays would serve to stimulate questions and reactions about the nature of these urban subfields and their relationships to each other and that urban scholars across the subfields will find them useful and intriguing". A modest goal. We guess that the two of us wrote this response goes some way to suggest that the editors met this aim. However, for a collection that goes by the title of "the state of urban research", our argument has been that it was unnecessarily partial in design and in delivery. We have highlighted three areas of concern: disciplinary partiality, geographical partiality, and citational absences.

In the cases of disciplinary and geographical partiality, our argument is that widening the terms of reference from the get-go would not simply have been additive. Rather, it would have allowed the collection to consider (and perhaps question) some of the challenges that the editors themselves highlight in their "Synthesis and conclusion across sub-fields" entry. The point of departure might more usefully have been the need to balance continued studies of, and theorisation from, cities in the global North, with the inclusion of those who study and theorise from other urban standpoints. Those standpoints could have been geographical (inside the US as well as from the global South or East), theoretical (that is engaging with post-colonial, post-structural, feminist, or queer geographical critiques of the state of some urban research, for example Doan, 2007; Reddy, 2017; Roy, 2016c; Bhan,

2019; Müller & Trubina, 2020; Angelo & Goh, 2021; Peake et al., 2022), or generational (considering career stage as a potentially instructive vector from which to view the future of the field). As Leitner et al. (2020b: 230) explain:

In its postmillennial form, the field of critical urban studies has been recalibrated and reconstructed in a host of ways, particularly in light of feminist critiques of productivism and essentialism, post-structuralist critiques of determinism and economism, and postcolonial critiques developmentalism and Eurocentrism.

It is only four paragraphs from the end that (some of) these issues – and the host of others they raise – get an airing. Like many others, both of us are enjoying some of the turn back to the 1980s in popular culture. Think of *Ghostbusters* and *Top Gun* in the cinema or *Stranger Things* on Netflix. However, it is not 1982; it is 2022! There is troubling lack of attention to what Roy (2020: 19) argues should be a “re-worlding of our fields of inquiry and disciplines”. A more disciplinarily and geographically diverse set of contributions would likely have raised these issues and considered strategies for how we can address them. That is not to argue against those in the five disciplinary papers, nor against their institutional geographies and histories. Rather, it is to argue the location of the performing and writing of urban research matters. Ending with a call for “greater emphasis on comparative research and on non-Western and global cities” (Wolman & Barnes 2022a: 30), having hitherto almost entirely ignored much of the work in both of these discrete but related areas, seems an odd way to conclude the collection!

Our, third and final argument refers to citational absences. That is the absence of an acknowledgement of, and citation to, something called ‘urban studies’. Although there are different national histories to the emergence of urban interdisciplinary efforts (Reese, 2014; Coelho & Sood, 2022; Khirfan, 2021; Myers, 2020; Sood 2020), in general it seems odd to ignore much of the work to date in this vein while concluding with a plea for more of it! From their particular vantage point, whether political science or sociology, some who contributed to this collection make the case for future work to reach across traditional academic disciplines. In others, such as planning, the authors highlighted overlaps between bits of their discipline with bits of other disciplines. The conclusion underscores this point, that what is required is “more interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary research” (Wolman & Barnes 2002a: 30). We do not argue against this point, but it would have more credibility and force were it to come after a serious and sustained engagement with work to date that has done exactly that. That it does not seems to us at least, a missed opportunity.

Acknowledgements

The authors acknowledge the comments of Allan Cochrane, David Imbroscio, and Jan Nijman, as well as those of Bernadette Hanlon, Editor-in-Chief at the *Journal of Urban Affairs*, and one anonymous reviewer.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article

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