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# Insight

The Research Magazine.
Department of Urban Studies
and Planning.

Issue 6: 2020

# Welcome...

...to the latest instalment of the USP research newsletter where we spotlight some of the exciting new research emerging from the department. This edition includes items on new projects, initiatives and findings, early reflections on ongoing studies, profiles of some of our outstanding PhD students, and lists the new publications of staff over the year. We hope it will encourage you to delve deeper.

*Insight* provides a flavour of the diversity of our research as a disctinctly interdisciplinary and globally-orientated department, but one that retains a strong commitment to the local. From austerity governance in Baltimore to private rental marginality in England, and from indigeneity and urbanization in Bolivia to wealthy elites in Manchester and their colonisation of London, our research covers an expansive range. Through their research colleagues continue to push conceptual and methodological boundaries in making sense of the contemporary urban condition and how best to respond to it. The same applies to our vibrant postgraduate research community. Here we have Martha Mingay reflecting on her participatory action research approach to studying Community Land Trusts and urban activism, alongside Said Zaaneen who discusses his work on refugees and humanitarian interventions in the Gaza Strip.

**Ryan Powell**
Director of Research

The last 12 months have yielded a number of research successes as well as outstanding individual achievements. New research grants spanning departmental interests have been won from, amongst others, the British Academy, the Economic and Social Research Council, the EU Horizon2020 programme, the European Research Council, the Global Challenges Research Fund, the Leverhulme Trust, the Natural Environment Research Council, and the Welsh Assembly.

Our community of researchers continues to grow and in the last year we have welcomed five new externally funded post-doctoral colleagues: Sally Cawood (Global Challenges Research Fund), Eric Hoddy (Economic and Social Research Council), Alex Baker, Jay Emery and Thomas Verbeek (all Leverhulme Trust). Their work explores, respectively, urgent questions related to urban sanitation, violence and transformative justice, eviction, deindustrialisation and class, and air pollution and social justice across a range of global contexts. We are extremely proud of our commitment to the next generation of urban scholars and are delighted to welcome such an exciting crop of young colleagues that extend and further diversify our collective, interdisciplinary research agenda.

All colleagues in USP are research active, which means that our teaching, whether in the classroom or online, is inevitably shaped and informed by the very latest findings and developments within our respective fields. But our teaching also increasingly informs our research. The cutting-edge use and development of new AR and VR technologies has involved strong collaboration with our postgraduate urban design students, for instance. We are excited about these developments and the new opportunities they afford to students and staff across teaching and research.

Reflecting back on the research highlights and achievements of the year seems a little strange amid the global uncertainty of Covid-19. The extent of the consequences of the pandemic remain largely unknown and set to unfold well into the future. However, we can be sure that the social sciences, and urban research and planning in particular, have a central role to play in evidencing and responding to these new challenges. This extraordinary moment also brings opportunities - for building the case for transformative change in our cities and for the collaborative shaping of a more equitable, sustainable and hopeful urban future.

# Little capital:
## the life of wealth elites in the everyday metropolis

Katie Higgins

In a context of rising levels of economic inequality, there have been increasing calls to 'study up' and examine the rich and powerful. The hope is that in shifting the gaze upwards when considering the uneven distribution of wealth, new questions can be raised about the contours of the problem.

In my research I have been trying to understand more about the 'super-rich' living in and around Greater Manchester (often defined as people with around $30 million+ in disposable assets). How do wealthy residents engage with the city and region they live and work in? How does wealth link with power in a smaller urban centre? What can their lives tell us about how inequalities are generated? The research seeks to better understand how wealth operates in and around a smaller, 'provincial' urban centre.

The fieldwork has involved and interviewing wealthy individuals, a group often absent from social research, and detailing their family histories, life course, and everyday geographies. I have also become interested in philanthropy, which appears to be an important element of how they present their lives. Alongside these interviews, I have started to trace the wider social relationships of this group, through wide-ranging conversations with their intermediaries, including private wealth managers, architects, journalists, charity fund-raisers and estate agents. Another method to build a picture of their lives has been spending time at various events, clubs and societies they frequent, as well as exploring affluent residential and commercial districts in the region.

One preliminary, that has emerged from my research, has been the gendered performance of patronage for the region's towns and cities. 'Mr Oldham', 'Mr Wigan' and 'Mr Manchester' are reeled off in conversations about wealthy male individuals who channel parts of their wealth into propping up local theatres, youth services and even high streets. Their names adorn buildings and populate local quangos and civic boards, animating the intimate networks between state and capital. Regional wealth elites, such as these, are often overlooked as urban actors but raise important questions about which voices are prioritised in decision-making, how we fund civic infrastructure and the role that locally embedded elites play in the transition of regional economies.

In a world marked by the coronavirus crisis, the changing fortunes and urban influence of wealth elites will likely be one way of tracking how economic inequalities are reproduced and reconfigured.

# Urban indigenous development alternatives in Bolivia and Brazil

Manifiesto Urbano

**Dr Philipp Horn introduces two new projects that focus on urban indigenous peoples and possibilities for more racially just and sustainable urban futures.**

Indigenous peoples are often portrayed as living in isolated rural areas, in pristine natural settings. Yet, rural indigenous peoples are increasingly affected by territorial displacement, the urbanisation of their lands, and are moving from the countryside to cities. 40% of the world's indigenous population already lived in cities in 2010, with numbers set to rise to more than 60% by 2025.

Urbanisation produces a significant generational divide within indigenous peoples. For example, in Latin America 80% of indigenous peoples residing in the countryside are above age 60, while 44% of indigenous peoples in cities are aged under 25. Urbanisation rarely leads to improvements in living conditions as indigenous peoples, are often trapped in poverty and excluded from the education and employment opportunities available in cities. Urban indigenous youth and women remain excluded from development interventions targeting indigenous peoples as these remain rural in focus, and from participation in indigenous movements which are characterised by patriarchal power dynamics. Despite this, urban indigenous peoples should not be seen as passive victims, rather they are active agents of change who confront uneven power relations within their own communities and challenge processes of uneven development to imagine and create alternative futures. Yet, little is known on what such alternatives entail and how they could reconfigure urban development and planning practice.

Two recently awarded projects within the department seek to fill these gaps. The first is entitled 'Decolonial development alternatives: A counter-cartography of traditional peoples' urban territories in Para and Minas Gerais, Brasil' and is funded through the University of Sheffield's QR GCRF Sustainable Partnership scheme. For this project, which runs from January 2020 until July 2021, a team of researchers from the University of Sheffield, the Universidade Federal do Para, and the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais work collaboratively with indigenous groups from six different urban areas to compare how indigenous peoples shape, imagine and collaboratively manage urban space. The project deploys an innovative counter-cartography method to make visible traditional people's representations of space and related urban interventions. In doing so, it seeks to generate novel understandings on innovative models for sustainable urban interventions, evoking alternative pathways towards meeting the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

The second project is an ESRC New Investigator project entitled 'Indigenous Development Alternatives: An urban youth perspective from Bolivia'. Commencing in October 2020, it will examine the dynamic interactions of urbanization, youth activism and indigenous development alternatives. The project will explore the driving forces contributing to the urbanization of indigenous peoples in distinct settings such as the city of El Alto, peri-urban neighbourhoods in Sucre and Santa Cruz, and the urbanising countryside of Amazonia. Through collaborative work with indigenous youth activists, the project will provide detailed accounts on the lived realities of indigenous youth in these four urban settings. It will investigate different yet interconnected examples of youth activism which seek to promote pathways for alternatives to urban development, centring around a variety of topics such as racial justice, decolonisation, gender equality, and intercultural approaches to land management, housing, governance and sustainable business models. In doing so, the project will highlight pathways for the promotion of more inclusive and just urban societies in which no person, regardless of ethnic background, age, gender or location of residence, is left behind.

Philipp Horn

# Ideology, housing and English planning

**Andy Inch**

In a recent paper* published as part of a special issue of the journal Planning Theory which we helped to guest edit, Ed Shepherd and I show why it is important for both theory and practice to recognise how ideology influences town planning.

Over recent decades, governments in many regions around the world have sought to simplify and speed up planning processes, arguing that land-use regulation imposes unnecessary constraints that prevent the free market from efficiently providing much needed development. The issue of housing supply has been at the centre of this politics of planning in England, with the planning system consistently blamed for failing to allocate sufficient land fast enough for new housebuilding to keep pace with demand. This has led to a seemingly endless cycle of planning reforms focused not on any positive contribution planners might make to tackling housing shortages, but instead on getting them out of the way.

Whilst such reforms are usually presented as pragmatic responses to policy failures (and can be effectively challenged on those grounds), they also draw much of their power from wider political thinking. In seeking to make prevailing understandings of planning fit with dominant neoliberal ideas about the proper role of the state and markets in society, they are always deeply ideological.

Recognising the importance of ideology can help us to critically interrogate how broader historical forces shape and limit our understanding of what planning is and, crucially, what it could be. Bringing ideology to the fore of analysis of planning raises significant theoretical challenges. It is never easy to ascertain how much power ideas have to mould history. The term 'ideology'

carries a lot of baggage and often arouses suspicion, not least amongst planners who sometimes see it as a distraction from more immediate, practical questions.

Drawing on the work of the late Stuart Hall, we sought to trace how a flexible conservative political ideology has shaped recent planning reforms in England. Without losing sight of other economic, social and political factors that have shaped the contemporary conjuncture, we aimed to show the varied work that ideology does to hold together contradictory pressures, securing support for deregulatory planning reforms, even in the face of opposition from within the ruling Conservative party.

Our aim was not just to suggest ways of working through theoretical difficulties in the relationship between ideology and planning. Instead, following Hall we argue that theory is best understood as a 'detour' on the way to more important political questions about what should be done. In this way we try to use 'conjunctural analysis' as a tool to assess opportunities to challenge and reshape dominant ideas.

Highlighting growing challenges to neoliberal hegemony, we point to the fact that recent Conservative governments have reconsidered previously unthinkable policies such as council house building and land value capture as evidence that the intensification of the politics of 'housing crisis' may create opportunities to articulate alternative understandings of planning and its potential. It's up to those who would like to see progressive change to seize the moment.

**\*Inch, A. and Shepherd, E. (2020)**
Thinking conjuncturally about ideology, housing and English planning, *Planning Theory*, 19 (1), 59-79.

# Profile:
# Martha Mingay

Martha Mingay started her PhD at Sheffield in 2018, having previously studied at University College London and the University of Edinburgh. Her research on Community Land Trust activism is supervised by Prof John Flint and Dr Berna Keskin.

**What question are you trying to address with your PhD and why is it important?**

My PhD explores urban Community Land Trust activism as a political response to the housing affordability crisis. Community Land Trusts (CLTs) are a model of community-led housing with the potential to offer affordability through the separation of housing and land ownership. My research is grounded in a North London group campaigning both against the disposal of an NHS Mental Health Trust site and for the establishment of a CLT as a mechanism to guarantee affordable housing in perpetuity in Haringey, a suburban borough politicised by the rapid transformations of its housing markets, including the proposed loss of social housing.

The potential of the CLT model to ameliorate the housing crisis in the UK depends on its success in urban areas, where affordability is most acutely pressured. I am particularly interested in this case for its potential to illuminate the specific characteristics of CLTs as urban social movements, in campaigning both against public land disposal and for affordability, in a city typified by high land values, established regional governance and embedded development actors alongside population density, inequality, displacement and community 'superdiversity'. These conditions pose challenges to CLTs in their organising, decision-making and negotiations with state and market actors, many of which are shared with other urban political campaigns.

**What are some of your key findings to date?**

I'm at an early stage of data analysis but I am pleased that my theoretical framework, using the autonomist understanding of the commons applied to public land disposal and the impact activists can have on a development's planning parameters, holds. A close application of this theory, derived from Italian Marxism, has allowed me to develop 'communing' as a methodological framework for Participant Action Research (PAR). 22 months of participating in the group has exposed the political and financial pressures on public land tenders, alongside the difficult transitions required of a community campaign group seeking to manage housing. These pressures can create considerable internal tensions for CLTs around questions of equality, power and expertise. As a result, the challenges CLTs face as consensual, horizontal decision-making bodies contrast with other development actors in London and can threaten the efficacy of community groups. I hope to show the group's experiences highlight both CLT-specific and universal structural challenges in the market-led delivery of significant levels of urban affordable housing.
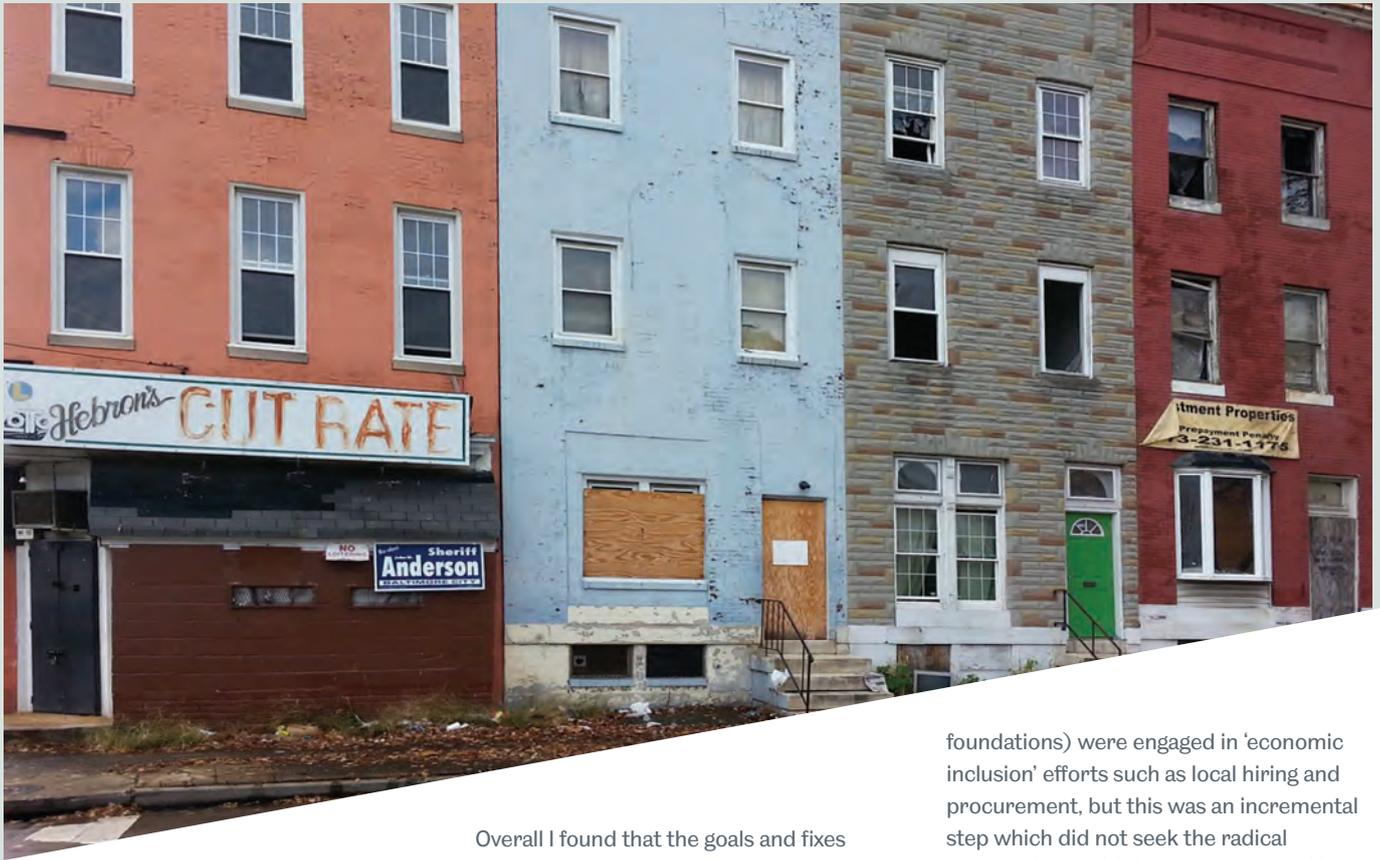
**Who will benefit from your research?**

I hope my research benefits the CLT sector and other forms of co-housing and community-led affordable housing models growing in the UK, Europe and beyond. The site's past, as a mental hospital, is particularly interesting and the campaigners explicitly promote affordable, community-owned housing as a solution to the housing based precarity and resulting anxieties millions of Londoners face. I hope my research contributes to policy agendas explicitly connecting affordable housing and health policy, and supports existing campaigns to re-evaluate the Treasury's rules which interpret 'the maximised return to the public sector' in narrow economic terms that ignore the extensive costs of precarious housing.

# Austerity governance in Baltimore

Madeleine Pill

As part of an international, multi-disciplinary team funded by the ESRC, I undertook the Baltimore, US case study for the comparative research project, 'Collaborative Governance under Austerity', conducted in eight cities in eight Global North countries.

In this project (fieldwork took place between 2015 and 2018), we explored how austerity is navigated in and through municipal governance, in the context of prolonged neoliberalisation, economic crises, and struggles for alternative political economies.

Baltimore is known for its Inner Harbor redevelopment of the 1970s, which became a blueprint for waterfront regeneration around the world; and for its concentrated poverty and racial injustice, as immortalised in the HBO series 'The Wire'. It is a salutary example of a deindustrialised city which was an early adopter of strategies of urban entrepreurialism. Its 'perma-austerity' and the extent and depth of its divisions are extreme by the standards of the other cities we studied. In 2015, the city gained worldwide attention when there was an uprising following the death of a young black man, Freddie Gray, due to injuries sustained in police custody. My research, phased over the following two years, draws specific attention to what changed, and what didn't, as a result.

Overall I found that the goals and fixes of Baltimore's governance remained largely the same. City government continues to prioritise relationships with the city's major 'ed and med' anchor institutions like Johns Hopkins University, and the sportswear corporation Under Armour, anchoring the latest waterfront megaproject which is benefiting from the biggest financing package in the city's history. A triage investment system prioritises neighbourhoods with development potential. The most deprived neighbourhoods, with majority African American populations, are written off economically and 'contained' through repression. Participatory mechanisms for grassroots organisations and citizens are scarce and tokenistic.

The research affirms the importance of everyday struggles about public services - especially (over) policing, and (lack of) housing and education; along with conflicts about urban redevelopment, such as the distribution of tax subsidies which reasserts the dominance of the waterfront and of private actors in the city. Major, private but non-profit actors (such as the city's 'eds and meds' and philanthropic

foundations) were engaged in 'economic inclusion' efforts such as local hiring and procurement, but this was an incremental step which did not seek the radical community wealth building envisaged by some citizen activists.

Such struggles not only focus attention on the governance of the city, from which citizens are excluded, but on the scope for more equitable alternatives which can disrupt the normative power of neoliberal ideologies and redress the iniquitous divisions with which Baltimore is synonymous. The need to repoliticise debates about the priorities being pursued was stressed at a research workshop held in the city. Citizens and civil society were not only not 'at the table', but as a workshop attendee pointed out, "we don't even know where the table is."

Research outputs to date include a stakeholder report available in four languages and a special 'Worlds of Austerity' issue of the Journal of Urban Affairs (2020), which includes my paper, 'The austerity governance of Baltimore's neighborhoods: "The conversation may have changed but the systems aren't changing" (42:1, 143-158). A co-authored volume, 'New Spaces of Hope' is forthcoming from Bristol University Press.

"If you want land, government can't give you land, you have to go and ask who has land."

Former town planner of Lagos State Government, August 2019.

# Researching power, authority and land in Lagos:

## Taking an oblique approach to the unwritten

# "Lagos cannot be described, only experienced"

Public workshop participant,
August 2019

Much of Lagos operates according to unwritten but widely understood and practiced rules. They work alongside statutory rules and regulations, in both complementary and contradictory ways. As such, the structures that underpin everyday life in Lagos form an ambivalent relationship with the state - often partially acknowledged and widely tolerated, but sometimes brought into great tension. For example, traditional title-holders, such the Oba and various chieftaincies, are officially recognised by Lagos State Government and are represented by the Ministry of Local Government and Community Affairs. Yet they are accorded little official power despite the de facto reality that customary landowners are an integral part of land and housing delivery in Lagos, constituting a neo-customary institution. That over 70% of Lagos's 18-21 million people live in unplanned areas, on plots of land with only customary tenure agreements, is known and tolerated but never officially acknowledged. This disparity between how Lagos works on the ground, and how it works on paper is a crucial dynamic that shapes the urbanisation of sub-Saharan Africa's largest city, is often missing from accounts that subsequently miss the point, and forms the starting point for this research project.

Urban theory has struggled to accommodate such contradictions and parallels in the tenaciously binary understandings of informality and a whole host of conceptual definitions that haven't travelled well from European and North American cities to the majority cities of the "Global South". In this way, the everyday role of customary institutions has largely gone missing in Urban Studies, or been mischaracterised from a developmental approach as a predominantly rural phenomenon. Only recently has there started to be recognition of the need for taking the role of urban traditional authorities seriously in regards to land and urban governance. This forms part of a wider critique of southern urbanism that seeks to pay better attention to the realities of southern cities, improving understandings and addressing

still wide gaps in knowledge. This research project seeks to locate the de facto urban governance configurations of Lagos, formed of customary institutions and other non-state organisations such as Residents' Associations, in urban theory.

Analysing, identifying and writing about unwritten and unacknowledged practices poses a real methodological challenge. The initial proposal to "map" the de facto governance configurations of Lagos quickly became unrealistic; it seemed inappropriate to make explicit that which draws power and viability from being implicit. Methodologies are needed that avoid the colonial imperative to list, name and categorise, and find a way to accommodate contradictions and uncertainties. In the second year of the project I have been trying to develop an oblique approach both to research and to representation through writing. In this way, I have been finding ways to look at the impacts and effects of real urban governance, what is enabled through being unspoken, rather than at the institutions and organisations themselves. I have also been taking seriously chatter, rumours, anecdotes, hearsay and stories about how power, politics, land and authority operate in Lagos. So far I have been finding, in interviews, conversations, written work and online forums, remarkable but still intangible consistencies and some great lines and stories, told with humour, anger and creativity. I am currently exploring different forms of writing that can draw deeply on literature, theory and situated research but that go beyond (or stop short) of an authoritative-academic style. This approach was going to have been put into practice over three to four months of planned fieldwork in 2020, which has of course been disrupted by the coronavirus pandemic. The current crisis has therefore opened up a whole new set of methodological challenges and anxieties, but also opportunities for reflection on the ethics of southern urbanism research by white western researchers, and the possibilities of exploring rich secondary sources.

**Lindsay Sawyer**

# Urban popular economies:

## A Sheffield 'desk' bridging conversations among researchers at the University and beyond

'Popular economies' refer to the variegated, promiscuous forms of organising the production of things. The term also includes the repair, distribution and use of these things, as well as the provision of social reproduction services that are differentiable from conventional modes of capitalist production.

The popular economy is not reducible to notions of informality, shared, social or solidarity economy. Instead it embodies the efforts of those with limited access to wage labour to generate a livelihood and to anchor such livelihood in forms of accumulation that enable them to participate in larger circuits of sociality, to concretise and sustain experiments with remaking collective life, and to elaborate the semblance of a public infrastructure. As such, an emphasis on the popular economy recognises the skills, abilities and dynamic strategies through which particular subjects question, negotiate and alter established socio-economic orders and rules of the game.

The *Sheffield Desk on Popular Economy* is a collaboration between the Department of Urban Studies and Planning (USP) and the Urban Institute (UI). It seeks to bridge conversations among researchers across the university interested in the urban popular economy. What is meant by this term?

Examples include:
- residents of Sadr City revolting against the diminishing material horizons of their everyday lives
- residents of Buenos Aires attempting to maintain the positions of their clothing workshops in existing commodity chains without reproducing relations of exploitative labour
- residents of Birmingham trying to piece together new institutions supportive of basic social reproduction in the face of sustained austerity
- residents of Beirut appropriating the demise of urban services as a locus for national political renewal
- residents of Manila circumventing the general war on the poor in efforts to protect the everyday intimacies of neighbourhood organisation
- residents of Brooklyn fighting to retain public housing and black residency in the face of gentrification
- residents of El Alto where, confronted by colonial cultures of planning, Aymara indigenous peoples integrate their modes of socio-economic and political organisation within the urban fabric
- residents of Freetown where women organise to ensure the equitable distribution of opportunities to participate in civic affairs.

All of these diverse instances are manifestations of a concern about how lives could be lived under difficult circumstances.

Coordinated by AbdouMaliq Simone and Victoria Habermehl from UI, and Gabriel Silvestre and Philipp Horn from USP, the collaboration started this Spring with a virtual workshop held on 24th March. Since then, online seminars have been organised with distinguished speakers from different parts of the globe. Solomon Benjamin (Indian Institute of Technology, Madras) and Felipe Nunes Coelho Magalhães (Federal University of Minas Gerais) presented their respective work examining the Indian and Brazilian contexts of shifts in production and labour relations and their impact on popular livelihoods. In May, Mpho Matsipa (University of Witwatersrand) and Amen Jaffer (Lahore University of Management

# Research-led teaching: an undergraduate's view



Sciences) discussed their separate research on the gendered practices of livelihood and sociality in South African and Pakistani cities.

This collaboration has three aims: to listen to and discuss the work and interests of participants which, in one way or another, touch upon popular economy; to map out possible conceptual and practical connections amongst this work; and to identify possible ways of working collaboratively across the University and beyond to consolidate possible research or pedagogical work in this area.

**Gabriel Silvestre**

**Find out more**
sheffield.ac.uk/usp/research/projects/
popecon

As a lecturer, Rowland Atkinson has helped me to understand the city in theoretical terms that underpin the complex processes at play in urban environments.

His research has expanded my understanding of power dynamics within communities, particularly through the module *Urban Theory*. Rowland used his article on *Urban Policy Control and Social Catharsis: the assault on urban fragility as therapy* (2014) and his book *Securing an urban renaissance: crime, community, and British urban policy* (2007) to support his teaching in this module.
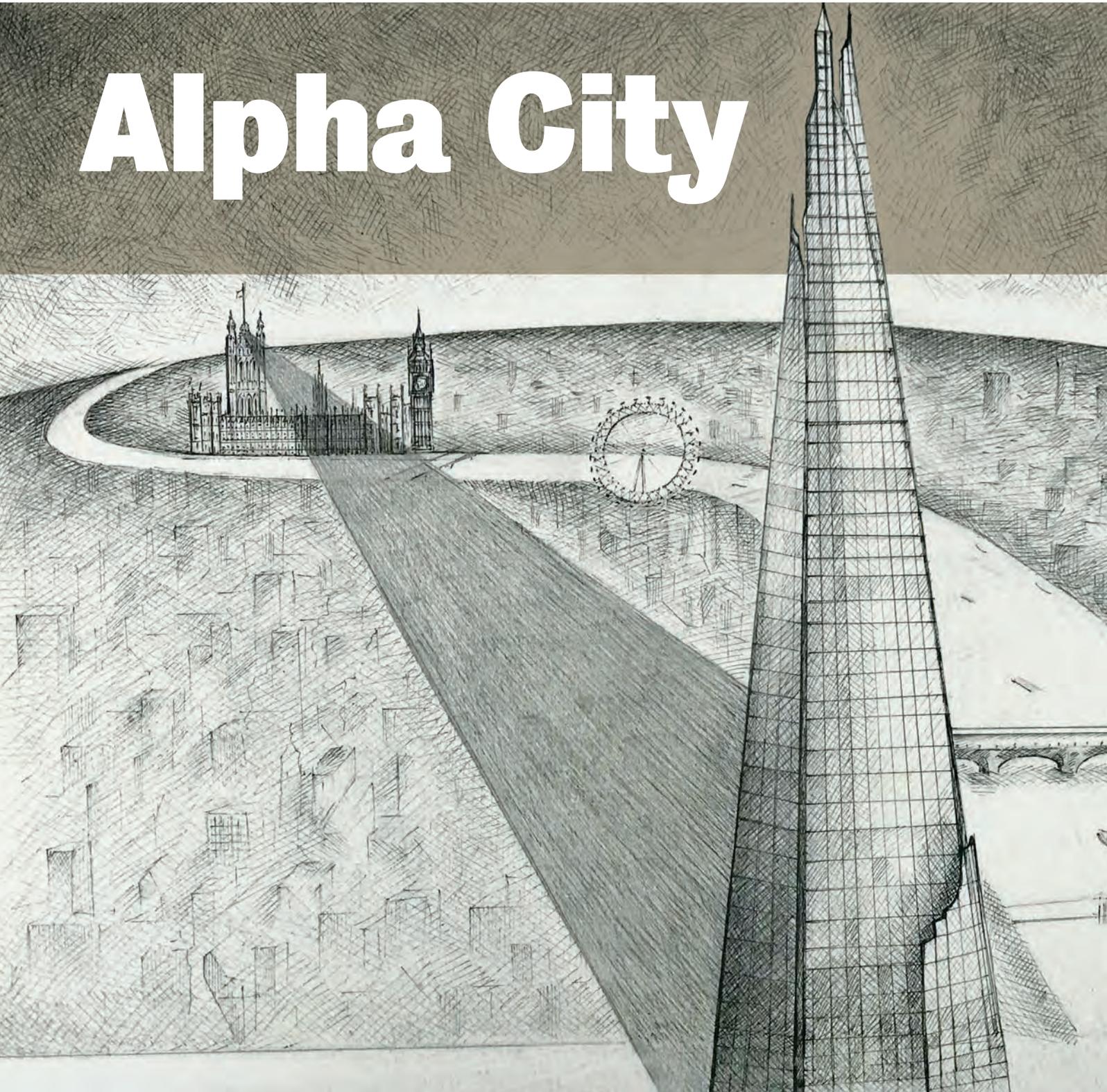
Throughout the course, Rowland's modules helped us as aspiring urbanists understand the fundamental theories within the field of urban studies, teaching us through his work on the right to the city. My interest has been captivated by urban power struggles, which is also Rowland's area of expertise. I have always been interested in inequality, particularly in how this relates to neoliberalism, and

Rowland's work and advice in this module certainly influenced my own beliefs on who the city is for. I have a lot of respect for Rowland and his work, to the extent that I asked if he could be assigned as my dissertation supervisor because of our shared interest in power relations within the city. My dissertation subject is the evaluation of claims regarding the current rise in knife crime, and Rowland's research in the field of urban criminology in his book *Urban Criminology: The City, Disorder, Harm and Social Control* (2018) has helped my interpretation of the essence of crime in the city. As a result of his research, he has been an active and supportive supervisor, more than able to direct me to other influential scholars in this field of study.
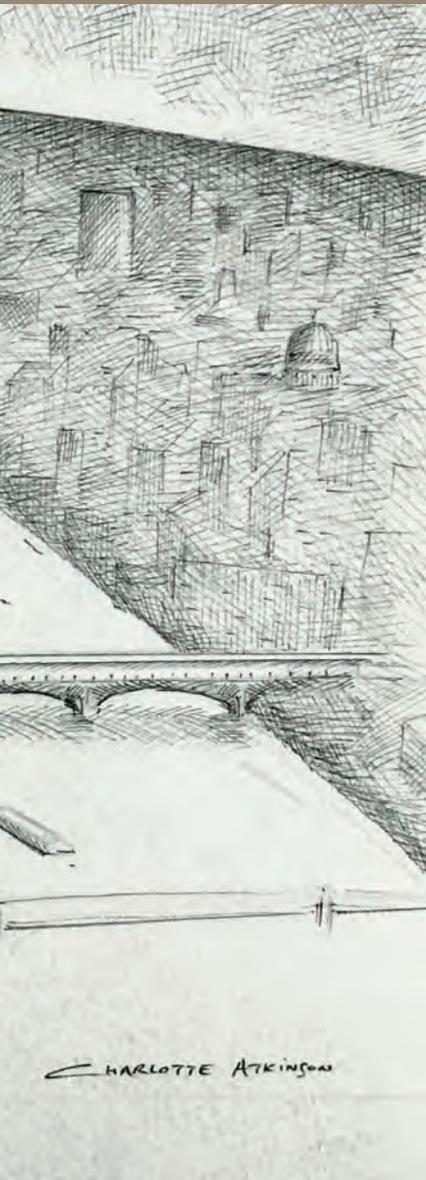
**Samantha Hall**
MPlan Urban Studies
and Planning student.

**See overleaf for more on
Rowland Atkinson's research.**

# Alpha City

## If I asked you which was the best city in the world, how might you respond?

CHARLOTTE ATKINSON

What measures, feelings or indicators would guide your choice? Would it be Berlin for the music, Barcelona for the clubs, Rome for its beauty, Paris for its romance? Quite possibly it would be none of these, but if you had almost unlimited money then where?

Today cities like Frankfurt, London, Tokyo, Singapore, Taipei and Hong Kong are top choices for the world's super rich. There are around 200,000 in this group and their number continues to expand. For the super rich, one of the pre-eminent cities to relocate to is London. What does the city offer that others do not? The obvious ingredients are wonderful streetscapes, historic residential districts and a financial beating heart that beats as hard as any other around the planet.

However, these qualities are only the beginning. Much of the property-led boom in London over the past decade has been driven by the expansion of the numbers of the rich themselves. Much of this has come about as shifts in the global economy have occurred, producing new winners at the apex of finance and technology, alongside older sectors like energy and property. For the rich, the lure of London is the offer of a ticket to the party at which so many of the world's wealthy and emerging elite are at. This feeling has driven thousands of sales to overseas buyers where money is no object. While prices have fallen in recent years, primarily as a result of market uncertainties generated by Brexit, the city's West, inner North and outer West, beyond the city's fringe, are what we can think of as 'alphahoods'.

These are essentially global addresses advertised and traded, either by estate agents, or by new residents on the city's dynamic social circuits. In this sense the city arguably operates much as it always has – by giving national and international elites a place where their social standing can be cemented. This has been the story of London's West End for at least two centuries.

Despite the growing interest in London's rich, the point of my new book, Alpha City, is not simply to look in awe at these processes, but instead to offer a critical analysis that asks: what does alpha status deliver for the city's ordinary residents? My argument is that the dark side of such a city is all around us. It can be seen in the quarter of households living in material poverty, and in the thousands displaced by demolitions to make way for 'better' houses at market prices that few can afford. It also resides in the broader treatment of the city's less well-off by a more or less cosseted and ignorant political system and property lobby that has had the effect of worsening the conditions of the poor through austerity programmes.

When we ask which is the best city in the world, we should be wary of claims to 'alpha' status. We must consider how such cities become engines of ignorance and antagonism to the losers in their economies, and we must hope a kinder and more inclusive urbanism will be found.

**Rowland Atkinson**

# Urban citizenship and informality

The new White Rose Doctoral Training Partnership network 'Urban citizenship and informality: new dynamics in the context of global urbanisation' aims to expand and deepen knowledge about the relationship between informality and citizenship, supported by three funded PhD studentships exploring a truly global set of case studies.

In the context of our increasingly urban world, citizenship is recognised as a critical issue. In response to political and economic crises, urban movements have mobilised to claim rights in cities as diverse as Hong Kong, Istanbul, Cairo and New York. At the same time, deepening levels of inequality and exclusion are contributing to the expansion of informal economies and areas in cities in the Global South, but also in places like London, Barcelona and Seattle. Urban informality – understood as activities which fall outside regulatory frameworks – may weaken state control and formal democracy, while at the same time offering economic and political innovation. Our network aims to explore new developments at the interface between urban citizenship and informality, taking an interdisciplinary, comparative approach to understanding increasingly globalised political, economic and urban dynamics.

The network brings together a team of academics with expertise in politics, international development, human rights and urban studies from across the universities of Sheffield, York and Leeds. Each network member is part of a supervisory team for one of three PhD studentships funded by the ESRC/White Rose Doctoral Training Partnership. Going beyond the usual development debates, these three PhD projects will explore these phenomena through foregrounding key actors: the state, marginalised communities, and elites. Each PhD will take a comparative approach, with one case study from the Global North and one from the Global South.

The network involves partnership with two key UK-based NGOs in the field of human rights, development and citizenship, with diverse geographical remits. The Overseas Development Institute (ODI) is the UK's leading independent global thinktank on international development, with presence in 50 countries, offering access to an unsurpassed network of development practitioners and researchers. Just Fair (established 2011) monitors and advocates the protection of economic and social rights in the UK, working with local, national and international stakeholders, and can offer access to data and networks relating to rights in the UK.

In bringing together an interdisciplinary team of experts, external partners and PhD students around the themes of urban informality and citizenship, this network is positioned to contribute new knowledge to key debates in this area, such as those around the New Urban Agenda and its implementation. The network will also have an impact in terms of global policy and practice, for instance by facilitating collaboration with local level NGOs and local decision-makers. This will contribute to increasing understanding and representation of how different groups of citizens engage with informality in diverse contexts, to improve outcomes of local decision-making for local communities.

**More information about the network is available at**
https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/usp/research

**Melanie Lombard**

# Profile:
# Said Zaaneen

Said Zaaneen started his PhD at Sheffield in February 2020, having previously studied at the University of Manchester and Al-Quds Open University. His research on humanitarian interventions in the Gaza Strip is supervised by Dr Tom Goodfellow.

**What question are you trying to address with your PhD and why is it important?**

My research aims to examine humanitarian and development interventions in urban contexts in the Global South, with a specific focus on studying the experiences of refugees and poor people living in protracted crises.

As more than two-thirds of the world's displaced population has settled in the cities of the Global South, there is a growing global concern regarding the suitability of traditional humanitarian actions. Such actions were originally designed for rural contexts, and now are being implemented in dense and urbanised areas.

My PhD research will explore the daily interactions between urban refugees and the various humanitarian agencies that provide them with essential services and support. I also intend to examine how adaptive such humanitarian agencies are when faced with the challenges of working in fragile urban settings.

**Where in particular will you be focusing your research?**

My research project is still in the design phase, but it will focus on the under-studied context of the Gaza Strip. The Gaza Strip represents a rich research environment for this topic because, according to the United Nations, 75% of the population of the Gaza Strip are in need of humanitarian assistance. The World Bank estimates unemployment rates to be more than 47%, while almost 70% of the two million inhabitants of Gaza are refugees living in dire humanitarian need. There are eight refugee camps across the tiny Strip, with residents of these camps living in overcrowded houses in one of the most densely populated areas in the world.

**Who will benefit from your research?**

I hope that my research will benefit humanitarian and development actors such as UN agencies and NGOs, service providers including municipalities and local grassroots organisations, and refugees and poor people in urban contexts. If the factors that influence aid delivery in specific urban contexts are well understood, mechanisms of provision can be altered so that the aid can be more effective and support more positive outcomes for those in need.

It is vital to investigate the refugee camps in the Gaza Strip, their dynamics, and how these are influencing or being influenced by approaches to humanitarian and development aid delivery which have been developed over the last 70 years. I believe my findings will contribute to academic and professional discourse regarding the various approaches to aid delivery in urban settings in the Global South. In addition, my research will help humanitarian and development organisations to maximize positive impacts when working with refugees and poor people.

# New projects

## Mobilising adaptation: governance of infrastructure through coproduction

A team of researchers from Sheffield (led by Dr Liz Sharp) have been awarded £750K by the Natural Environment Research Council to demonstrate and evaluate a community-led approach to reducing flood risk. Landscape interventions such as raintanks, ponds, rain gardens and swales (designed ditches) provide additional water storage and slow run-off after heavy rain. In this project, the team aims to examine whether flood avoidance/resilience can be enhanced through greater activation and empowerment of local communities, activities which will improve local water management, but also have additional positive effects on residents' sense of locality and well-being.

Project activities will take place in Hull over the next 2 years, and the team will work in close collaboration with the Living with Water Partnership (a formal partnership of the flood risk management authorities for the Hull drainage catchment) and the Hull and East Riding Timebank (a network of individuals and organisations that offer skills and mutual aid in Hull). The project will contribute new learning on processes of urban adaptation and the utility of action research and co-design research methods. The project is funded via UK Research and Innovation's UK Climate Resilience programme.

**Find out more:**
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## Migration, urbanisation and conflict in Africa

Despite the widespread consensus that urban sustainability and inclusion are now crucial for future stability and wellbeing in African countries, the ways in which migration feeds into current urban challenges is poorly understood. Urban in-migration has complex and contradictory consequences in contemporary Africa, and is all too often associated with 'crisis narratives' and disorder in the absence of adequate knowledge of when and how migration leads to conflict. The relationships between urbanisation, migration and conflict are only likely to rise in importance in the context of population growth, increased pressure on land, and displacement related to climate change. This project will explore these issues through a comparative research design in nine cities in Ethiopia, Nigeria and Uganda.

With a Sheffield team including Tom Goodfellow, Melanie Lombard and Lindsay Sawyer, this three-year project will be delivered in collaboration with researchers from Addis Ababa University (Ethiopia), University of Lagos (Nigeria), Makerere University (Uganda) and the University of Witwatersrand (South Africa). The £2 million project is funded by a partnership between UK Research and Innovation (through the Global Challenges Research Fund) and the African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA).

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## Youth and the work/housing nexus in Ethiopia and South Africa

Ethiopia and South Africa's youth experience high unemployment and lack affordable housing. Ethiopia recently invested in Africa's largest industrial complex in Hawassa, creating new job opportunities for young workers. Yet, low wages and scarce housing challenge the potential for sustainable futures. In South Africa, wavering historic investment in Bronkhorstpruit, a former industrial decentralisation site, means high youth unemployment. Successful provision of state housing means some youths are housed, but cannot afford living costs.

Funded by the British Academy (through the Global Challenges Research Fund), this project examines the youth work/housing nexus in Hawassa and Bronkhorstpruit. The project asks: how the work/housing nexus is experienced, what are the key challenges, what are the state and non-state responses, and what is its wider significance for questions of urban sustainability. Alongside the Sheffield team (Paula Meth and Tom Goodfellow), the project benefits from collaboration with teams from the University of Hawassa (Ethiopia) and the University of Witwatersrand (South Africa).

**Find out more**
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# Housing exclusion

## in the English rental market

The UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence (CaCHE) is a multi-disciplinary partnership between academia, housing policy and practice, established in 2017. There are many projects underway, and a CaCHE Policy Fellows Programme has recently been established, providing an opportunity to share academic evidence with civil servants and policy/practice professionals.

Our team from the University of Sheffield, with Kim McKee at the University of Stirling, explored housing exclusion in the English rental market. We know that around 8.4 million people in England are affected by the housing crisis, with one in seven now living in unaffordable, overcrowded, insecure and unsuitable homes (National Housing Federation, 2019). Our research aimed to understand the perceptions of key stakeholders in the social and private rented sectors in England.

Participants emphasised that housing exclusion was worsening, with growing numbers facing limited housing options, or no access to decent housing at all. This is not felt equally – young people, BAME groups and low-income households experienced the most constraint in their housing choices. Geography is also crucial, due to diverging policy and practice across the UK.

Our research identified a number of macro-drivers of exclusion, including:

- Lack of affordable, appropriate, secure housing
- Changes to funding for the development of social housing
- Welfare reforms which have restricted access to housing
- Lack of regulation in the private rented sector (PRS) and limited regulation in the social rented sector
- Challenges in accessing appropriate support
- Interaction of housing and immigration policy

Our report also details the diverse mechanisms through which exclusion is operationalised:

- **Systems of access in social housing:** we found greater negotiation between housing associations and local authorities over the rights to allocate properties, whilst choice-based lettings systems were viewed as complex and focused on process over personal needs. Some housing associations used platforms such as Rightmove to advertise to a 'wider pool' of people in order to allocate 'hard-to-let' properties
- **Private landlord pre-tenancy checks:** these highlight the power imbalance and profit-motive at the heart of the PRS. For those who cannot pass them (due to low/insecure incomes, bad debt, or receipt of welfare benefits) there are few options when social housing is scarce
- **Social landlord pre-tenancy checks:** affordability checks are also used by social landlords; our participants feel that assessments are becoming more stringent. This is partly driven by pressures on social landlords to balance their social role alongside the need for 'sustainable' tenancies, underpinned by appropriate levels of welfare and/or tenancy support
- **Technology:** technological advances are changing how landlords decide who they let to, for example through credit checks and products such as 'the credit ladder', which helps tenants build a credit score through timely rent payment
- **Tenancy conduct:** some landlords (private and social) visit potential tenants to assess their lifestyle, housekeeping and current property condition, representing further mechanisms through which access to housing is restricted

It is vital that housing sector stakeholders work together to deliver person-centred approaches to ensure access to appropriate housing across varied local and regional housing markets. But this local action needs to be paralleled by the (re) reform of the welfare system, which is a key driver of current patterns of exclusion. Everyone deserves a safe, secure and affordable home, but unless we tackle these challenges we risk failing to reach this aim.

**Kim McKee** and
**Jenny Preece**

**You can access the full research report here:**
https://housingevidence.ac.uk/

# Publications
## January 2019 – May 2020

## Books

**Atkinson R** & Millington G (2019) *Urban Criminology: The City, Disorder, Harm and Social Control* (Routledge).

**Horn P** (2019) *Indigenous Rights to the City: Ethnicity and Urban Planning in Bolivia and Ecuador* (Routledge).

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Preece J & Bimpson E (2019) Forms and mechanisms of exclusion in contemporary housing systems (UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence).

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