

## The politics of the (global) urban: city strategies as repeated instances

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### 1. Introduction

When we say that **cities have become global actors**, this is a short-hand (cities don't act as such) which indexes a desire to understand the ways in which urban actors and institutions have agency to shape globalising processes of economic growth, politics, cultural form, environmental change. Urban political analysis has sought to explain the territorial basis for global competition amongst cities (Cox and Mair, 1988; Leitner, 1990), in which cities jostle to attract circulating capital investment, to project a potent image on a global stage as destinations for tourism, or, more recently, to be recognized as successful leaders in urban management and policy innovation (Gonzales, 2011). There has also been significant concern with the ways in which circulating investments (Harvey, 2013) and policies (Peck and Theodore, 2015) both shape and are shaped by the agency of urban actors. Thus, as cities experiment with neoliberalisation, for example, they are influenced by wider global norms of urban policy, but in turn contribute, according to Peck, Theodore and Brenner (2009) to the "syndrome" of neoliberalisation.

Both of these analytical series identify the grounds for global urban agency in the local interests and territorially circumscribed dependencies of the urban actors. In this context, the configuration of different actors into stable, "urban regimes" (Logan and Molotch, 1987; Stone, 1989), or local regulatory contexts (Peck, Theodore and Brenner, 2009) emerges from deep historical path dependencies in specific places and in relation to specific territorialized institutions. However, even as these analyses explore the interface of localized urban politics with the transnationalisation of urban processes, neither of these approaches has revisited the (territorial) grounds of urban agency in the context of highly transnationalised, even substantially exteriorized, processes of urban governance. This paper argues that new understandings of the grounds or territorialisations of "urban agency" need to be developed., not least in response to the changing empirical realities of urban politics and globalization.

Significantly, a sense of enhanced global urban agency has emerged on the stage of international development policy and politics. The scope for agency on the part of institutions representing local government, mayors and urban policy makers (Acuto, 2013) has expanded considerably with the upsurge in international interest in urban development policy, such as the UN agreement to support an Urban Sustainable Development Goal (Parnell, 2016; Acuto and Parnell, 2016), or in the role of cities in addressing climate change (Bulkeley, 2012). Furthermore, the financialisation of urban development process has led to a strong transnationalisation of the actors involved in urban development in many contexts (Weber, 2015; Halbert and Rouanet, 2014; Shatkin, 2017). Here, though, a strong rescaling of "urban" agency at a global scale (Acuto, 2013), and the transnationalisation of urban actors (Allen and Cochrane, 2014) has arguably contributed to enhanced territorialisations of agency at the level of the project (Pinson, 2009), or in emergent "transcalar territorial networks" (Halbert and Rouanet, 2014).

Thus the spatiality of global urban political agency is being reconfigured beyond the binary of territorialized local government, locally embedded communities and firms anchored in structured coherence of localities vs circulating or "footloose" capital (Cox and Mair, 1988; Harvey, 1989). I will suggest that "*terrain*", or territory ("locality") remains important in shaping the grounds of the global agency of the urban, but I will show how this needs to be conceptualised as emergent in the transnational and trans-scalar practices of urban governance (Allan and Cochrane, 2007), rather than imagined as an effect of the *a priori* territorialisation of interests at a local "scale" of urban politics.

A second element contributing to the need to reconceptualise global urban agency emerges from the territorial reconfiguration of urbanisation processes and of urban theory. The dispersal of urbanisation across sprawling city-regions/urban territories, has ignited a strong theoretical debate on the complex spatiality and nature of the urban (Scott, 2001; Merrifield, 2013; Brenner and Schmid, 2015). New grounds need to be established for speaking about the global agency of “the urban”, or “cities”, then, partly because the very content and spatial form of urbanization has been brought in question (Brenner and Schmid, 2015). But it is also essential to revisit analyses of global urban agency in the wake of an extensive postcolonial critique in urban studies which has generated a heightened awareness of the great diversity of urban experiences across the globe which need to be drawn into theoretical consideration (Robinson, 2006; Roy, 2009; Parnell and Oldfield, 2014). Thus, the nature of urban agency itself needs to be interrogated across the great variety of urban political formations, stretching across contexts with different kinds of actors, different interest configurations, and different formats of the operation of power (Simone, 2001; Roy, 2005; Parnell and Pieterse, 2016). In this paper, I draw on the potential of a comparative imagination to inform efforts to theorise urban political agency across a wider range of urban experiences. A reformatted comparative practice (Robinson, 2016a; b) enables analysis to bring a diversity of urban experiences into conversation, thereby stretching existing concepts and inventing new repertoires for understanding global urban agency.

I use three cases of city strategy in very different urban contexts (London, Johannesburg and Lilongwe) to stretch analyses of the politics of the global urban to help us to draw insights from the range of political dynamics at work across different urban contexts as urban actors seek to launch themselves on the global stage, or to localize “global” processes. Rather than being led analytically by the experiences of euro-american cities, which have dominated theoretical reflections on how cities act globally, our insights on these issues need to also be inspired by urban processes important to those urban areas located in different regions, shaped by diverse histories of globalisation, highly disparate levels of poverty and wealth, and different regulatory and institutional forms.

In this light, this paper addresses two questions in relation to retheorizing global urban agency: what are the grounds, or territorialisations, of global “urban” agency? And, what are the diverse forms of global political agency which might be identified across different urban situations? Thinking across the variety of global urban politics asks that we extend the theoretical registers which have helped us understand these processes. Trans-scalar and emergent territorializations of urban agency, as well as informal, fleeting or spectral forms of engagement with globalizing urban processes come into view. Starting analyses of urban political agency from “anywhere” and including a diverse range of cities as starting points - perhaps as diverse as possible, which could be a methodological guidance for starting to theorize a problematic - enables an expansion of theoretical registers, and supports the potential to launch insights from different urban situations.

## **2. From local economic development politics to City Strategies: genetic grounds for comparison**

I have found it intriguing that many of the analytical concerns of the earlier local economic development literature come into focus, but in new ways, when considering a widely circulating genre of urban practice, long term city visions and plans, or city strategies (Healey, 2007; Pieterse, 2008; Robinson, 2011b). These have been prepared in most cities around the world, and reflect the strongly interconnected world of urban policy production. Their serial production in very different cities and their shared circuits of influence suggests an opportunity to analytically frame an interrogation of the politics of urban development starting from any city where city strategies have

been prepared; thus, their ubiquity can provoke thinking across a diversity of urban outcomes. They allow insights into issues which will be familiar to researchers of the politics of urban development: how different kinds of actors with differential influence and capacity can come together across the city to define or contest paths for development, perhaps as an “urban regime” but perhaps as an array of actors and agency more fragmented and spectral than that; how these pathways of policy formulation can shape and influence potential for different economic or collective activities; how more or less stable and shared visions of a city’s future can be articulated in relation to other cities and wider global processes (Healey, 1998).

Taking such a ubiquitous governmental technology as our starting point means that while existing analyses focus largely on the US and Europe (although see Harding, 1994), we can internationalize these concerns to attend to a much wider range of actors, forms of constitution of urban agency, as well as different processes of globalization. Starting from cities like Lilongwe, Malawi, hard questions are posed to the existing literature: How are urban political interests articulated in conditions of the strong trans-nationalization, even exteriorization of economy, state and civil society, the dominant role of international agents (donors, advisors, consultants, investors, foreign governments), the significance of informalized political processes, and challenges of extreme inequality? In fact, I will suggest that these issues are also important to take account of in London (at the top of the putative international urban hierarchy) and in Johannesburg (a regional centre in a middle-income country). Bringing these cities together for analytical reflection challenges us to explore whether experiences from poorly resourced contexts can be effectively drawn into wider theoretical conversations on urban governance. This would demonstrate the potential to significantly extend the theoretical range of urban political analysis through comparative research with a wider global scope. The two questions which this paper (and this book) addresses, could therefore be extended in ways that could be helpful to thinking about all cities.

Firstly, on what is the capacity for urban actors to engage in global processes grounded? For Cox and Mair (1988), whose analysis was concerned with US cities, local agency in urban development politics rests in the territorialised interests of the state, business and community in a locality – states have interests in generating income and securing electoral victory; residents are concerned with jobs and meeting their needs through local facilities and services; locally dependent businesses are invested in the “structured coherence” (Harvey, 1989) of local environments which support their activities, and incoming businesses are interested in reducing the costs of doing business. The potential for an alliance around the agenda of economic growth is secured amongst these actors, with different outcomes in contexts dependent on the nature of formal and informal arrangements of political relationships (Molotch, 1986; Logan and Molotch, 1987; Vicari and Molotch, 1990). Kantor and Savitch (2004) expand on this analysis, with 8 case study cities across the US and the UK, attending to how local actors position themselves in relation to the circuits of governmental resources and the role of the strategic positioning of the local economy in global economic processes more generally. A quite rounded theorisation emerges in their analyses, informed also by the variety in the institutional and political dynamics which their cases bring to light, including the relative democratic responsiveness of governments to the electorate, for example.

In contrast, and despite a sometimes celebratory approach to this, the increasingly successful representation of “cities” and local government at the highest levels of international diplomacy and policymaking highlights the importance of taking a networked view of the capacity of urban actors. The trans-nationalization of urban agency at the scale of international politics has been effectively achieved in both climate change and development policy (Bulkeley, 2012; Acuto, 2013; Parnell, 2016), speaking to a networked capacity across city leaders in emergent transnational organizations. Territorially based urban actors engage in policy development and sharing, in international diplomacy and lobbying, and configure their agency on the global/international stage in strongly

networked ways. However, in this context, there has been little work to interrogate exactly how and why specific territorially located urban actors participate in such networked global politics. While in this emergent networked capacity, “cities” in general might become “obligatory passage points for global environmental governance” (Acuto, 2013: 15), Bulkeley (2012) explores more directly how transnational networks also provide a platform for enhanced visibility for both individual urban actors and their cities, indicating that the territoriality (local and national) of political interests in this phase of the city as networked global actor remain vital (Söderström, 2014). Policy making processes within these networks can “enhance international legitimacy” and “improve policymaking independence” for individual cities in relation to national level government (Acuto, 2013: 16). But some lack capacity to influence such networks, or face significant challenges in implementing networked policy innovations for lack of resources and capacity or poor fit with their circumstances.

Thus, a territorial perspective remains important to understanding global urban agency. It brings into view the multiplicity of networking opportunities and diversity of transnational connections which cross-cut any given urban territory. Thinking across and with this dense multiplicity of connections is in fact the task of a city strategy, which emerges out of a vast array of policy influences and competing agendas to frame a city-wide agenda (Robinson, 2011b). Recent studies of financialised urban development projects have documented the emergent territorialisations of transnational and transcalar networks coalescing from the particular associations amongst actors involved in a specific project (see Halbert and Rouanet, 2014). The practice of preparing a long-term vision or strategic plan convenes an imaginative and practical territorialisation of politics concerning a particular urban context. But this is formed in the midst of transnational agents and ideas, including sometimes strongly exteriorised actors and concerns. Here we can learn much from methodological innovations of policy mobility research (for example; McCann and Ward, 2010; Roy and Ong, 2011; Robinson, 2011b; Peck and Theodore, 2012; Söderström, 2014; Wood, 2014). Thus, while the vigorous policy circulation associated with preparing city strategies is noteworthy (Healey, 2007; Robinson, 2011b), each strategic vision or plan is also distinctive, representing both a close engagement with a specific context and a certain territorialization of urban politics (see Robinson, 2011b for a wider discussion of city strategies).

For some time I have been following three examples of city strategy, from cities not conventionally considered together: Johannesburg, London and Lilongwe. Aside from my opportunistic interest in each case, I justify bringing them into comparative conversation on the grounds of their shared genesis in interconnected policy circuits: they emerge from the shared, if differentiated, global circulation of a specific governmental technology (city strategy), and shared, if differentiated, circuits of globalising urban policies. There seem to be good reasons for exploring these “repeated instances” (Jacobs, 2012; Robinson, 2016a; 2016b). To be clear, the “cases” in such an analysis are not cities as such, but the “repeated instance” of long term city strategies which form part of an interconnected field of urban policy, in which city strategies, as well as the policies and practices involved in their production, are circulating.

Reformatting comparative tactics for twenty-first century cities benefits from working with the spatialities of urbanisation itself. Thus comparative tactics can be inspired by the ways in which the urban comes to be formed (and known) as it is assembled transnationally, across a multiplicity of specific but strongly interrelated outcomes. This supports the possibility for proliferating insights across a world of cities. I have therefore suggested “genetic” grounds for comparison, based on the extraordinary array of interconnected processes which lead to often repeated, but distinctive, urban outcomes around the globe. Here, then, we can start our thinking with the many repeated instances which make up the urban, such as residential high rises (Jacobs, 2006), mixed use “new urbanism” developments (Moore, 2013), low-income financialised housing (Caldeira, 2016) – or indeed, city strategies. I also propose the value of “generative” starting points for thinking the urban, which build

on conceptual curiosity about shared and differentiated urban experiences. Thus scholars, practitioners and observers build insights across different experiences (Myers, 2014; Söderström, 2014), based on shared features, which enable them to think with the variety of urban experiences, generating and extending concepts, perhaps coming to their useful limits, and needing to invent new concepts. In this way, a reformatted comparativism can contribute to developing new vocabularies and conceptualisations of the urban (Brenner and Schmid, 2015; Robinson, 2016a; Schmid *et al.*, 2018), including understandings of the politics of the global urban. Thinking across a variety of urban contexts will enable us to extend our interpretations and understandings of the politics of the “global urban”: to consider the grounds and forms of global urban agency emerging from and shaping three cases of city strategies.

### **3. Thinking across three cases of city strategies**

The cases of city strategies which I have assembled here have the potential to stretch understandings of urban development politics drawing insights from three quite different urban contexts. In London, United Kingdom, the London Plan, a strategic “spatial” plan is mandated in legislation. It draws together statutory thematic plans of the Mayor for the Greater London Authority, established in 2000. The Plan is reviewed and updated periodically, and usually redrafted significantly with the election of a new Mayor (4 year terms of office). Its function is to set high level planning and wider policy guidance for the administratively fragmented metropolitan area. In Johannesburg, South Africa, strategic city-wide visioning was initiated in the late 1990s alongside preparations for the creation in 2000 of unitary local government in the municipality after a period of institutional transformation with the end of apartheid. The review and revision of the plan has been episodic, linked to moments of institutional and political change, and while initially ad hoc, is now an expectation of national legislation on local government, and nominally linked to the annual and 5-year planning and electoral cycles of the city. Institutional tensions exist between operation and strategic control, and between spatial and strategic planning, and the implementation of the high-level city strategy is not very streamlined. In Lilongwe, Malawi, an ad hoc city strategy was formulated in 2009 through close co-operation with the City of Johannesburg, partly supported by the United Cities and Local Government, and partly by the Cities Alliance, but substantially self-financed by Johannesburg and Lilongwe. The co-operation came to an end with change in personnel in Lilongwe, and while there have been some positive outcomes in terms of further funding and investment in housing, implementation was patchy.

My evidence for each of these three cases is rather different, driven partly by my lines of access to learning about the strategy in each context but, as the following section will clarify, also driven by the distinctive issues which each case raises. I have followed the Johannesburg case closely since 1999, and have conducted numerous, and repeat, interviews with key city government personnel and other actors involved in the city strategy process. My comments here are drawn from these interviews, as well as attending some public consultation meetings, and analysis of background documents as well as draft and final policies. Here the strategy represents the negotiation of a post-apartheid vision, balancing priorities of growth and redistribution. In London I have been fortunate to co-operate with the community-based network, Just Space, learning through their collective organization and engagement with the London Plan process primarily through the formal consultation process, public hearings, but also informal interactions with officials (Brown, Lee and Edwards, 2012). Here the key issue which emerges concerns the potential for a more inclusive policy agenda to take hold in a large city with very powerful property development and business groups. My knowledge of the Lilongwe case is gained from discussions with several Johannesburg officials who were involved in a city to city exchange process, as well as analysis of detailed background documents, correspondence and evaluation materials. Here the question which arises concerns the implications of external actors playing a strong role in policy and urban development.

As a comparative practice, I benefit here from the observation that each “repeated instance”, while interconnected with the others through the practice of preparing city strategies, is a “singularity” and offers a distinctive starting point for reflection; each experience of city strategy prompts analytical reflection in its own right. There is much more to be done with these three cases as well as with the potential of a genetic comparative method working with the specific connections between cases and the wider relational contexts which they bring into view (see Deville and Guggenheim, 2016, for some wider discussion; Hart, 2016; Robinson, forthcoming). Here, though, I use this particular tactic: starting with each (repeated) instance, grounded in an interconnected practice, I allow them to raise questions of each other (Ward, 2010), in order to “thicken” the interpretation of each of the singularities in turn (Akrich and Rabeharisoa, 2016). I start below with London as it proposes some perhaps surprising answers to the first of the two questions I am addressing in this paper, what are the grounds of global urban agency? Johannesburg signposts well some helpful understandings of the second issue, what are the forms of global political agency? And the case of Lilongwe importantly stretches understandings of both of these issues. Each case offers a different analytical starting point and in a specifically post-colonial move in the final section below I bring the experiences of both Lilongwe and Johannesburg back to review understandings of the London case.

a. London: trans-scalar territories of global urban agency

The London Plan itself is a circulating practice, drawn on and promoted by the UK national government – the Department of Communities and Local Government under New Labour had been influenced by US-centric practices of strategic city-wide visioning, including those of Monitor’s Michael Porter, who was also influential in shaping the early analyses and processes in Johannesburg (Institute for a Competitive Inner City, 2003; Interview, former Johannesburg city official A, 2009). The use of strategic planning to cohere the work programme of the newly-established GLA also reflected the more general global and European circulation of a strategic approach to urban planning as good practice, also promoted by New Labour’s DCLG (Tewdwr-Jones *et al.*, 2010). But it also represented a long-standing strategic policy function associated with the authorities responsible for London, which shifted over time from the GLC (abolished in 1986) to an amalgam of local authorities’ representatives (Local Planning Advisory Committee), under the auspices of central government’s Office for London, until the GLA was re-established in 2000 (Bowie, 2010).

Does London’s plan itself act on this global policy stage? The London Plan office does attract international visitors concerned to observe their practices; and officers have visited other contexts to present their approach (Interview, 2011, GLA Planning Officer). Unlike Johannesburg, where, as we will see the city strategy has been self-consciously positioned in relation to wider circulating ideas about strategic urban planning, the London Plan itself has had a more confined presence as a local working document and is just as strongly embedded in local planning ideas and inherited practice as in global urban policy. This despite the myriad learning practices of officers and elected representatives (as well as business and community actors) involved in preparing the London Plan are inserted into global policy circuits which they draw from as well as contribute to, benefitting from their relatively privileged location on conference, academic and professional circuits looped through London.

The assessment of UK global urban agency more generally has been rather muted, since for many decades local government has been strongly directed and funded by the central state, making it one of the most centrist systems of urban governance, and often a poor fit for analyses of local agency such as regime theory (Ward, 1996; Harding, 1994). Local states did not raise money through attracting business investment or developing property (unless it included housing for ratepayers rather than social housing tenants), so the link to promoting employment was weak (business rates were redistributed nationally through an agreed formula). Local authorities had little discretion on

most of their spending, despite historically playing a strong role in delivering major welfare state services, such as education and housing. Applying urban regime theory to the UK case has been notoriously challenging, with only a few cases standing out for their more entrepreneurial approach to local development e.g. Manchester (Harding *et al.*, 2004).

However, this has changed significantly over time. Central government grant has been reduced and instead local business rates are allocated directly to local authorities, albeit with some fiscal cross-subsidy amongst authorities over time (DCLG, 2017). Thus, local authorities are increasingly dependent on urban development to generate their core budget: the generation of income for key welfare state functions has been downscaled to the extraction of value from the urban environment. Reinforcing this, but in a longer-term trend, opportunities for property development provide one of the few means for discretionary spending on infrastructure, services and housing via localized developer taxes and charges. Each of the 33 sub-metropolitan local governments have strong incentives to seek close alliances with property developers. Alongside these fragmenting trends in urban development, the creation of metropolitan mayors, the London Mayor being the first, has initiated new spheres of governance at the metropolitan scale in realms of policy, strategic vision, international engagements, co-ordination with lower level authorities, and management of an expanding range of metropolitan wide services (such as, police, fire, local economy, housing). However, the Mayor needs to operate in an urban environment characterized by significant territorial fragmentation and institutional complexity (Travers, 2004; Gordon and Travers, 2010).

In London, agency in relation to globalized processes must therefore emerge in relation to significantly dispersed agency. The leading analyst of London politics, Tony Travers (2004), coins this an “ungovernable city”, with 33 sub-metropolitan councils, capped by a relatively weak Greater London Authority, effectively an agency of metropolitan strategic guidance and some operational responsibilities, including for transport, police, fire and broader economic development which is effected partly through a business-led agency, a Local Enterprise Partnership. This is not to suggest that there is not significant scope for action and these responsibilities have expanded significantly since the GLA was established. But in this city urban political agency is notoriously complex, involving many governmental and quasi-governmental institutions, across different levels of authority, with historically strong central state direction of policy formulation and service delivery adding in to the mix numerous central agencies operating locally, most notably, health care. Agency is dispersed across institutions, and in such a situation of messy governance, relies strongly on inter-personal negotiations and alliances. Building a growth coalition for the city has taken adept political agency from Mayors, lobby groups and central state officials (Gordon, 2004; Gordon and Travers, 2010), as well as relying on informal networks which cohere around specific urban development projects or consolidate through repeated interactions over numerous projects (e.g. associations which are forged at presentations, conferences and developer milieus)<sup>1</sup>. In its institutional dispersal, then, the “city” as a global actor in the case of London is very much a multiplicity (Allen and Cochrane, 2007). The formulation of the London Plan, as a city strategy, establishes a vision and direction of travel across London’s institutional complexity, with the GLA needing to navigate the multiplicity of actors relevant to the formulation of policy.

How then does the relative coherence of a city strategy emerge from highly “distributed” agency? Territorial coherence and temporal consistency in the discourses and practices underpinning London’s strategic visioning have been significant and I would suggest the reasons for this can be properly located in three sets of processes. Firstly, the role of policy discourses and transnational regulations (e.g. the adoption of European strategic spatial planning practices – see Nadin, 2007; Tewdwr-Jones, Gallent and Morphet, 2010). Secondly, the strongly path-dependent challenges,

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<sup>1</sup> These observations are based on current esrc-funded research on a Mayoral Development Corporation, established 1 April 2015, in Old Oak and Park Royal.

imaginings and practices which frame actions and interventions to understand the city on its own terms. And, thirdly, the imagination at work to competitively mobilize “London” in global circuits of investment.

Coherence and consistency in the London Plan over time emerges to some extent from the technical nature of the discourses which subtend this particular city strategy, and which establish or constrain the terms of engagement amongst different actors shaping the London Plan (Rydin *et al.*, 2004). Analytically, then, the case of London requires us to attend to the agency which emerges from the territorializations of “discourse”. The London Plan is quite a technical document, unlike the other two plans considered below which are looser and more strategic. The London Plan sets both direction and specific policy in local strategic planning issues, and so must provide conformity with wider legislative and policy frameworks and expect conformity from subsidiary local planning authorities. It also incorporates high level consequences of national and European or international policy in different areas of the GLA’s responsibilities (health, environment, transport, housing, economy). In each of these policy areas, the London Plan is part of the banal but thorough-going trans-nationalization of urban policy through learning networks, best practice and national level circuits of information. And “London” is in turn a participant in the invention of the broader regulatory context of the global urban through these processes.

The territorial grounds for agency are therefore emergent in a strongly transnationalised field: local actors are constituted in relation to a diversity of transnational alliances and networks. Thus “local” actors range widely in their sources of policy and strategic inspiration, not least because many Londoners, including many small and medium business operators, bring experience from elsewhere to their political engagements (Allen and Cochrane, 2012; Roman- Valazquez, 2014; cf Theodore, 2007). The Mayors of London have been closely involved in the creation of a global political stage for cities, Ken Livingstone and deputy Mayor Nicky Gavron were influential in forming and sustaining international networking amongst powerful cities and other actors, such as in the C40 network (Gavron, 2007; Interview, Nicky Gavron, 2009). This provides a strong example of the transnational nature of “local” policy making: “as a political officer from the GLA put it: ‘the [C40] meeting offers a sweeping window to survey the state of urban planning in our global competitors, and twin global action with global competitiveness’” (Acuto, 2013, p. 16). The Mayor of London also has access to readily available platforms at key events, such as the annual gathering of business leaders at Davos. And the prolific engagement between all the different local boroughs as well as the Mayor with property developers introduces a profound and quotidian agency for the city in terms of shaping the global circulation of financial investment capital.

In the face of the institutional complexity which underpins the plan, perhaps the most surprising feature is the consistency in the precise form of strategic visions for London over time. Continuities can be identified in the consistency of top level objectives, the stability over decades of the spatial form of the plan (central activity zone; smaller town centres; “opportunity” areas for significant and concentrated development; inner city vs outer suburbs; convergence between east and west), and the continuity of staff working on London’s strategic planning across these institutions (the lead planner until 2017 having worked on the strategic plan for London in different capacities since the mid-1980s). There has also been a very long time-horizon in which the dual imagination of London as a “global City” and a site for sustainable urban development practices has been operative. Locally embedded policy-led research on London’s economic future, as a world, or “global”, city, was initiated in the late 1980s. Firstly this came as a response to a devastating decline in population and economy, and later as a basis for competitive positioning vis-à-vis other cities dependent on advanced services and finance sectors (Kennedy, 1991; Gordon, 1995). Sustainable urban development discourse began to gain purchase internationally and influence strategic thinking about London around the same time.



A form of territorialization of London's policy can therefore be seen to emerge from the broader competitive eye of policy makers, businesses and politicians: to make London the "best big city" in the world according to former Mayor Boris Johnson (GLA, 2011); to sustain its competitive positioning in certain sectors, such as finance, services and cultural industries; to promote new areas of specialization, such as green or circular economies; to facilitate London's relatively rapid growth; to construct a built environment which advertises this global status. Certainly, responding to the implications of such globalized economic growth places enormous pressure on wider policies on housing, local economies and high streets, for example, which ostensibly claim a continuing interest in supporting London's distinctive neighbourhoods and quality of life. Global ambitions are therefore distilled into giving shape to the overall framing of the Mayor's strategic spatial plan as well as informing specific elements of it, such as creating planning exceptions to protect key central office spaces against more lucrative housing development, and to intensify development in so-called "Opportunity Areas".

The London Plan, then, demonstrates that the basis of global urban agency is achieved through and against significant institutional fragmentation, a multiplicity of transnational circuits of learning and practice and is profoundly trans-scalar in that it is mediated by national and (for the moment) supra-national institutions while also demonstrating deep local influences and continuities.

#### b. Johannesburg: Launching and localising developmental agendas

In contrast to the muted global agency of the London Plan as such, Johannesburg has claimed strong global effects for its early post-apartheid city strategies, which emerged at the same time as the Cities Alliance (CA), a key promoter of city strategies amongst poorer countries, was founded. While some Johannesburg officials involved at this time suggest they "invented" the city strategy idea which became so important to the CA, at the least Johannesburg's strategic planning formed a case study for the Cities Alliance (CA, 2006; Robinson, 2011b), and informed their development of the idea of the city strategy as a framework for supporting a city-wide and inclusive approach to urban development planning in poorer cities.

From the vantage point of Johannesburg, we can trace some shared circuits of influence across the three cases presented here. The consultants used to develop the city strategy concept for the CA drew on literatures and practices related to long-standing US practices of city-wide visioning (Harris, 2002; Cities Alliance, 2006) which also informed the Monitor Group and Michael Porter's (1990) Competitive Advantage of Nations (and cities) methodology. As we saw above, these were also relevant to the UK city strategy initiatives of the 1990s and 2000s. There are significant shared influences, then, amongst the strategic planning practices which shaped both the formulation of the Cities Alliance and Johannesburg engagements with stakeholder-led city visioning (Robinson, 2011b), and the national legislation on regional and spatial planning governing the London Plan (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2007). As a best practice case, UCLG subsequently targeted Johannesburg to support a city to city learning initiative across Southern Africa and became involved in a collaborative relationship with officials in Lilongwe (Interview, former city official A, 2009). Eager to promote itself in international circuits, an international strategy has seen Johannesburg circulate its own achievements, such as the city strategy, through selected international networks (C40, UCLG, Metropolis), where targeted marketing of the city strategy work was undertaken (Interview, city official JE, 2011; Peyroux, 2016). City to city learning also led to international study visits and exploring city twinning with cities in different parts of the world (Europe, Africa, South America), on different themes, including security, strategies, youth, environment (Interview 1 and 2, city official B, 2011 and 2012; Peyroux, 2016; this volume).

With few resources available for international interaction in a middle-income resource-stretched city with many urgent delivery priorities, international networking organizations have provided valued opportunities for strong global visibility for the city (Interview 3, city official B; Peyroux, this volume). Successive Mayors have been promoted as leading figures in international networks of cities, such as UCLG and Metropolis, with the former Mayor Masondo co-President of the UCLG, and former Mayor Parks Tau currently (2017) president of UCLG, even though he lost his post in the 2016 elections which unseated the ANC from power in Johannesburg City Council (Interview 3, city official B, 2013; Harrison, 2015). While learning and policy development have clearly been important ambitions of Johannesburg's international policies, a key official commented that, "basically, your allies are very important as well in terms of your political and international profile, so it is building your brand to some extent as well" (Interview 1, city official B, 2011). The form of global urban agency bleeds here into a form of marketing, seeking to raise visibility and influence to bring reputational enhancement and a larger role on the world stage of urban policy and local government networks.

Johannesburg has prepared a sequence of city strategies, with different emphases. The early 2000s saw a broad ranging initiative, *iGoli*<sup>2</sup> 2010, which sought to set a strategic agenda alongside institutional restructuring and privatization or corporatization of various functions, for the newly integrated City of Johannesburg. This initiative stalled with trade union and popular protests against privatization leading to a much-reduced stakeholder process (Parnell and Robinson, 2006). An in-house consolidation of the private sector research undertaken for the *iGoli* process (by Monitor, the Harvard-based company) saw a strategy – Joburg 2030 - strongly focused on marshalling all council initiatives to promote economic growth as a priority. And after city officials stalled the implementation of this strategy, a more balanced co-ordination of a series of strategies covering growth, human development and environmental issues was brought together in the 2006 Growth and Development Strategy (Interview 1, former City Official A, 2009). While this gained some traction discursively in the city institutions, officials in different departments were skeptical as to its influence on implementation (Interview, former city official D, 2011). A revised version in 2011 was launched with considerable publicity and stakeholder "participation", although this was rather late in the day to influence the actual document which was already substantially drafted. Very little time was allocated to implement any changes, sometimes overnight, as the consultation reports were coming in (Interview 1, city official B, 2011). Implementation was again compromised as the influence of the City Strategy Unit responsible for driving the strategy was undermined when the Urban Development Planning department gained control of planning the capital budget, more fundamentally shaping city priorities (Interview, former city official (GG), 2009; Interview former city official D, 2011; Interview, City Official G, 2016).

As in London, international policy circuits are an everyday presence for Johannesburg's officials, through their own professional training, internet and institutional connections. Policy development draws selectively and intelligently on key ideas and practices prominent in different settings around the world (Robinson, 2013), or packaged for circulation (Wood, 2014). Ideas are available easily on the internet – arriving in Johannesburg as quickly as anywhere else – and trajectories of learning include maintaining close contact with local and international academics, officials who have themselves recently returned from studies abroad (Interview, city official A), or commissioning desk top studies of key areas (Interview, former city official B). Face to face discussions with peers while on trips or in international policy settings can make a strong impression and provide leads for further research or implementation. Although ideas shared may be familiar or relatively slight, chance discussions can help to focus practices (Interview 2, former city official C, 2011). A former city official from the office responsible for preparing Johannesburg's Growth and Development Strategy noted, for example, that on a trip to New York City, where they were discussing "PlanNYC", New York's long-term plan, they discussed their public consultation process. He "took home [that] they just

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<sup>2</sup> The vernacular name for Johannesburg, "place of gold".

simplify the stuff, even this [GDS] document you have was deliberately simplified – and still people find it dense .... They were saying to us if you want to engage with stakeholders and citizens across the board you have to take stuff in a form they can engage... we hadn't finalised this consultation process, so we got back and that was at the back of my mind..." (Interview 2, former city official C, 2011). More generally, though, apparently international learning can be embedded in ongoing recursive interactions and policy development where the exact origins are unclear (Wood, 2014). Phil Harrison, himself a former city official as well as senior scholar notes, for example, that although South Africa had long experience in *in situ* upgrading of informal settlements (van Horen, 2000), and academic knowledge about the Brazilian experience was widespread, two study tours to Brazil and Peru (1999) and to Brazil in 2008 "led more immediately to the adoption of new policy" (2015: 216) in this area.

However, as in the London case, the folding of Johannesburg's city strategy and wider policy development through diverse transnational circuits (Robinson, 2011b; 2013) sits alongside the strong path dependence of the strategic visions. Here we are able to highlight perhaps even more strongly than in London the importance of historical trajectories in shaping the grounds for global agency. In Johannesburg, the idea and the capacity to frame a distinctive vision for the future of the city, and to articulate the terms of the city's insertion into globalizing processes, has been strongly informed by the national political project of democratization and redistribution after apartheid (Robinson and Parnell, 2006). This has been grounded on a strong, integrated local government across the metropolitan area of Johannesburg – although the wider city-region is fragmented into three similar sized municipalities. Headline commitments to redressing balances in service delivery, and to accommodating both the poor and the large number of migrants arriving in the city from across the region, country and continent, owe their formulation to this shared national political project. A key idea for the GDS 2006, "the proactive absorption of the poor", was influenced by emerging practices in another South African city, Durban, where the idea that people should be able to live in the city without needing to incur costs had emerged (Interview 1, former city official A, 2009). A strong political commitment to this idea saw it adopted into the strategy (Interview, city official E, 2011). Equally, the desire to promote (shared) economic growth alongside other objectives derives from both national and local level understandings of Johannesburg's dominant place in the export economy of South Africa, and the need to secure jobs and income for residents, as well as sustain national (income) and local (property) taxes.

The electoral system plays a strong regulatory role in shaping these strategic aims. Concerns about being re-elected were high on the ANC Mayors' minds over the years, and extensive survey analysis of residents' views informed election and policy planning (Robinson and Parnell, 2006; see for example, <https://www.wits.ac.za/news/latest-news/general-news/2016/elections/quality-of-life-survey-for-gauteng/>). These concerns were well-placed, as the 2016 elections saw the ANC lose control of Johannesburg to a relatively unlikely coalition of the liberal, largely white Democratic Alliance (which won the most votes) and the radical youth ANC breakaway group, the Economic Freedom Fighters (who provide the required voting majority in the council).

Formulating strategic policy, then, could not simply rehearse global policy ideas, such as promoting resilience, or environmental sustainability, for example, although these played a strong role in the 2011 version of the Joburg 2040 growth and development strategy (Interview, city official E, 2011). It was also not feasible to offer a programme of urban development which sought simply to insert Johannesburg as a competitive "global" or "world class" city into wider global circuits. In the light of the multiple competing agendas presented by the demands of that context (Parnell and Robinson, 2006) the city strategy had to address hard questions from politicians concerned with delivering jobs and houses (Interview 1, former city official C, 2009). Indeed, these priority agendas contributed to shaping the global agency of the city globally, in terms of the policy circuits and places it sought to

influence and learn from. Here, a distinct South-south shift in policy learning had been underway, reflecting both a search for more relevant policy ideas (Harrison, 2015) and a revised assessment of the geopolitical positioning of Johannesburg and South Africa (Peyroux, 2016). Notable here has been learning, for example, on participatory budgeting, bus rapid transit and transit-oriented development, informal settlement upgrading, smart cities, security and resilience (Harrison, 2015; Peyroux, 2016). The form of policy learning was also influenced by this territorial imperative – embedded developmental learning based on long term and substantive exchanges related to topics and sectors which mattered to Johannesburg came to dominate the city-to-city relationships (Interview 2, city official B, 2012).

Nonetheless, the city strategy navigated a range of trans-scalar dynamics. Shared responsibilities with other tiers of government in key areas relevant to urbanization ensured that political concerns and policy concepts reaching across local-national-provincial government shaped or delimited local trajectories. Close attention needed to be paid to new national government agendas and concepts – such as shared growth or human settlements policy – as well as alignment sought with ANC party concerns at local and regional levels (Lipietz, 2011). These were interwoven with widely circulating policy ideas but also with more locally developed academic concepts. This made the arrival at a specific range of policy agendas and commitments in the city strategy a complex and rather untraceable, even spatially topological, process (Robinson, 2011b; 2013; Interview city official E, 2011). Two of the key authors of the 2006 and 2011 city strategies expressed this in the following ways:

“The way the stuff works in truth is that a small team of people and, almost always, one or two individuals within that team are engaged in policy debates more generally, read incredibly widely on all sorts of issues and it just becomes part of the amorphous mass of their thinking. And then as they engage with what people are saying within the city, engage with stakeholders, engage with communities, a synthesis process happens by which the thoughts become a particular policy statement or a particular program of action. But if you were to say now where did that idea come from, you’d say well it came out of the work we were doing in this particular department but in truth actually the idea probably came from somewhere else.” (Interview 1, former city official A, Johannesburg, 2009)

“Honestly it’s been very difficult, it has been very, very challenging. It would have been easy if we had agreement around the concept [of resilience] and theories of change – and then further develop it ... and then at the same time I guess the challenge has been trying to bring together the political imperatives, national and provincial priorities, and the theoretical stuff together.” (Interview, city official E, 2011).

In addition, overlapping responsibilities for aspects of urban development across tiers of government led to creative rethinking about who is to be involved in strategic urban policy making and implementation at an early stage in the Johannesburg process of city strategy preparation. One observer who had worked in national local government policy networks and in another large city, commented in relation to Joburg 2030 and the 5 year planning instrument, Integrated Development Plans,

“We started thinking that the limitations of the IDP [integrated development plan] was that the IDP is a municipal plan, it’s not a plan for the municipal area ... IDPs only deal with powers and functions of municipalities and municipal budgets, cutting out safety and security, health, welfare, education, foreign policy... all sorts of things that you need to run a city. And I would give credit to Joburg for opening up that debate, they were pioneers there, I give credit to [officials] and all those people because they were doing it and at the end of the day their

conclusion was that their two main interventions had to be around crime and skills, at that stage, and then they thought, whoops, but we don't do that, so who can we influence to do that, then they had to start constructing alliances and networks and how do they influence those people, although I don't think they necessarily succeeded in that." (Interview, former Cape Town city official, Cape Town, 2009).

On the one hand, then, the Johannesburg city strategies evidence a capacity to effectively work across the demands of a range of different territorially embedded constituencies and to address tough redistributive and developmental questions politically and technically. But on the other hand, they have also managed to engage closely with global urban policy and developmental practice. For the purposes of this paper we can see at work in this case a trans-scalar formation of territorial imperatives for urban development and a multi-directional process of engagement with wider global processes of knowledge circulation. However, this transnational environment is simultaneously territorialized – circulating ideas are already present and localized. Moreover, local practices are effectively launched into wider knowledge circuits and policy networks to achieve both developmental goals and global visibility. As I have argued elsewhere, a sophisticated spatial vocabulary is needed to appreciate these dynamics (Robinson, 2011b; 2013; Allen and Cochrane, 2014; Allen, 2016). In this case, the territorialized concerns and interests of the city strategy are grounded in cross-cutting trans-scalar and transnational formations. One consequence of this was to place Johannesburg's strategic policy team as influential in shaping strategic planning practices internationally – which opens up the story of their engagement with Lilongwe.

c. Lilongwe: Slow policy transfer and the exteriority of urban agency

If the wider national and supra-national political contexts, as well as globally circulating ideas, shape the particular territorializations of urban political agency at a metropolitan scale in London and Johannesburg, turning to think with the case of Lilongwe we are reminded to attend to the precise nature of these articulations of global and localized processes; to the form of global urban agency. In Malawi, and in many African contexts, local government has historically been strongly directed by central government ministries, and still has little discretionary scope for operation. As a result, central government agencies are important players in key areas such as housing, planning and infrastructure (UN-Habitat, 2011). More than this, international non-governmental and development organizations are active partners or providers in so many of the functions of local government that significant problems of overlap and duplication of effort can emerge. Without local government engagement, the moral authority and co-ordinating capacity to implement policies is frequently lacking (Manda, 2014). At the time Johannesburg officials began engaging in a close peer-to-peer mentoring relationship with Lilongwe officials with a view to producing a city strategy (2007-9) there was no functioning political authority there and somewhat limited administrative capacity. Local elections had not been held since 2000, the 2005 elections had been cancelled, a number of officials had been suspended because of a financial corruption scandal (including the financial oversight officials). The financial probity of the council's activities was a difficult issue to confront (Interview, Johannesburg city official and consultant, 2012). The Lilongwe city strategy was not prepared in auspicious circumstances, then, for realising either the political capacity or the organisational resources to constitute local agency in relation to wider global processes. In this case transnational influences took the form of direct policy inputs from Johannesburg and the UCLG, and the search for international NGO and development aid funding to address the extreme developmental needs of this city of around 700,000 people.

Following initial engagements with UCLG's City Futures programme to promote international networking at the World Urban Forum, June 2006, in Vancouver and the Africities conference, Nairobi, September 2006, a dedicated workshop was held in Johannesburg in July 2007. Here officials and politicians from South African and Southern African cities met to discuss South Africa's

experiences with city strategies (Interview 2, former city official A, 2011). Some of the officials I interviewed indicated that they had not been strongly aware of the aims of the workshop in advance, and appear to have been surprised to learn at the time that the underlying motivation was to implement mentorship arrangements amongst Southern and South African cities. Thus UCLG and Cities Alliance organizers seem to have been driving the process at this stage. But once engaged Johannesburg officials, notably a key official in the Central Strategy Unit responsible for drawing up the city strategy, saw this as an opportunity to engage in a positive developmental international relationship with a city closely connected to South Africa through labour migration and economic interdependence (Interview, city official and consultant, 2013). This opportunity was welcomed as a marker of a shift in the city's international policy towards a strategic and substantive process of city to city learning, rather than the more ceremonial approach to city twinning which had become customary, or the proliferation of unco-ordinated international links across many different departments which predominated at the time (Harrison, 2015; Peyroux, 2016; Interview 3 City Official B, 2014).

At the commencement of the city planning exercise with Lilongwe Johannesburg officials engaged together with UCLG officers in discussions with national and local government departments in Lilongwe, NGOs and donor organisations. They left their first visit in April 2008 assessing that support from these bodies was confirmed. However, Johannesburg participants observed that no political authority was in place to guide the officials there, and little scope existed for institutional leadership. A previously elected council had not assumed their positions, but also most of the directors of administrative units were acting appointments, and the suspension of the financial department because of extensive corruption significantly hampered both day to day operations and longer-term planning (Lilongwe CDS, 2009; JCC CSU Evaluation, 2011). Nonetheless, in the incumbent CEO of some years, Professor Donton Mkhawire, a motivated champion for the process was found, although unfortunately he left to serve as an MP in 2009 (*Nyasa Times*, 29 December 2011).

In interview with Johannesburg city officials involved in the mentoring relationship, their view of the state of the city government of Lilongwe was fairly dismal and some examples they recounted seemed to indicate a low point in both local government capacity and international development practice. As documented in the city strategy document which emerged from the process, at the time, only 10% of the anticipated revenue was being collected. Recently donated used fire engines languished in the car park, needing spare parts no longer produced anywhere in the world. A recent investment in a road system, through Japanese aid, had significantly disrupted pathways for the city's majority of pedestrians. Not one of the 17 Lilongwe city assembly health centres was functioning in the city for want of personnel and drugs (Lilongwe City Assembly Annual Report, 2008, p. 11). And this in the face of one of the highest levels of malaria anywhere on the continent, 1478 reported cases of cholera in 2008, stunting and malnutrition in children, and significant HIV infection rates (12%) (Lilongwe CDS, 2009).

A small grant from Cities Alliance (\$72, 375) offered start-up costs for city strategy preparation, financing an exchange between city officials in the two cities, and was sponsored by GTZ (German Organization for Technical Co-operation), Japan International Cooperation Agency, UCLG and USAID Malawi (GHK CA Evaluation Report, 2010). Over several months, and then years, the exchange continued, building engagements between officials from Johannesburg and Lilongwe across a number of areas of city activity, such as security, health, GIS, planning, infrastructure/engineering, bye-laws. Over time the programme expanded beyond the initial brief (Phase 1), and perhaps a dozen officials travelled from Johannesburg to Lilongwe for a week or two at a time, funded largely by Johannesburg's own budget, reviewed regularly by the Mayor. It was estimated this second phase of activity cost around \$250,000 (GHK CA Evaluation Report, 2010; Interview 3, City Official C, 2013;

Interview, City Official and Consultant, 2013). The agreement between Lilongwe City Assembly and Johannesburg City Council remained informal, partly because of the lack of political direction in Lilongwe. According to the Johannesburg team, this allowed flexibility for the process to evolve according to need and not to face excessive external expectations (Presentation, Cities Alliance meeting, Mumbai, January 2010)

Some very positive features were identified by the officials who attended the mentoring events. The Planning Department had excellent paper records, with traceable cases, about which officials were knowledgeable (Interview, city official and consultant, 2013). And the bye-laws were in good shape, needing only an updating of the fees charged to be effective and supply an income stream (Interview, city official F, 2013). Based on the evaluation reports and interviews with Johannesburg officials, a lively opening meeting was held with local citizen groups, including groups linked to the Slum and Shack Dwellers International, involved in local housing provision, and locally based international NGOs (Kitchin, 2009; GHK CA Evaluation report, 2010). A report back meeting to these constituents was presented by Lilongwe officials at the end of the process (Interview 3, city official B, 2014). Ideas for a set of priorities for a medium term strategic vision for the city were generated through some commissioned local research and through numerous follow up meetings with Lilongwe officials. Together the groups of officials generated an assessment of the needs of the city and its residents, and the potential to address these, with Johannesburg officials carefully thinking through some general insights from their policy knowledge, and drawing on their strong experience in their own city, which had some resonances with Lilongwe's more extensive urban challenges (Interview, city official H, 2013). The final document reflected a significant investment from officials in both cities. The numerous Johannesburg visitors reflect positively on the experience, the mutual learning involved, and potential to turn around the administrative malaise. A major achievement noted in the internal review by Johannesburg was that on the basis of the CDS the development process could be demand-driven, rather than 'donor-led' or 'supply-led' (City of Johannesburg, 2011).

There were also some more challenging aspects to the programme of work. A recent Japanese (JICA) donor master planning exercise had delivered an ambitious set of plans for infrastructure development in Lilongwe. However, these were inaccessible to the officials – their computers were not powerful enough, and they did not have the software package to read the data. One colourful hard copy sufficed to frame discussion (Interview, city official and consultant, 2013). In fact, computing equipment was so poor that the Johannesburg official felt it important to inform the Cities Alliance that advertising their activities via email and internet was not adequate (City of Johannesburg, 2011). At one moment, the officials from Johannesburg had to confront their Lilongwe counterparts with ongoing corrupt behavior, extended lunch breaks, and lack of attention to meeting times (Interview, city official and consultant, 2013; City of Johannesburg, 2011). A specific intervention and training on local financial management funded by the South African Development Community was poorly attended by officials enrolled, who were frequently distracted or left the meeting (Report on training session, 2010). More generally Johannesburg observers noted that training itself seemed to play a negative role in government capacity: officials were often abroad, not doing their allocated work, but receiving "training" through various multilateral and bilateral agencies, which seldom translated into improved implementation (Interview, city official and consultant, 2013).

The global life of the city strategy, initiated through an international networking programme of the UCLG and CA, continued after its completion but in a rather different form. A new incumbent in the role of CDS Manager brought in to take forward the city strategy swiftly submitted the mentoring relationship behind the city strategy for an international award. The award was duly received in Guanzhou, China, for international co-operation. It was received by the manager, who had not

been part of the process at all, and the Cities Alliance, whose early subvention of the process was rather less than the investment of money, time and commitment from Johannesburg. Johannesburg officials who had driven the process were not named in the award or invited to the award event (Interview, city official and consultant, 2013), although later publications did bring some desired publicity (Cities Alliance in Action, 2010; Thorpe, 2011).

Other outcomes were more material, including an investment of significant funds. \$2.6m was given from the Gates Foundation to implement the City Strategy, specifically related to informal settlements needs and upgrading service delivery there (Interview, city official and consultant, 2011; CA Evaluation, 2010; <https://www.gatesfoundation.org/Media-Center/Press-Releases/2010/09/Foundation-Announces-Effort-to-Tackle-Urban-Poverty-in-Five-African-Cities>). Cities Alliance funding of nearly \$250,000 was forthcoming for Phase 3 implementation of institutional elements of the strategy. A series of low cost implementation engagements with Johannesburg through 2010 saw some successes, such as planning for future projects, and opening some local clinics (City of Johannesburg, 2011). However, the formal relationship with Johannesburg ended around this time amidst some distrust and ongoing concerns about good governance and the continued absence of elected local government, which was seen as a precondition for Johannesburg's involvement (Interview 1, city official B, 2011). They had also withdrawn, for example, from the Addis Ababa collaboration during a period of political uncertainty and diminished adherence to democratic governance (Interview 3, city official B, 2014). Notes from regular contact sessions through 2010, looking to work with Johannesburg officials on the implementation strategies for different elements of the programme indicate concerns about lack of preparation between meetings, commitment to attend, and core project planning skills to take forward the programme of work set out in the city strategy, including in the office of the CDS Manager. Despite acknowledgement of these challenges, the significant new funding streams from Cities Alliance and the Gates Foundation were dedicated to the initiative – and Johannesburg was sidelined from future implementation plans. Johannesburg officials' concerns here are pertinent, as they observed the potential for the high expectations of donor agencies – and the large sums of money they wished to disburse – to be counter-productive compared to the mentors' own flexible and low-key approach, able to engage with capacities and programmes at a more realistic level (City of Johannesburg, 2011).

The experience of the Johannesburg-Lilongwe co-operation had attracted the attention of myself and Elisabeth Payroux as researchers focused on Johannesburg, and interested in global policy circulation. We were intrigued by the developmental focus of the programme, and the slow, engaged process of policy transfer – quite at odds with the “fast policy” analyses currently dominant (Peyroux, 2015; Peck and Theodore, 2015). In some ways, though, aside from the practical investment leveraged from the Gates Foundation through the report, and some early low-key implementations, this lengthy, committed, developmental process of strategic policy formulation, with a number of effective, do-able suggestions for development in a well-researched document became caught up in political change and administrative challenges – although a newly elected Mayor was still able to refer to the City Strategy as a valid programme of work in 2017 (The Nation, 28 January, 2017). However, the city strategy was most impressively specularized in a process of international recognition of the personal and institutional collaboration. It has been “banked” as organizational capital, part of the ongoing achievements of international city to city networking programmes promoted by the CA and UCLG, leading to further investment in policy making in Lilongwe despite some less favourable assessments of the actual dynamics of the process (Interview, city official and consultant, 2013; City of Johannesburg, 2011, p. 13).

The Johannesburg-Lilongwe co-operation to produce a city strategy again illuminates the strongly transnational grounds of urban agency – in this case, the capacity to act both locally and in the



global arena was founded on a strong and direct engagement from a series of international actors – Johannesburg municipality, the Cities Alliance, UCLG, the Gates Foundation, JICA, and the many other international organizations, donors and NGOs active in the city. More generally on the basis of this case, analyses of urban agency need to focus more strongly on the external and exteriorized nature of interests and capacity. This case also provides insights into the range of forms of urban agency and global engagement: specific and personal links and connections in substantial face to face engagements; fleeting but perhaps influential engagements at international conferences; formal interactions through applications and evaluations with transnational organizations; speculative presencing to bring to visibility certain representations of places, which might have little foundation in reality but which can have strong material impacts, such as enhancing reputations, strengthening institutional credibility and directing financial flows.

d. Looking again at London: Spectrality and Welfarism

If we turn back to London with Johannesburg in mind, the powerful continuities of both democracy and a strong, welfare-oriented state need to be layered into any assessment of the agency of that city (the point of key commentators on the global city interpretation of London – see Hamnett, 2008; Buck et al, 2002). While there is significant and growing pressure on local councils to fund their budgets from local business rates (as opposed to direct government grants which drew on the national receipts of these rates) and property development in the face of budget cuts, which significantly changes their priorities in spatial planning terms, the reorientation of funding sources does not necessarily destroy policy processes appropriate to a democracy founded on citizen rights, elections and consultative practices; the London Plan remains focussed on key policy outputs relevant to these welfare agendas, including ensuring the provision of education, urban services and being held responsible for health and the quality of urban life. Reviewers hired by the City of Johannesburg to scope international practice in city strategies observed of the London Plan that it was notable for, amongst other things, “The progressive feel of the document; The ability to link economic growth with an emphasis on inclusivity” (Silverman *et al.*, 2005: 26). The outcomes often fall far short of the expectations of a universal welfare state, and nowhere more so than in the purposeful devastation of affordable housing stock, diminished capacity to deliver social infrastructure and appropriate levels of open space, and the failure to take action to lower pollution levels (see for example, Lees, 2014). London’s capacity for global action has been fundamentally re-engineered and expanded, across successive labour and conservative governments, directly through establishing the institutions of the GLA, and indirectly through the wider competitive ambitions fostered through discursive achievements on the basis of platforms such as the city strategy/London Plan. The terms of that engagement are widely seen to have been configured in a “neoliberal” or competitive idiom (Massey, 2007), but it would be inaccurate to disregard the substantive residual welfare orientation of urban policy and politics.

Returning to London with experiences of city strategy making in Lilongwe in mind, I was surprised by the resonance I observed between the “spectrality” and informality of the state and policy in Lilongwe with the situation in London (see Hillier, 2000). Here, the occasion was the Evidence in Public hearings, a semi-judicial situation in which a Planning Inspector tests the soundness of the plan against available legislation, and the public and different interested parties (local governments, developers, business organisations, community groups) are permitted to make contributions to discussions of matters identified by the Inspector. In the UK, in 2012, a substantial body of planning legislation was discarded in favour of a new, slimmed down “National Planning Policy Framework”. In the process of institutional and legal reform, the London Plan had become an anomaly, as the only “regional” (supra local government) plan. At one stage in these hearings in 2014 I noted the Planning Inspector suggesting that since there was no available legislation to inform his thinking, he would take guidance from a now defunct piece of legislation. Something of the spectrality of the state, operating in a legal void, was exposed (Tuvikene *et al.*, 2016). In this set of hearings, too, the growth

in the population of London was under the spotlight, and the uncertainty of the recent census data as a basis for predicting future growth was very apparent, the question being, had fewer people moved out of London in the recession period (because of the stagnation of the property market) and would this resume in the future, returning growth levels to pre-recession levels? Population projections for 2036 ranged from 9.8m to 10.4m, for example, around this uncertainty (GLA, 2015a). This conundrum was evidenced not least in the double dealing of the planners, suggesting on the one hand that London must plan to accommodate this entire predicted population growth. Based on a mid-level of growth scenario, this would need 49,000 new homes p.a., far beyond historic levels of construction achieved although still less than the objectively identified need. This ambition would run against the failure to translate planning permission and identified sites into realized construction of homes – effectively giving London a “ghost city” of over 200,000 homes (Mayor of London, 2012, p. 20). On the other hand, the Mayor’s team was writing what became a notorious letter to the fairly remote but still commuter town of Bedford, warning their planning officers to plan for growth despite the census figures showing population decline in those areas. The uncertainty at the core of a key driver of the London Plan and its competitive global ambitions – especially given the impacts of the strong steer for densifying housing development and increasing building heights across the city which would potentially adversely affect residents’ quality of life – was palpable. The Inspector required that a full review should begin immediately, underway at the time of writing (The Planning Inspectorate, 2014).

#### **4. Conclusion: Revisiting the global political agency of the urban**

In the context of multiple globalizations, and with an analytical view committed to widening the range of urban contexts informing theorization, conventional assessments of the territorializations of “urban” agency need to be revisited. This paper has suggested that it is important to consider how global urban political agency comes to be constituted across different urban situations, and in relation to a multiplicity of transnational and trans-scalar processes (Allen and Cochrane, 2007). In thinking about the production of global political agency of the urban through the example of city strategies, it is necessary, then, to appreciate the diversity of circuits and processes through which a territorialized urban agency is configured. In the midst of a range of globalizing processes and agendas in which the urban is implicated, there is room for global urban political agency to be assembled at specific moments of imagination, presentation, articulation and institutional co-ordination.

Urban agency, then, appears as an emergent, transcalar but territorialized possibility, articulated in many different ways in relationship to a wide range, and different configurations, of globalizing processes. Different forms of global urban agency have also been evidenced in this paper. The capacity to scan and assess circulating policy for locally resonant agendas, for example, speaks to a strong agency for analysis and assessment within institutions and city officials in both London and Johannesburg. But the Lilongwe case where a capable official mobilized the achievements of their collaboration with Johannesburg for maximum global visibility while disconnecting these representations from the outcomes on the ground raises the importance of recognizing the spectrality of some aspects of “global urban agency”. This is especially relevant when urban actors are pressing for visibility and packaging achievements for circulation - publicizing Johannesburg’s City Strategy work, for example, or making political capital from London’s role in C40. More than this, the international development industry needs to look at the ways in which their own practices foster more spectral forms of urban agency, promoting and publicizing ambitious programmes, such as international networking and city to city learning, despite significant and known challenges of implementation. Thus learning, and competing, disciplining and developing, fabricating or acting on uncertain grounds, bringing to visibility precarious achievements or invisibilizing failure through managing representations, indicate a range of forms of global urban agency.

Working across three interconnected cases, based on the widely circulating practice of preparing city strategies, has brought into view the need for new interpretations of global urban agency in the midst of multiple globalizations. The paper has shown the value in bringing the three cases into conversation with each other in order to enrich understandings of urban politics in each context. Together they have drawn attention to the wide range of globalization processes shaping urban outcomes, and to the variety of forms of urban political agency at work. This demonstrates the potential in following connections to generate comparisons across a wider variety of urban contexts, thereby stretching analyses of urban politics.

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