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How to Study Comparative Urban Development Politics: A Research Note

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The problem: not much, not very comparative

Emile Durkheim's dictum that science begins with comparison underscores the value of systematically, analyzing a large number of cities across different national cultures. As Durkheim (1982) suggests, only by comparing and measuring relationships can we achieve greater certainty. There are other reasons why comparison enables scholars to clarify and better explain phenomena. First, because comparison more precisely shows how variables work differently in a variety of settings; second, because comparison affords us a better chance to understand how the discovery of anomalies within different social systems can be refined and ultimately enhance theoretical understanding; and third, because comparison provides contrast models that point up crucial distinctions within a given set of findings.[1]

Notwithstanding Durkheim's counsel, urban research has not been very comparative. What often stands for comparative analysis is comprised of separate chapters on a limited number of cities capped by an attempt to draw some unifying themes. When large numbers of cities are used, these works usually turn out to be a compendium of monographs, rather than tightly integrated, systematic comparisons (Robson and Regan, 1972; Walsh, 1972; Dogan and Karsarda, 1988; Knight and Gappert, 1989; Sharpe, 1995; Rothblatt and Sancton, 1998; Marcuse and van Kempen, 2000; 2002). Few studies move across national boundaries (Fainstein *et al.*, 1983; Browning *et al.*, 1984; Abu Lughod, 1999). Most often studies that do venture across different national terrains limit their analysis to Anglo/American comparisons (Gurr and King, 1987; Barnekov *et al.*, 1989; Wolman and Goldsmith, 1992). For instance, recent work by Di Gaetano and Klemanski (1999) undertakes systematic cross national comparisons, albeit limited to the British and American political experience. One of the few recent scholars to have gone beyond Anglo/American comparison is Jeffrey Sellers (2001) whose work casts a finely woven, if rather complex, net over eleven cities in the United States, France and Germany.

This limited record stands in contrast to some other areas of political science, such as studies of political parties, interest groups, executives and legislatures, where multi-nation research and comparative theory-building are more prominent (Kornberg, 1973;

1 The classic case for this proposition can be found in the field of power structure studies. Single city studies resulted in substantial differences in findings between 'elitist' and pluralist interpretations. Moreover, the concepts of 'elite' versus 'pluralist' cities became muddied in ambiguity and ideological debate. Not until simultaneous, systematic and multiple comparisons were made did social scientists begin to explain that differences in the characteristics of cities could turn up different results. Indeed, the very definition of 'elite' and 'pluralist' was unsatisfactory until comparative research showed how the concepts could be illustrated as a continuum with variations in degree. Thus, what began as a simple theoretical dichotomy was ultimately refined into a nuanced range of analysis (see Agger *et al.*, 1964; Clark, 1968).

Rose and Suleiman, 1980; Lijphart, 1984; 1994; Almond and Verba, 1989; Kappeler, 1992). Curiously, many scholars who undertake comparative studies of nations do not venture into cities, though there are a few notable exceptions (Tarrow, 1977; Keating, 1991). Contemporary scholars struggle to find an approach to the comparative study of cities, but often find this so challenging that little of it is done. Most recently, Di Gaetano and Strom (2003) have developed a comprehensive approach for analyzing a multiplicity of cities. Their model draws on different aspects of structural, institutional, cultural and rational choice theory and attempts to apply them to many aspects of urban politics. While bold and creative, this encompassing combination of theories may be too unwieldy to offer testable propositions for analysis.

We set out to offer some guidance to scholars seeking to explore this important subfield. As we see it, the challenge for comparative urban analysis is to achieve improved rigor, while remaining sensitive to the urban context. By rigor we mean consistent investigations that can be replicated and elucidate the urban experience in a variety of settings. Data can obviously come in a variety of forms, but however varied it should be ascertainable by other scholars. Consistency of application improves clarity, enabling researchers to highlight similarities and differences. At the same time, the study of urban politics needs to be systematic. By the term systematic we mean that (1) an explicit framework should govern the analysis, providing testable and deductible propositions for comparative examination; (2) comparisons should be made through the use of common categories, concepts or variables that can be measured; and (3) comparisons should steadily run throughout the work (Easton, 1965; Lijphart, 1971; Dogan, 1990).

Obstacles to systematic comparative research: lack of comparative urban framework

There are considerable problems associated with developing such a comparative agenda. To begin, there is no commonly accepted general theory of urban politics and policy that can provide direction and testable propositions for examining common political phenomena in cities across nations and cultures. Without some kind of theoretical construct that highlights common properties shared by cities, comparative analysis makes little sense. Legions of scholars have offered competing visions of the city without coming to much agreement on its key traits Park and Burgess, 1925; Dahl; 1967; Wirth, 1969; Jacobs; 1969; 1984; Saunders, 1983; Rae, 2004). This vacuum leaves those seeking to do comparative urban research dependent on what Robert Merton called 'theories of the middle range' to guide inquiry (Merton, 1968).

The difficulty is that many — perhaps even most — middle-range urban politics theories are not easily transferred across national cultures. For instance, theoretical debate over machine versus reform politics has dominated the study of American urban politics for decades, yet this controversy has very limited relevance to many Western European cities that lack a comparable history. Similarly, regime theories that characterize so much of American scholarship are inadequate because of differences in the composition and power of business interests in European cities. A major obstacle to comparative research is the lack of viable middle-level theories that are capable of embracing nations with very different histories and social life. This obstacle is made more problematic by theories about national politics that cannot be replicated at subnational levels. Some scholars argue that this is due to the fact that cities are not really 'mini states' whose characteristics parallel those at the national level, but entities that reflect a larger structure of intergovernmental relations. Cities are permeable, and as such they are both dependent upon and influenced by national and regional political economies. Permeability, then, deeply affects local decisions (Yates, 1977; Peterson, 1981; Kantor, 1995).

Beyond theoretical problems, at least four methodological obstacles confound comparative urban research. These consist of: (1) analyzing a sizeable number of cities

while still providing depth of analysis; (2) accounting for different contextual meanings, especially across different cultures; (3) providing conceptual tools that can accurately address the same problem in different places; and (4) accessing, retrieving, and processing useful data from multiple jurisdictions. Although these are serious sources of difficulty, they are not unique to urban politics and can be surmounted.

Scope versus depth

Comparative analysis should be applicable to a sizeable number of cities. Determining a 'sizeable number' of cities can be tricky but, as Durkheim suggests, comparisons should contain substantial variation allowing the researcher an 'adequate range' of subjects for comparison.[2] With this in hand we can begin to test hypotheses, gradually distinguishing what is incidental from what is inexorable (Meckstroth, 1975).

While multiple comparisons furnish avenues for explanatory theory, the temptation instead is to focus on isolated circumstances. This makes it difficult to know whether propositions generated from case studies can be generalized or not. Taken alone case studies may provide depth, but they lack sufficient scope for application to other cities. We suggest that comparative urban scholarship requires this kind of depth to make sure propositions accurately fit the context, but any analysis should go beyond the idiosyncrasies of a particular situation and tell us something about the larger scope of urban patterns. Thus, we often face a tradeoff between depth and scope.

Related to this is the matter of knowing when to cross the bridge from aggregate analysis to case studies and visa versa.[3] Looking at multiple cities by relying on surveys and aggregate data sources affords a big picture view of urban phenomena and a means of systematically testing propositions across a wide range of possible variation. Yet the costs of this approach are all too familiar: mistaking spurious explanations for reality, lack of sensitivity to the complexity of the phenomenon studied, oversimplification of the social forces, static analysis and lack of historical perspective (Sekhon, 2004). Just as case studies may generate idiosyncratic information, reliance on aggregate approaches may provide an inaccurate or misleading picture, simply because this kind of research is devoid of contextual understanding. In studying cities comparatively, it seems clear that both methodologies afford advantages and disadvantages, but the crucial issue is to know when to rely more on one than the other or to draw upon both of them. This is a problem that is found in all comparative research (Przeworski and Teune, 1970; Eckstein, 1975; Dion, 1998).

Contextual meanings

Turning to our second obstacle, differences in contextual meaning are crucial. These distinctions are products of historical accident, cultural variation, institutional differences, and demographic or geographic patterns. Idiosyncrasies of this sort make it difficult to extend formulations from one political context to another. A genuinely comparative framework should be able to address issues that have similar meaning in a broad variety of political contexts and draw useful generalizations about the nature of the problem.

Problems of context are especially acute when reaching across a multiplicity of cultures (Lijphart, 1975; Dogan and Pelassy, 1984). As used here urban contexts embrace the historical, cultural, geographic and demographic content of cities. Even differences of language influence the saliency of problems, their perception and their

2 Determining a sizeable number of cities for comparison depends upon the subject to be studied, hypotheses to be tested and other factors. Having taken various factors into account in our own study, we determined that 8 to 12 cities would satisfy Durkheim's criterion.

3 We thank Professor Arnold Fleischmann at the University of Georgia (Athens) for pointing out this issue and for his general comments on the manuscript.

analysis. Moreover, questions of context (defined as a set of factual circumstances in which something comes into being or exists) often meld with questions that are structural (defined as a continuous pattern of interaction or enduring arrangement).[4] The issue is well illustrated by how chambers of commerce are treated in Western Europe and the United States. In Europe chambers of commerce began during the Middle Ages and matured through a guild society. As a result they gradually became incorporated into the operations of local city halls, and today their roles are ensconced in statutes. Thus, stemming from a particular context, European cities have developed a structural relationship with local chambers of commerce that make it easier for mayors to pre-empt them. By contrast, American chambers of commerce arose during an age of unbridled capitalism and chambers of commerce took root as interest groups, formally separated from government. As a result they have developed a structural relationship with city hall as lobbying groups that often achieve private objectives. In both instances, differences in historical context yielded very different structural relationships. While differences of use can be managed by carefully specifying and applying context and structure, the difficulties of treating different factual circumstances and relational patterns across different cultures persist. The scope of contextual or structural problems can be illustrated in a number of ways.

To begin, social group identities and relations vary from culture to culture. For instance, racial and ethnic relations are likely to have very different meanings in North American and European contexts. In cities like Detroit, African Americans constitute a population majority surrounded by predominantly white suburbanites. Most European cities lack such demographic patterns. Thus, when we speak about spatial segregation in America, we are talking about a crisis in which whole cities are separated from the larger body politic and jurisdictional control entails far-reaching political consequences. In Europe spatial segregation is often a matter of differentiation by block or neighborhood, whose import is more social than political. In addition, the specifically American history of black-white relations has been influenced by slavery and civil war — factors that also are absent from European cities (Savitch, 1988; Sugrue, 1996; Smith and Feagan, 1995). Race and ethnicity are then indigenous issues tied up with America as a nation of immigrants with cities serving as vehicles for acculturation and socialization (Moynihan and Glazer, 1963; Merton, 1968). By contrast, racial-ethnic issues in Europe are invariably tied to a history of colonialism or policies related to immigration. Race and ethnicity are therefore linked with those who are 'foreign born', 'guest workers' or 'alien residents' and who may or may not become citizens. In effect, the categories of racial politics differ in substance and meaning in ways that make the socio-historical context crucial in comparative analysis.

Next, contextual difference also pertains to judgments about the saliency and definition of social issues. Some may believe a problem is trivial, too broad or too narrow; others may claim the phraseology is biased; and still others may argue that another problem should be explored. Whether challenges are right or wrong they must be addressed. The difficulty lies in the subjectivity of defining a problem and that any single definition of that problem may not pertain to all cities. For example, income inequality is considered a problem in virtually all Western European and North American cities. Not only is the degree of income inequality much larger in American cities, but the causes of inequality are usually attributed to different sources. Indeed, social surveys show that American urban poverty is commonly perceived to be an essentially private sector problem, and Americans are apt to use phrases like 'discrimination' or 'prejudice' to convey its social roots. By contrast, Europeans are more inclined to define similar populations as products of 'social exclusion' and to find fault with public policies (Wilson, 1997: Chapter 6).

4 Problems of structure are also compounded by how different disciplines treat this concept. Political scientists associate structure with formal or informal patterns of political authority; sociologists see it as recurring social relationships, while geographers and planners are apt to view structure in terms of spatial relationships or as groups occupying different spaces.

Finally, there are qualitative differences in political systems that may confound meaningful comparison. The familiar case is that of formal institutional differences where executives (mayors) and legislative (councils) play very different roles from one society to another. Here the theoretical contribution has been to search for 'functional equivalents' so that roles can be adequately compared (Easton, 1965; Olson and Mezey, 1991). Finding 'functional equivalents' is more easily said than done because the overlap can be nebulous, some functions may or may not exist within a given society, and the importance of a function from one society to the next can greatly vary.

There are other problems connected to qualitative or institutional dissimilarities. Within different nation-states, cities vary enormously in their legal authority, their political scope and their social disposition. The very idea of 'a city' is different in the United States than in Europe; differences exist even within European nations. American cities have very broad latitude in adopting tax, housing, education, police, land use and a host of other policies. By contrast, French cities hold only a small portion of these powers, so that key powers related to police, education and even land use are virtually controlled by the state. The United Kingdom goes even further in constricting cities, regarding them as mere agents of central government that can easily be overridden, reorganized or ignored. How a city is defined has a profound effect on public policies. Local authorities in Britain, France and Italy are unable on their own authority to provide many of the business incentive subsidies that are sometimes used by American city governments in order to promote job growth. These subsidies are often prohibited by national governments and have been restricted by the European Union.

Moreover, the presence or absence of urban policies is far from universal — even in nations with similar political economies. Various types of urban enterprise zones can be found in Great Britain, the United States and France, but these policies are not duplicated in Italy or Canada. Besides, seemingly similar policies may have an altogether different content. Some are simply tax free havens, while others engage citizens in an array of self-help programs. To add to problems of comparability, many local governments in Europe are integrally bound with national or regional authorities. In the United States relationships with regional authorities are infrequent or tenuous and ties with the national government are erratic. Moreover, the existence of multiple actors like various American states, the European Union, the German Lander or French Regional Councils make it difficult to distinguish exactly who is doing what or if a policy is more a creature of supra governments rather than a local choice.

The problem of context and structure is a major hurdle, if only because cities are complicated social places and because subnational governments exist within an intergovernmental context that is not of the city's making. As Peterson (1981) underscores, local political economies are much more permeable and subject to extraneous influence than national economies, and because of this they are likely to be more un-patterned. Large numbers of differently configured entities present real challenges for researchers (Przeworski and Teune, 1970; Dion, 1998).

Conceptual parochialism

Related to the idea of context is our third obstacle, namely formulating conceptual tools that have comparative accuracy. Since concepts enable us to filter out, magnify or exclude information, we need to be cautious about their use and about ethnocentric selection or interpretation. This is a common pitfall of comparative research, encountered especially by scholars who study developing nations through Western eyes (Almond, 1960; Deutsch *et al.*, 1981; Arif, 2001). Thus, what may be called 'decentralization' in the United States is very different from 'decentralization' in France. In the American case, decentralization entails a shedding of authority that entails the withdrawal of national or state funds. In France 'decentralization' entails greater discretion without a serious withdrawal of fiscal support and is often accompanied by

enhanced cooperation between cities, regions and the national authorities. This means that no concept can be comprehensive, much less perfect, and each has its relative merits and liabilities. To more accurately define this occurrence scholars employ terms like re-scaling or re-territorialization, enabling them to capture and define allocations of authority. The final test for any concept is not only to determine if it is far reaching, but also whether it is a useful and accurate tool for identifying differences.

As part of this same issue, comparative urban scholars face the problem of building concepts that can address the same kinds of problem in different places, while making allowances for variations. This means that concept building must pertain to a common social phenomenon that affects the lives of stakeholders and citizens in cities, but also allows for differences in the way these actors perceive it.

The idea of transferring the American idea of 'regime' to European soil illustrates the problem. Scholars have attempted to utilize the concept of 'regime' well beyond its American confines (Vicari and Molotch, 1990; Harding, 1994; Kantor *et al.*, 1997; Di Gaetano and Klemanski, 1999; Mossberger and Stoker, 2000; Zhang, 2002). A major problem with the notion of regime is that it assumes a large role for private sector interests and business in urban decision-making. As conceived by American urbanists, the very definition of a 'regime' encompasses a partnership between public and private actors in order to engage in 'social production' (Stone and Sanders, 1987; Stone, 1989). Yet in most European cities the huge presence of the public sector as well as a lack of a tradition of business involvement in local government discourages private sector participation in governing coalitions. 'Social production' is largely, if not exclusively, carried out by the public sector. This reality seriously limits the application of the regime concept to cities outside of the United States. Further, when the concept of regime is stripped to its essentials so that it can be applied elsewhere, the idea turns into a stretched and amorphous term that entails its own operational difficulties. Indeed, outside of its original context, some scholars question whether 'regimes' are simply ways to restate the old fashioned notion of coalitions (Horan, 1991; Mossberger and Stoker, 2000; Savitch and Kantor, 2002).

Despite the obstacles, conceptual provincialism is not insurmountable. As some of Putnam's work (1993) on social capital shows, it is possible to build fairly precise social and political concepts that engage scholarly debate in a wide variety of nation states, governmental contexts and social organizations. Indeed, a number of European scholars from various disciplines have organized comparative analysis around a series of different seminal concepts. In political science Patrick Le Galès (2002) uses the evolution of relationships between the city and the nation state to understand urban political dynamics on the Continent. In geography and planning Chris Jensen-Butler, Arie Shachar and Jan Van Weesop (1997) employ the focal concept of competition to organize contributors around the idea of corporate mobility or 'spatial switching' (Swyngedouw, 1992). In sociology Andre Donzel *et al.* (2002) have written an excellent monograph comparing social cohesion across different types of territory. And a splendid collection of interdisciplinary articles has recently been produced by Martin Boddy and Michael Parkinson (2004) which focuses on the comparative effectiveness of urban policy remediation.

Yet the difficulties of tying concept formation to systematic, unified comparisons do persist. For that reason urban scholarship will need to rely more on the use of analytical frameworks that can examine middle-range propositions. This more modest and incremental approach to social investigation is the stuff of most social science research.

Data, dilemmas and comparison

Last, we face data dilemmas. They are not unique to the urban field, but they are particularly pervasive. In order to make meaningful comparisons, a framework must employ concepts that are sensitive to qualitative as well as quantitative variables. In

principle, qualitative and quantitative methods are complementary. Each may be used to verify findings and validate measurements. Qualitative measures can be described and justified explicitly in order to make clear what standards and norms are employed. Further, it may be possible to use both quantitative as well as qualitative indicators in order to identify multiple dimensions of the same variable. Consistencies and inconsistencies can be explained and, if necessary, reconciled in order to provide careful and convincing measurements and rankings.

Data gathering is not just hamstrung by a mass of numbers, but also by the fact that it can convey different messages. In America high unemployment or welfare rates are an indication that those affected are in dire straits. This is because remuneration is quite low and filing a claim often means not being able to find a reasonable job. Long unemployment rolls in Newark or Detroit are often signs of penury. In some European nations, however, unemployment and welfare remuneration can be quite high — sometimes amounting to 80% or more of earlier salaries. Higher unemployment figures in Amsterdam or Stockholm can mean that people are still well off and biding their time to find jobs of their choice.

The availability of data will also vary from society to society. In the United States ethnicity and race are paramount considerations and census takers offer mounds of data on these categories. In France, national laws do not recognize differences in ethnic or racial origin, and data are sparse or non-existent. So long as one is a French citizen the Republic prohibits the use of ascriptive data and this makes it difficult to pinpoint intersections between class, race or religion. Similar problems of non-existent or hard to obtain data are also present in Italy, Spain and Greece.

At the other extreme, inconsistent or voluminous data can also be a problem. Several agencies may collect the same information, yet use different methodologies for gathering data and come up with different results. The researcher then may be confronted with more than enough information that is also contradictory. Also, in some countries the number of cities has multiplied through new incorporations, while in others the number may be reduced through consolidation. Because of this, boundaries have changed and this makes it difficult to keep data consistent over a period of time. France has amongst the highest ratios of cities (communes) to citizens in Europe; the United Kingdom redefined city boundaries numerous times; Canadian provinces like Ontario and Quebec have consolidated major cities As the number of cities change, so too does the volume of evidence to be gathered through interviews, documentary analysis, and archival searches. This mass of data must be ingested and made more parsimonious in order to allow for meaningful comparison. Data need to be reduced to key variables, compressed so it can be used and refined so it can accurately portray the variables to be measured. These complications can be compounded by issues related to resources, time and designing a methodology that can properly manage the information.

A political economy approach: how cities bargain

Our experience in conducting a cross-national analysis of ten cities for *Cities in the International Marketplace* (Savitch and Kantor, 2002) begins to provide some direction for overcoming these obstacles. Although our approach is imperfect, it offers a possible theoretical framework for explaining urban development politics within North America and Western Europe. Further, the framework provides a means of managing all four methodological problems that constrain comparative urban research. Focusing on how cities bargain in the capital investment process, this approach is: (1) applicable to a relatively large number of cities within the Western industrial context while affording depth; (2) responsive to different contextual meanings in its key variables; (3) avoids parochial conceptualization and interpretation; and (4) draws upon and reconciles substantial qualitative and quantitative data.

The anchor in this study is what we call bargaining theory. A look backward may be helpful in seeing its comparative relevance. Students of American urban politics frequently described local economic development as privately led and characterized by widespread business influence. What has come to be called 'growth machines' or 'pro-growth' coalitions dominate American urban development. Despite the finding of some scholars that cities are entirely motivated by a search for development, many of these features seemed to be substantially more limited in European cities (Gabriel and Hoffman-Martinot, 1999; Baraize and Negrier; 2001; John, 2001; Jouve and Lefevre, 2002; Jouve and Booth, 2004). Following along the path of public choice theory, Paul Peterson (1981) taught that cities lacked the ability to control the movement of capital and labor across their boundaries. This incapacity forced them to become 'efficiency maximizing organizations' that compete with each other over jobs and investment. Though Peterson's critics pointed out that he exaggerated these limitations and ignored other factors, the question remained of how one might explain the deeper differences between American and European cities. It seemed to us there was no reasonable explanation for how different variables or pressures might operate in different kinds of political and economic systems.

Public choice theory and Peterson's own work suggest there is a specifically urban development process based on the political economy of capital investment. Cities compete for wealth in the marketplace, but they also compete for public support to influence this process. The question was why do cities respond to this struggle differently? Why do many European governments often seem to reject the so-called 'American model' of development?[5] Any number of hypotheses can be adduced to explain this, ranging from legal restrictions on what cities can offer business to stronger roles played by higher levels of government to differences in political culture.

The possible field of alternative explanations led us into a conceptual exploration and we settled on bargaining as a central aspect of the urban development. We defined bargaining as the ability of a city to garner resources in order to maximize its choices and realize its objectives in the capital investment process. In a world dominated by capitalism, we reasoned that all cities must depend on investment markets and they must seek political support for their programs. But specific cities should vary in their abilities to influence the process of capital investment by drawing upon different kinds of bargaining advantages. Some cities clearly are able to attract jobs and tax revenues much easier than others. Similarly, case studies showed that some cities are able to obtain political support, including fiscal subventions from higher level governments, to boost their economies. We hypothesized that cities could derive bargaining advantages from a variety of sources, such as the attractiveness of their locations to business, their ability to obtain aid from higher level governments and the qualities of their own population or cultural base. Further, we reasoned that the greater the bargaining advantages owned by particular cities, the greater the scope for choice in the game of urban development. Finally, political agency would surely enter into this equation — how city officials are able to make use of particular bargaining resources would also make a difference in outcomes. Much as in a game of playing cards, where the skills of the participants make a big difference about who wins or loses, so too are the players in urban development given limited resources they must maneuver to maximize their

5 In reality there is no one 'American model' used by cities in the United States. On this count American cities do show variation with localities like San Francisco embracing greater public intervention while cities like Houston hold public intervention to a minimum. However, as a general rule American cities decidedly lean toward the marketplace for capital investment and are far more prone to compete with each other for that investment. There are many reasons for this, including the need to raise revenue because of low levels of assistance from national or state governments, greater political autonomy which enhances local discretion over development, and a political culture that is more sympathetic to business and the marketplace.

advantage. All this pointed to a theory from which specific propositions could be derived to explain the development strategies of cities.

It is from this central proposition that it became possible to construct a framework to examine the phenomenon of bargaining over urban development on a cross-national basis. To focus our analysis we conceptualized the city as a political entity that pursues, absorbs, manages and directs development. Perforce, the city possesses discretion over alternative strategies for attracting and applying development. Within its distinct territorial boundaries and by legal authority the city is the bargaining unit for capital investment. As one collective actor among others it may be engaged with national or regional authorities in orchestrating development, but it alone possesses a systemic interest in promoting the wellbeing of its citizenry. As discussed below our methodology followed from this conception by devising ways through which different kinds of urban development could be evaluated.

The initial step was to simplify the kinds of dependent variables to be explained in a way that could encompass cities in a Western, liberal, industrial context. Drawing upon Weber, we initially constructed ideal types of development outcomes. As Weber explains, an 'ideal type' is a construct taken from a particular perspective that abstracts a set of specific features (Gerth and Mills, 1946). The extrapolated features are not typical, but rather 'essential' to the meaning of the phenomenon. As such an 'ideal type' will synthesize a plurality of data and accentuate vital information by incorporating it into an emphatic composite. An ideal type then is close to being a pure 'model' intended to focus on a subject. (Rossi and Freeman, 1989). The designation of pure models also allows us to identify hybrid or mixed forms of the occurrence.

Using these typologies, we were able to specify our major dependent variables, 'social' versus 'market' oriented development. Each represents polar opposite kinds of urban strategies. We hypothesized that outcomes will vary in these cities in accordance with the preponderance of bargaining advantages. That is, those cities with a strong bargaining position will pursue something closer to 'pure' social centered development, since they are less dependent on market pressures alone. The obverse also holds. Cities with a weak bargaining position will pursue something closer to 'pure' market centered development. There are also less definitive cases. Those cities shown to have hybrid development will commensurately display a mixed pattern of characteristics.

Social and market centered development take different views about the use of 'collective goods' and the value of 'free markets'. Accordingly, each orientation is associated with distinct policy choices. Social centered cities put a priority on collective enhancement. Proponents of social centered policies seek to distribute benefits directly and widely. Tangible evidence of these policies can be seen in green belts, low and moderate income housing and historic preservation districts, as well as by material exactions from the private sector.[6]

In addition social centered strategies make demands upon private investors, often requiring them to furnish amenities or build for non-market purposes. These include tying development to public purposes (through linkage policies), higher taxes on business, and sharply curtailed funding for private projects. It may be that social centered strategists seek votes and are motivated more by popular pressures to distribute benefits or demonstrate the collective uses to which capital can be put.

By contrast, market centered cities act much like Peterson's (1981) 'efficiency maximizing organization', and weigh their gains by the criterion of economic growth. This strategy places the highest priority on attracting jobs, increasing population, adding

6 Particular policies for social centered development include high taxation on business and commerce, restrictive zoning, few or no subsidies, integrated, planned land use, public sector-led development, rail, metro and other forms of mass transit, job development/retraining for the unemployed, land use exactions, linkage to public amenities, public funding for land preservation, strict architectural controls, neighborhood emphasis and publicly subsidized housing.

buildings and revenue. Market-centered strategies target benefits to business or stress benefits that will accrue to individuals through market behavior.[7]

In addition, market strategists rely on supply side methods to create capital. Their objectives are to stimulate the marketplace by removing restrictions on capital flow or infusing that flow with public/private funding. Ideally, this should entail limited public intervention, such as deregulating land use or lowering taxes. In reality, these objectives actually require government intercession. Methods for doing this include tax abatements, direct subsidies (grants, loans), or 'packaging' deals for land acquisition and clearance (through development corporations). Growth through a market centered strategy depends on the willingness of elites to furnish capital, and accordingly benefits are targeted toward those who assume risk.

These concepts of social and market-oriented development permit us to describe and measure variations in urban policy among cities with reference to dichotomous ideal types. Even though particular cities may employ different methods in unlike circumstances, both conceptual provincialism and institutional variation can be minimized. Having begun with a dichotomous typology, it then became possible to convert it into a dependent variable that could be assessed through policy outputs that occurred within different political economies. As data became available, the typologies were later refined on ordinal continuums.

Key variables

Our bargaining focus makes it possible to deduce and select key explanatory variables. Selecting variables can be tricky and requires a good deal of patience. No doubt, it is important to understand the major factors that might logically increase or decrease a city's influence over the competition for capital. To do this we turned to available case studies, literatures, field visits and conducted preliminary unstructured interviews. Here we can rely on the technique of 'scanning' a large number of possibilities in order to locate the most salient variables (Lijphart, 1971). Proper scanning would require an extensive survey of more than two dozen cities in North America and Western Europe. Our immediate objective was to narrow the field of inquiry to major cities in advanced, industrial liberal democracies since these cities share common political and economic environments.

The bargaining perspective enabled us to identify specific variables that appeared to increase or decrease the capacity of cities to influence development even though the urban contexts varied. These variables could be subsumed under the broad rubrics of *steering* and *driving* variables in an analytical framework to explain the influence of cities in the capital investment process. Figure 1 presents a graphic illustration of our approach and includes those cities selected for study.

Bargaining, key variables and outcomes

Steering variables include *popular control* and *local culture*, while driving variables are composed of *market conditions* and *intergovernmental support*. By steering variables we mean forces that focus on options and preferences. Popular

7 Particular policies for market centered development include low taxation on business and commerce, free land use, extensive subsidies, discreet, market-driven land use, private sector-led development, freeways for private automobiles, open indiscriminate job development, free, 'no strings attached' development, private rights for land development, loose architectural controls, downtown emphasis and privately financed housing.

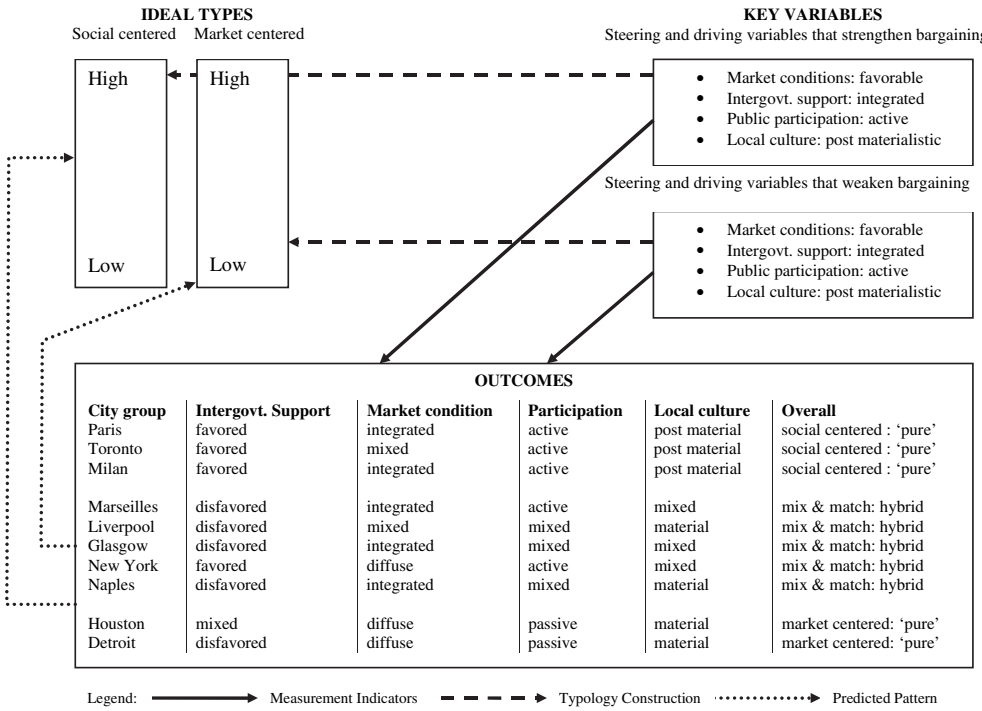

Figure 1 Ideal types, key variables and outcomes

participation will give expression to *how, where and whether things are built*. Similarly, local culture will reveal dominant priorities about *what is likely to be built*. By driving variables we mean forces that operate to provide the initiative, resources and energy for development. Without market conditions that make available investment, employment and an economic base, urban development is simply not likely to occur. As a driving force, intergovernmental support provides the finance and infrastructure that are also essential for development. It is not too much to say that the driving forces of market conditions and intergovernmental mechanisms determine whether things *can be built*.

Most important, the concepts of steering and driving variables enable the researcher to capture two different, though overlapping resources and to specify them in all cities — no matter what their particular political, economic or cultural context.[8]

Once the key variables are clearly designated, the most difficult problem is to operationalize them to measure the same thing in different cities and nations. As noted previously, this is fraught with major obstacles. To take one example, how is it possible to measure and rank a city in respect to its support by higher level governments? Quantitative measures can be employed, such as fiscal support given to localities, but this is only one piece of the picture. Fiscal flows from top to bottom may not contribute

8 In many ways driving variables like market conditions and intergovernmental support are closer to factors of 'structure' because they are comparatively long term, quite difficult to change and relatively impersonal. By contrast steering variables like popular control and local culture are closer to 'agency' factors because they are generally shorter in duration, easier to change and highly personal. The resemblance between driving forces and 'structure' vis-à-vis steering forces and 'agency' allow a richer analysis, especially when considering how development policy can best be formulated.

much to the bargaining leverage of local governments if other aspects of the intergovernmental system work to undermine city autonomy. Numbers have meaning only if we understand their context. Further, qualitative aspects of intergovernmental support can be decisive How does one compare and evaluate 'support' when it may take on the character of different, complex formulations?

Our technique for resolving these problems is to employ an ordinal concept to assess intergovernmental systems that could be measured by examining multiple quantitative and qualitative indicators. We reasoned that 'support' means greater intergovernmental fiscal and planning 'integration' (well coordinated, clearly stated and consistent support). Urban systems that are characterized by 'diffuse' relationships (distant, imprecise, erratic, low level support) owned fewer advantages in the bargaining process. Integrated or diffuse support can be measured by assessing a host of critical characteristics, scoring and weighting them. The ordinal measures were then converted to quantitative ones to permit comparison. This permits the investigator to work across a number of dimensions, thereby capturing both the substance and nuance of different national systems.[9]

Political agency, case studies and depth

Thus far, our framework presents a model of the political economy of urban development politics that highlights key variables that can be assessed comparatively: (1) a conceptual distinction between social centered and market centered policy, which also enables us to specify their respective characteristics; (2) an assessment of steering and driving variables, enabling us to rank different cities through a combination of quantitative and qualitative indicators. This approach provided the necessary tools in selecting for examination ten cities — all of which were located in liberal Western democracies. Following Durkheim, variation was important, and we selected a number of cities whose characteristics would allow us to test the construction of 'market' versus 'social' centered development. Clearly, it was not possible to find a fully representative sample of cities in advanced, liberal societies but we could select a broad enough range of localities to illustrate the range of variation of our key variables that also encompass salient urban characteristics.[10] Rather than representative, our cities were nonetheless good examples of how urban development evolves over a period of time.

9 As shown in the table below, various dimensions on a single variable such as intergovernmental support can be assessed and measured in a sizeable number of cities, while also capturing the broad range and gradation of that support.

	Unified Territorial Administration	Center – Periphery Networks	Regional or Metro Government	Inter-governmental Aid (adjusted)[a]	Inter-governmental Support Score[b]	Outcome
New York	Low	Low	Moderate	Low	1.25	Diffuse
Detroit	Low	Low	Low	Low	1.00	Diffuse
Houston	Low	Low	Low	Low	1.00	Diffuse
Toronto	Moderate	moderate	High	Moderate	2.25	Mixed
Glasgow	Moderate	Moderate	High	High	2.50	Integrated
Liverpool	High	Moderate	Low	High	2.25	Mixed
Paris	High	High	High	Moderate	2.75	Integrated
Marseilles	High	High	Moderate	Moderate	2.50	Integrated
Milan	High	High	High	High	3.00	Integrated
Naples	High	High	High	High	3.00	Integrated

[a] >50% = high; 50–33% = moderate;<33% = low.
[b] 1.00–1.66 = diffuse; 1.67–2.33 = mixed; 2.34–3.00 = integrated.

With such a limited number of cities how is it possible to know if the model really works and can it explain outcomes? In particular, the interplay of the steering and driving forces is likely to vary over time. For example, national urban policies often change, leaving cities with greater or lesser intergovernmental support in development policy during specific years. Perhaps most important, this model signals *potential resources* available to cities. It must also take into account the possibility that some cities have greater political capability for actually using their particular bargaining resources to get what they want. As noted earlier, political agency also counts. This crucial link in the model of development might be explained by understanding the role of politicians, leaders, bureaucracies and governing coalitions.

This is the point at which we cross the bridge to make use of case studies. By surveying the policies and political process in a limited number of cities over a period of three decades, we are able to simultaneously address both obstacles. First, the examination of actual case materials of decision-making over a lengthy period allows us to examine the interplay and dynamics of key variables. Qualitative information provides the depth of analysis that permits the researcher to understand how variables interact and compare policy outcomes in each of our cities. This provided many payoffs. We found that wealth alone could not account for social centered policies. Even though it seemed logical to assume that only cities with strong market positions (i.e. attractive to investors) could make demands on business, we found that some cities could overcome this resource deficiency by relying on political resources, such as intergovernmental support. Thus, case study analysis can be used to probe, qualify or confirm aggregate findings.

Second, the use of case studies also enables us to achieve depth by surveying the role of political agency in the development process. In each city we observed the mobilization and constitution of governing coalitions over a lengthy period. By identifying the dominant interests, political agendas and governing dynamics it is possible to note how bargaining skill and political biases figured into the development game. This not only shows how political decision-making and particularistic interests become a crucial link in bargaining with capital, it also highlights the possibilities and limits of political agency. For instance, the qualitative survey demonstrates that leaders and governing coalitions were neither randomly constructed nor just matters of local choice. Some kinds of coalitions were more likely to be found in only particular types of bargaining contexts. The importance of bargaining as a central concept was confirmed, even when it affected popular participation and accountability to ordinary citizens.

The analysis also highlights how bargaining resources tend to be cumulative, permitting well endowed cities to draw upon their steering and driving variables to achieve more ambitious social objectives than resource poor cities. All the same, policy outcomes are hardly deterministic. Political agency is crucial in making effective use of bargaining resources. Some cities with considerable bargaining advantages lacked the ability or will to employ those resources effectively, while less endowed communities played a smarter game. In the end, looking at cities comparatively and systematically over a lengthy period confirms the importance of political choice.

In sum, our methodology employed triangulation to minimize the problem of a limited (though large by past standards) number of case cities in testing our theory. The bargaining model was tested by utilizing quantitative, ordinal and historical-qualitative case study data to explain how the ten cities pursued alternative strategies for economic

10 For example different territorial scales could be illustrated by metropolitan cities like New York and Toronto while conventionally bounded cities were represented by Marseille and Glasgow. Relying upon our key variables led us to examine cities that differed in such basic things as wealth, socio-economic characteristics of population, intergovernmental relations and political institutions and partisanship. In addition, variations in governing regimes and national political context were also considered in our selection. For example, the inclusion of cities in non-English-speaking countries was important.

development. The analysis of aggregate patterns of bargaining in the international marketplace by the ten cities could be checked against detailed case study comparisons for theoretical consistency. The case studies allowed us to closely study the actual interplay and dynamics of bargaining forces that acted upon city governments, while the aggregate analysis portrayed their impact on the larger picture. Policies were also gauged along a 30 year time line to limit the influence of atypical policies. Just as Putnam (1993) found, these triangulation techniques permit greater confidence in making theoretical sense of findings about complex political and economic forces even when the number of cases is small.

Conclusions: advantages and application

While our approach does not clear all the obstacles to comparative urban research, it does help mitigate them and enlarges the possibilities for systematic analysis. The notion of bargaining penetrates at least one important area of urban policy and provides an explanation of urban differences across some specified Western cultures. Specifically, this approach: (1) provides systematic analysis of multiple cities in a manner that also affords depth, incorporating aggregate and case study techniques; (2) takes into account differences in contextual and structural meanings of key variables and concepts; (3) utilizes concepts that are reliable in measuring the same phenomena in different places; and (4) combines the use of qualitative and quantitative data on a relatively large scale.

There are some specific lessons from this discussion that can be applied more broadly. One lesson is that the study of comparative urban development does not need to await consensus on a single and compelling theoretical definition of the field in order to support systematic multi-city research. Our experience with the concept of bargaining shows how it is possible to build a framework to probe at least one important policy area, the politics of urban development. Although the concept of bargaining cannot address all important questions about urban development, it is capable of generating explanations that are relevant to cities in North America and Western Europe. It also addresses the reality of economic competition among cities in Western industrial societies and provides a means for explaining the scope for local political choice.[11]

By focusing on the notion of bargaining advantages and disadvantages, this concept could be applied in multiple political venues in order to elucidate the dynamics of a common process and explain different outcomes. Bargaining also shows that middle-level theory building can be expanded to include cross-national urban analysis. We believe there are opportunities for urban research to be reformulated in ways that make it possible to include a large variety of cities and that it might be expanded to non-Western cities.

Another set of lessons pertain to our methodological experience. It suggests that, in principle, the study of cities presents no different methodological problems from studying other political units, such as nations. First, careful identification of key variables permitted the retrieval of comparable data from a number of cities. The framework then facilitated multiple comparisons of cities by selecting and filtering data though a distinct set of ideal types and key variables. Perhaps most important, the use of aggregate and case study data revealed that both can be used in a complementary fashion to provide scope and depth (Sambanis, 2004; Sekhon, 2004). The use of case studies permitted examination of possible pathways specified in the bargaining model,

11 We do not suggest that cities in North America and Western Europe are a monolith. However, they do bear some important characteristics in common. These cities are lodged in advanced, industrial societies, they operate under market conditions and they are governed as liberal democracies. Shared characteristics and interests were sufficient to unite the G-7, consisting of the USA, Canada, UK, France, Germany, Italy and Japan.

helped refine our empirical measures, enabled the identification of key variables and permitted us to explore the relative influence of agency and structure.

Second, the contextual difficulties of accounting for institutional differences and searching for 'functional equivalents' in multiple American and European cities are manageable. The specification of key variables allowed us to be less concerned with institutional differences or varying definitions of a city, but rather with maintaining focus on important factors (markets, participation, governance, culture) that are common to all the selected cities. Aggregating these factors into key variables, such as *steering* and *driving* forces, facilitated this endeavor. Further, by carefully focusing on genuinely comparable 'outputs' — market versus social centered strategies — rather than institutional differences, we avoided getting bogged down in searching for and reconciling 'functional equivalents.'

Finally, operationalizing major concepts related to bargaining resources so they measure the same thing in different places was facilitated by the use of quantitative and qualitative indicators. All of the key variables were operationalized in ways that allowed for their measurement by at least three or more different kinds of data, thus providing a multidimensional picture of urban development.

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