Re-placing the National in an Urbanized World:

The Future of Comparative Urban Politics

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Jefferey M. Sellers
Department of Political Science
University of Southern California
Von KleinSmid Center 327, Mailcode 0044
Los Angeles, CA 90089-0044
Phone: 213-740-1684
Fax: 213-740-8893
E-mail: sellers@usc.edu

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Abstract

As the world becomes more urbanized, and transnational practices are recognized as fundamental, comparative urban politics has an increasingly prominent role to play in more general comparative accounts of governance, politics and political economy. A central challenge for international comparativists concerned with cities lies in the need to reconceive national institutions, societies and cultures in ways that do justice to both the persistence of the national and the influence of local agents and structures. To fully engage the nation-centered approaches that continue to dominate comparative politics, comparative urban political analysis must separate out the exercise of local agency from infrastructures of national institutions, and take account of the role that national elements play in local agency itself. Such an approach will enable alternative, multilevel accounts of governance and politics that remain beyond the reach of traditional nation-centered frameworks. These accounts can contribute not only to urban politics, but to wider disciplinary understandings of the politics of nations and transnational processes.

Increasingly, humanity lives in an urbanized world. Most of the world population, and over 75 percent of the population in developed countries, now lives in urban regions. By 2015 a majority of the developing world will as well. This development almost surely means that understanding urban regions and their governance will continue to grow in importance for the study of policy and politics. At the same time, it poses new challenges to the small but growing number of scholars engaged in the study of comparative urban politics. A decade ago, comparative urban governance and politics remained preoccupied with concepts and arguments drawn either from the United States or from formal governmental characteristics. Since that time, despite a continued preoccupation with American "models" of urban governance (e.g., Savitch and Kantor, 2002, Ch. 8; Davies, 2002) it has gained increasing substance. International comparative work on cities has proliferated, branching off in various directions and elaborating an increasingly diverse set of concepts, categories, and hypotheses. In a wide range of domains, researchers have scrutinized cities and urban governance to understand phenomena that at once transcend the boundaries of nation-states, and focus within urban regions within different countries. In efforts to reach beyond parochialism, analysts have turned to the comparative study of politics at the national level for such concepts as corporatism (e.g., DiGaetano and Strom, 2003). Yet the subfield remains in search of a distinctive collective agenda of its own. Even the increasingly vast literature on globalization and cities (e.g., Clark, 2001) has only so far produced surprisingly little in the way of common frameworks for research on politics and governance.

This essay will argue that international work on urban regions holds enormous but unrealized promise as a means to understand fundamental features of governance and

politics. Rather than an isolated subfield dependent on concepts from specific countries or other subfields, comparative urban politics is uniquely positioned to contribute to wider debates about the changing nature of contemporary policymaking, politics, economies and societies. One of the central keys to unlocking this potential lies in a serious engagement with the national institutions and categories that still dominate the study of politics and policy in comparative politics and international relations scholarship. Even in an era of growing internationalization, one of the most crucial features of urban governance and politics lies in their nested relation to a host of institutions and other processes at national and other wider scales. The comparative study of urban governance and politics has a great deal to contribute to more general understandings about these institutions and processes. Only studies that address the theoretical and methodological challenges of this interplay with other levels can fully realize this potential.

The Emergence of Transnational Studies of Urban Politics and Governance

Much of recent work on cities has embraced transnational or global processes as a primary reason for renewed attention to urban governance. This research outlines a growing number and variety of transnational connections among urban regions that transcend or even defy national boundaries. Transnational comparative analysis of urban politics and governance remains largely if not primarily analysis of processes *within* countries. Even as this work has cast nation-states in a new and different light, it highlights the need for a better understanding of nations and their significance for urban politics.

The recent flowering of international comparative research on urban regions has moved decisively beyond both the nation-state and an exclusive emphasis on the internal

politics of cities. The barriers to information and access that long precluded either comparativists or urbanists from giving full attention to urban regions have increasingly broken down. As a result, urban governance has been treated against the backdrop of international as well as national influences:

--As some of the earliest research in this vein, work on "global cities" identifies and analyses urban centers in terms of the presence of financial and corporate elites connected through financial transactions into global networks (Sassen, 1991). Increasingly, this work has given way to more sophisticated analyses that link urban governance to positions in international networks and markets for places (e.g., Sassen, 2001; Hill and Fujita, 2002; Savitch and Kantor, 2002).

--In many of the largest cities of the U.S. but also those of Asia and Europe, immigrant communities also link urban politics and governance to transnational networks (e.g., Smith, 2001). Although largely social and cultural, enhanced through family ties, these links can also have crucial economic elements and may ultimately affect the political orientations of participants (Hamilton and Chinchilla, 2001).

--In environmental and other policy areas, comparative international studies show that practices and norms have spread widely among cities throughout much of the developing as well as the developed world, and that local actions often play the critical role in this process (Clarke and Goetz, 1993; Freire and Stren, 2001; Lo and Marcotullo, 2001; Marcotullo, 2003; Sellers *et al.*, 2003).

--Across the developed world and beyond, localities have pursued developmental strategies centered around amenities and tourist attractions for increasingly mobile clienteles of firms and visitors (Judd and Fainstein, 1999).

--High-tech and educational centers form an element of many urban regions that is also increasingly linked transnationally to networks built around advanced forms of professional activities, economic innovation and social movements (Sellers, 2002a).

--As the literature on the "New Political Culture" has emphasized, a cluster of related political orientations related to higher education and cultural sophistication has diffused widely among citizens and local political officials of the developed world. (Clark and Hoffmann-Martinot, 1998; Clark, 2001; Boschken, 2002).

--Transnational political and social movements often center in cities, integrating initiatives at this level with attention to the political opportunity structures in nation-states and beyond (Tarrow, 2003). Recent historical research has even recast early twentieth century movements for urban reform and social democracy in Europe and North America as movements of this sort (Rodgers, 1998; Saunier, 2002).

--In democratizing and transitional countries, urban governance and urban politics have emerged with growing roles in national policymaking and politics, often contributing to democratizing reforms (Dietz and Myers, 2001; Freire and Stren, 2001; Evans, 2001).

Just as Smith (2001) is surely right that the term "transnational" captures the character of many such processes better than globalization, these transnational dimensions are often inextricable from their domestic ones. Consider, for instance, a set of five urban regions that develop extensive and equivalent connections among each other (Figure 1).   Say that no transactions costs linked to distance or national boundaries interfere with the connections among the firms and residents of these places. Each contains equivalent, interconnected clusters of financial and corporate elites. Or each

stands in a roughly equivalent position in an international marketplace among cities for new businesses, skilled workers or elite residents. Or each comprises an equivalent site for the organization and mobilization of transnational movements, or for the reception of migrants. If Cities A and B are located in Country 1 and Cities C, D and E in Country 2, this network of connections among places is intrinsically transnational. Yet the cities within each country depend for a substantial portion of the connections to other places on domestic lateral relations than international ones. The balance between national and transnational connections can also vary widely. In Country 1, because of its comparatively small size, Cities A and B maintain three times as many transnational connections as domestic ones. In Country 2, however, Cities C, D and E confront as many possibilities for domestic connections as they do beyond national borders.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

At the same time, political actors in the cities of either country pursue local strategies within domestic institutions, markets, social collectives and cultures. Even as global cities or high-tech and service centers respond to international economic shifts, for instance, domestic political and economic entrepreneurs have typically led efforts to do so. Structures of political opportunity and primary political identities have generally remained centered within countries or lower levels. Policy too, despite formal exceptions like the European Union as well as growing international transfers, continues to center within the borders of national states.

The transcendence of national boundaries in work on urban politics thus makes a re-examination of the nation and its significance for cities all the more imperative. Even if national boundaries were not porous, cross-national comparisons would give the lie to the

rather parochial assumption that one can "control" for national characteristics by leaving out comparisons with other countries. As the growing transnational dimensions of urban politics have become clearer, so has the need to grapple more seriously with the nature of the national.

The National as an Infrastructure for Urban Governance and Politics

Such an effort can draw on a growing body of work in the "new institutionalism" at the national level. This comparative political economy has produced increasingly sophisticated accounts of why countries continue to matter for policy, economics and politics (e.g., Hollingsworth and Boyer, 1997; Hall and Soskice, 2001). Comparative accounts of urban politics echo this turn (e.g., Pierre, 1999; DiGaetano and Strom, 2003), even supplementing the general hypotheses of regulation theory with greater attention to national institutions and culture (Leo, 1997). But comparison of the way institutions and other dimensions of nations work in local politics requires attentiveness to kinds of local agency that nation-centered comparative political economy has rarely acknowledged. Taking this agency into account can ultimately permit a clearer conception of how the institutional, cultural and spatial dimensions of nations in fact operate.

In large measure, the national operates as an *infrastructure* for governance and politics in urban regions. Like the physical infrastructure of a country and its relation to economic and social life, this infrastructure consists of taken-for-granted conditions for political processes within and among localities. These conditions have governmental, political, economic, social and cultural dimensions. Some of them operate as vertically imposed, external resources for and constraints on local actions. Others furnish sources of institutions, identities, values and interests within localities. Not all of the

consequences from nation-states trace directly to these infrastructures. Nonetheless, taking them and their influences into account is a critical starting point to any cross-national comparison of local agency.

First, consider the external elements of these infrastructures. The most immediately apparent are the governmental and political institutions of the nation-state. National legislation works as a set of institutions to frame conditions for all manner of local actors, from households that benefit from subsidies or tax breaks for housing to local officials who set up parapublic companies. National systems of parties, electoral competition and organized interests incorporate local political competition in varying ways into wider frameworks of parties and organized interests. In developing country contexts initiatives of national states have often proven at least as central to local action. Political democratization has often been crucial to the development of formal authorities for urban governance, and national patterns of political clientelism have often dictated opportunities for local agency (e.g., Evans, 2001). These policies also work through incentives for households and firms, and through influences on interlocal competition throughout a national territory (cf. Sellers, 2002b).

Alongside these political elements, the infrastructures of economic institutions embedded at the national level have received little attention from comparative students of urban governance and politics. Yet studies of urban political economy within the United States and other countries repeatedly point to the importance of economics as well as politics (e.g., Stone, 1989). Comparative studies of capitalism point increasingly to national differences in these institutions. Analyzing variations across the developed world, Hall and Soskice (2001) argue that the pursuit of comparative advantages in the

global economy has reinforced rather than undermined these contrasts.   In their account, the "liberal" market economies exemplified by the United States contrast with the "coordinated" market systems like that of Germany in ways that extend far beyond pluralist and corporatist institutions for representation of business and labor in public policy. National institutions for industrial relations, corporate finance, systems of professions and technical expertise all differ in interrelated ways. In developing countries, analysts of urban governance have quickly recognized the importance of national economic institutions as well as relations with the global economy (e.g., Evans, 2001; Indergaard, 2003; Wu, 2003).

Countries also have social and cultural dimensions. Even as these elements constitute part of the fabric of everyday life and governance within cities, local identities, perceptions and norms often nest in wider national practices. Civil society, defined as a realm of associational life and institutions beyond the state or the realm of firms, furnishes a clear example. As Skocpol and her colleagues have shown, local civic association in the United States has often depended on organization and diffusion on the national scale (Skocpol et al 2001).   A sociological or anthropological variety of the new institutionalism would also point to identification with a national community as part of the institutional infrastructure of governance (Steinmetz, 2000). Even beyond the formal institutions of the nation-state and national politics, national media, languages, organized interests, and elites frequently bind urban politics into the common concerns of a society As Lamont's cross-national comparisons of the world of urban middle class and working class men in France and the United States show in fascinating detail (1992; 2000),

national cultural contrasts remain rooted in the everyday life of different developed societies.

Accounts of local agency can only be convincing once they have sorted out the full dimensions and dynamics of national influences. Even works that have elaborated sophisticated understandings of the ways that national and other supralocal governments can support or constrain localities, such as Savitch and Kantor (Savitch, Kantor and Vicari, 1995; Savitch and Kantor, 2002), neglect the numerous ways that national institutions are also at work *within* localities. Such nationally embedded institutions as the rules of local government systems also shape local politics within communities. Most recently, the UDITE study confirms a long series of findings that have pointed to the crucial role of rules for executive-legislative relations, local elections, and local administration (Mouritzen and Svara, 2002). National political parties and organized interests often furnish the institutional means for governance of and political contestation over local issues. Local actors may mobilize these organizations around agendas that bear various relations to their agendas in national arenas. French Socialist mayors, for instance, have sometimes stressed social equity and other times emphasized economic development. In either instance, they have drawn on both the local and the national resources their party has made available.

In ways that have rarely been investigated, national economic institutions are also partly local in character. These differences have often made state-society relations or even the operation and incentives of firms themselves quite different at the urban level under different forms of capitalism (Culpepper, 2001; Sellers 2002a, 2002b; cf. DiGaetano and Strom, 2003). Even among developed capitalist economies, these

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national differences impose conditions in the international marketplace among cities for firms and residents that existing analyses (e.g., Savitch and Kantor, 2002) have rarely been scrutinized.

Important dimensions of national and regional cultures are also situated within localities. National patterns of political participation, for instance, reside largely in relations with local political organizations or local participation in movements. Even more generally, the lifestyles and identities that make up a national culture are by and large patterns of everyday life. These patterns thus play out in the urban regions where most people live. Studies focused on this local level have generally succeeded best in analyzing the relations between cultural characteristics like social capital and politics (e.g., Putnam, 1993; Varshney, 2002).

Infrastructures of governance embedded at higher levels, then, play a role both in the external, vertical support or constraints imposed from above and in the exercise of local agency and even the constitution of local actors themselves (Table 1). These infrastructures themselves, it should also be pointed out, do not exhaust the influences of the national in local politics. In particular, the physical and social structure of cities themselves usually reflects decades or even centuries of accumulated influence from multiple levels. Over time, numerous political, economic, social, cultural and other influences have contributed to widespread urban sprawl in the United States but comparatively compact cities in Germany. The resultant urban structures themselves have important consequences for policy and interests. Yet even if precisely the same system of institutions and culture were somehow imposed on a U.S. and a German city, the Germans who lived around a compact urban center would have more reason to want

amenities in their downtown than the Americans who lived too far away to reach the downtown easily.

[insert Table 1 about here]

The geographic consequences of countries, like the local dimensions of society and culture, need to be distinguished from national infrastructures themselves. So must the institutions that local coalitions themselves build at the local level in pursuit of urban regimes or more limited formations (Stone, 1989). Although this distinction between local and supralocal is not always an easy one to make, areas of local discretion generally belong to local governance rather than to national structures. At the same time, some activities may simultaneously combine urban governance with the construction or reconstruction of national infrastructures for that governance. Initiatives on the part of individual cities to secure, say, grants or legal authorizations from higher level governments represent a form of urban governance that effectively restructures the institutional conditions imposed from above.

Although infrastructures for urban governance in federal systems often nest more at the level of intermediate governments between the national and the urban, this has rarely prevented the emergence of consistent national patterns of institutions (Sellers, 2003a; 2003b; 2003c). Similarly, national patterns have adapted to the supranational infrastructures of the European Union in ways that have maintained their centrality (Le Galès, 2002; Wollmann, 2002). In a world in which politics and governance are not confined to national arenas and institutions, comparative urban studies that take these infrastructures into account offer the prospect of significant advances in cross-national analysis.

Nested Analysis and the Decentered State: Comparative Urban Politics as an Approach to Comparative Politics

The advantages of an urban focus over nation-centered ones go well beyond the recognized methodological virtues of improved explanatory leverage and larger numbers of cases (Snyder, 2000; Linz and de Miguel, 1966). The key to such an analysis lies in the ability of comparative urbanists to move beyond traditional hierarchical models of the state, public policy and political organization toward new accounts that take the possibilities of local agency and local structural influences into account. By probing how the national nests in the local as well as how the local nests in the national, comparative urban analysis can ultimately elaborate a multilevel approach politics and governance that remains beyond the reach of traditional cross-national comparison.

The challenge such an account would pose for received understandings of the comparative field should not be underestimated. As any browse through the current textbooks in comparative politics will show, hierarchical national institutions, policies and organizations still predominate there. Principal-agent models or accounts of implementation continue to characterize decentralization as a matter of delegation from above, and implementation as one of inducing the locals to do the bidding of higher level officials (cf. Tommasi and Weinschelbaum, 2002). As late as twenty years ago, this global skepticism about the possibilities for urban politics was widespread among urbanists themselves (Castells, 1983). Even DiGaetano and Strom, in a recent comparative analysis of urban governance (2003), transported concepts developed at the national level almost wholesale to analysis of the local level.

If the local were only a microcosm of wider macrocosms that have already been analyzed from above, then local politics would only be a minor curiosity for comparativists. Yet we know that a great deal of governance and politics goes on at the urban level. Much of it goes beyond carrying out the wishes of others. The conflicts, coordination and initiatives there can be sources of governance and politics at higher levels as well as reflect influences from above. Just as the study of common property resources has illuminated the exercise of local agency in mostly rural contexts (Ostrom, 1990; Ostrom *et al.*, 2000), cross-national analysis of urban politics and governance has the potential to develop models of how these multilevel processes work. The source of this potential lies in the ability of comparative urban analysis to account for distinctive logics of multilevel governance that arise among cities, urban leaders and urban citizens.

Work in the field has increasingly coalesced around analysis of how, and under what circumstances, local politics and governance have ordered both local choices and higher level policies around local objectives. The result is a model that regards local actors as principals, and hierarchical superiors within the state as potential agents for them. The initiatives at the center of this model of governance represent the initiatives of local elites and activists. They can draw on local knowledge beyond the reach of higher level elites about the problems facing a place and how to solve them. They can weld together policies that often remain disparate at the national level, from housing to social welfare to transportation planning. They can capitalize on local spatial proximities and on interests linked to local patterns of everyday life within the region. Through systematic advocacy, they can gain the support of higher level officials and political organizations at wider scales. Over time, increasing returns to a city and its citizens can

grow out of these local initiatives (Arthur, 1994; Woodlief, 1998; Pierson, 2000). Local policies that improve the conditions of life in a place can even shift the territorial logics of markets among places in favor of a city or a neighborhood. Favorable local conditions secured from below can lay the foundations for more favorable treatment by policymakers from above. In this way, local actors and leaders can themselves assume the role of principals in acting on behalf of their city. The nation-state, beneath its ordered, rationalized appearance from above, emerges as archipelago of local and regional logics ordered from below. In each urban setting, these logics link to relations and coalition-building within civil society. A similar model could analyze transnational labor or social movement organization and strategy through the lens of local activism and mobilization in urban regions.

Looking to this local agency often casts national political and economic institutions in a different light from previous nation-centered accounts. The corporatist institutions of the coordinated economy, for instance, often operate very differently at the level of urban governance than at higher levels. At the national or sectoral level corporatism incorporates participation by peak associations of business and labor, while liberal pluralist or market economies do not. Yet scrutiny of local governance points to much greater mobilization of local business around urban governance in the liberal market economy of the United States latter than in the coordinated economy of Germany (Sellers, 2002a, 308-314; Strom, 1999). Similarly, decentralized local government powers play a crucial role in Social Democratic welfare states but have been less critical to Christian Democratic or liberal ones (Sellers 2003b; Pierre, 1999). In regions of the developing world like Latin America, national processes of democratization have received part of

their impetus from urban movements and local officials, and in turn led to further transformations in local governance (Dietz and Myers, 2001).

In the sociocultural domain, this potential for urban research is at least as great. Not only does research on national and ethnic identifications typically shows that strong local or regional identification can coexist easily with national or even supranational identification (e.g., Marks and Hooghe 2001, pp. 51-67). The international surveys led by Clark (2000), bolstered by parallel national results in work by Inglehart (1997), confirm a general spread of similar local cultural orientations in centers of highly educated professionals across the developed world. Many such groups as well as the political activities in which they participate tend to cluster together in certain urban settings, such as centers of education and culture. It is difficult understand the origins and development of Green parties, for example, without cross-national local comparisons that scrutinize the evolution of parties at the urban level in diverse national contexts (Sellers, 1998, 2002a).

In addition, an urban focus enables a view of important, territorially distinct patterns of governance beyond cities that a nation-centered one could not address. For instance, a multidisciplinary literature has pointed to regions as important units in the global economy (Storper, 1997; Herrigel, 1996; Barnes and Ledebur, 1997). Urban areas often stand at the center of these regional settings for agglomerations of production, applied innovation and service provision. For the biggest cities like Tokyo, there is often little distinction between the two. Relations between localities, including connections within domestic economies as well as those with translocal elements, are also virtually impossible to analyze solely by means of national units. A similar logic favors

transnational urban comparison in other areas where lateral relations among localities have grown in significance around the world, such as in metropolitan governance.

Finally, comparative urban analysis furnishes an especially useful approach for examining how the infrastructures of local governance can themselves be reshaped through agency from below. At the level of individual cities, comparison can illuminate how local actors can take advantage of lobbying, clientelism or discretion to change the terms an infrastructure imposes (cf. Sellers 2002a, Ch. 3). Similarly, analysis of collective representation of urban regions or parts of them can furnish the basis for a comparative reconsideration of the sources of policy at the national level. It seems likely, for instance, that the urbanization that has been under way for decades in the developing world has had at least as transformative an impact on national politics and national policy as the earlier urbanization of developed countries (Sellers, 2003; Lipset and Rokkan 1967). Similarly, the expansion of exurban or suburban settlement throughout the developed world poses political challenges at the national level that have seldom been scrutinized closely outside the United States (Mollenkopf 1983).

A wealth of opportunities thus exist for comparative urban politics to contribute to multilevel comparative analysis. In the theory of international relations, accounts that look to regimes, institutions and governance arrangements above the level of national states have increasingly challenged realist and intergovernmental accounts that look to nation-states as the fundamental units of analysis. Students of comparative urban politics need to view their subject as the basis for a similar challenge to nation-centered accounts of governance.

Imperatives for Transnational Urban Analyses

Urban analysis has the potential to alter our understandings of the national. The perspective of urban regions can provide new insights into the operation of national as well as transnational institutions, policies and politics, and especially into the role of agency and structure at the urban level. Yet serious transnational research requires more attention than urbanists have generally given to the national and intermediate levels of analysis that mediate between the local and transnational levels. To realize the inherent potential will require a new analytical sophistication in addressing the relation between the urban and governance at other levels, and methodological strategies that enable case studies and other evidence to be brought to bear more effectively on this question.

Analytical Imperatives

Of critical importance in the realization of this potential are sharper formulations of the distinctive view that urban politics and governance offers of national processes and influences. Several imperatives should guide comparative urbanists in developing these:

Look for local agency and local structures as sources of the substantive content of and the political influences on governance. Beyond describing "models," or "modes," or "institutional milieux" of urban governance (cf. Pierre 1999; DiGaetano and Klemanski 2000; DiGaetano and Strom 2003), comparative urban analysis should distinguish what is local about them. Separating this out requires clear differentiations of what is local from what is supralocal. In a wide range of circumstances, from implementation of national policies within cities to the operation of national parties and movements, where both supralocal and local elements are essential to local choices. A conception of wider national institutions as part of the infrastructure of urban governance offers the opportunity to better accommodate both elements. National political parties like the

German Greens, for instance, may pursue parallel local objectives in cities across the country. Often such a nationwide strategy goes beyond the mandates of legislation and policies at the national level or even the aims of national party leaders. In this, as in many other instances, national infrastructures shape but do not determine the substance of local choices.

At the same time, more rigorous inquiry requires clearer distinctions between local agency and local or national institutions. If either local or national institutions remain only "modes," "models" or "milieux," then it remains difficult to separate out the agency in institution-building, in institutional resources or constraints, or in challenges to institutions. A conception of institutions as an infrastructure enables a clearer view of how local agents both help to construct them and operate under their influence.

Consider second- and third-order as well as direct effects from national as well as local influences. One of the most important tasks to develop an understanding of influences at different levels is to take account of the complexity of influences from below as well as from above. Often this influence plays out through a chain of inter-related causes. If the citizens of urban regions in Germany often accept governmental support for public transit and restrictions on private vehicular traffic more than counterparts in the United States, the reasons amount to much more than a difference in local preferences. A full explanation must look to how tax or price policies at wider scales give incentives or disincentives to use private automobiles, and even to how current urban forms reflect the accumulated legacies from centuries of planning and policy. By the same token, the choice of a national or state government to situate an airport or a high tech facility in a city, or to direct subsidies to urban regeneration there,

seldom stems solely from factors external to the city. In this manner, local initiatives can also indirectly affect actions from above. Even beyond the opportunities for localities to exert influence through individual representation or collective mobilization, local measures can simply improve the prospects that investments from above will bring added returns.

Separate out effects from translocal influences at different scales. The global economy as well as other transnational processes always nest in an entire array of processes at national and regional levels beyond the reaches of urban regions. The national political economy, for instance, may either reinforce or modify the incentives for urban areas to compete with other localities in transnational markets. An urban perspective typically enables the clearest view of the interplay between urban actors and those at higher levels. For an individual researcher, however, the local viewpoint inherent in urban analysis may limit the possibilities for simultaneous research at multiple levels. In such instances it becomes all the more important to combine primary local research with secondary comparative research at other scales (cf. Sellers, 2002a, Ch. 3).

Separate out governance and politics from other spatial and social processes within urban regions.   At the same time, governance at the urban level nests within the physical structures, social relations and cultural practices embedded in urban regions. What might look from the national perspective like the initiative of local leaders or movements alone is usually at least partly the product of structural conditions within a locality. Even when the construction of governing coalitions or regimes within cities necessitates local entrepreneurship, local leaders and activists may undertake very different forms of leadership depending on whether local constituencies consist of a university or a

manufacturing industry (Sellers 2002a), a prosperous or a declining business community (Savitch and Kantor, 2002), a large or a small disadvantaged ethnic minority community (Sellers, 1996), or a dispersed or a concentrated pattern of settlement (Sellers, 1999).

Take temporality seriously. Policy choices made from above frequently manifest their influence through cumulative effects from the diverse policies of a dominant national party or coalition during the period it holds office. Especially at the local level that choices from below most directly affect, these local decisions often attain their full significance only through consistent patterns that emerge over longer periods of time. Consider local strategies of downtown economic development, or the difference that surburban growth management makes. In policy and politics as well as in markets, increasing returns from earlier decisions may be even more crucial to the logics of urban governance than they are to policy at higher levels (cf. Arthur, 1994; Woodlief, 1998; Pierson, 2000). Urban politics and governance are also often less structured through formal policy and hierarchically organized interests than their counterparts at higher levels. As a result, the consequences of local decisions for land uses and patterns of everyday life can be even more decisive for subsequent choices. Even as national taxes may come and go, a new highway or a shopping mall permanently alters the landscape and the lifestyles of local citizens.

Methodological Consequences: Taking Advantage of Urban Units of Analysis

These analytical imperatives also have implications for the methodology of international comparative studies. To lay more solid analytical groundwork for this area of inquiry requires self-conscious attention to designs that can test the national as well as the transnational and local as influences on the urban. Above all, multilevel analysis

requires multilevel research designs. Taking urban regions or parts of them as cases furnishes an important means of focusing analysis on the transnational and national as well as the local levels.

The well-established literature on case design in comparative politics has already pointed the methodological virtues inherent taking subnational cases as units of analysis. For a better understanding of transnational processes and urban politics, the rationale goes beyond this to a matter of theoretical necessity. The analytical imperatives of analyses that are at once transnational, national and local necessitate designs attentive to possible influnces at all three levels.

On the one hand, choices of local cases provides a means of *sampling* in relation to the transnational process to be examined as well as variables at both national and subnational levels. At the same time, choices among cases enable the design to *control* for variables the analysis excludes. In large measure, control and sampling are bound up together. In the classic manner illuminated by Mill's methods of difference and similarity (cf. Przeworski and Teune 1970), sampling local cases by national, local or transnational variables provides an equivalent to controls in an experiment. By holding one variable constant between two cases, one can examine the difference others make.

For the transnational objects of comparative urban research, an ideal case selection should furnish a full view of their dimensions. Thus, in a cross-national comparative analysis of high-tech and service activities and their politics, Sellers (2002a) focused on mid-size enters of educational and administrative services in three advanced industrial countries. Similarly, in their inquiry into large urban centers in the international

marketplace, Savitch and Kantor (2002) drew on big cities across North America and Europe.

By sampling variations along key dimensions of a transnational variable, the design can control for different values of it. In Sellers's study, for instance, three of the urban economies in the sample retained legacies from sizeable manufacturing sectors alongside services, while the others did not. Sampling thus enabled a closer examination of the difference that a service-based urban economy made by comparison with a manufacturing base. Similarly, to analyze the responses of large central cities in relation to international markets, Kantor and Savitch selected both cities that profited from market advantages and cities that had undergone relative declines.

At the same time, case selection furnishes one means to assess the difference the nations make. Without attention to the consequences of national political, economic, social and cultural influences, comparativists can scarcely hope to understand what is truly transnational or what is truly local. For instance, in transnational analyses of urban regions in relation to national and international political economies, the sampling should reflect variants in national capitalisms as well as along the lines of transnational economic variables. Sellers, for instance, samples the difference between service and manufacturing centers in a coordinated market economy, a liberal market economy and one intermediate case. Although Savich and Kantor do not test as wide a variety of national political economies, they do compare cities with weaker and stronger positions in interurban markets in most of the countries they examine. For transnational studies of urban governance and politics, national variations in local government forms are also crucial variables to test. (Cf. Sellers 2003a; 2003b; 2003c).

Finally, just as in domestic comparative studies, sampling can generate analytical leverage on local variations in urban settings and even local agency itself. To assess the difference that local political parties made as elements in urban governance, for instance, it makes sense to cities with various trajectories of local political control by the right as well as the left within each country. In Sellers' study (2002a, Chapter 4), party control helped to explain some of the differences in local choices, but did so in different ways in each country. Governance in German as well as U.S. cities produced largely similar local policies regardless of party control. In different French cities Left coalitions carried out progressive and regressive local agendas.

Similarly, case selection often serves to focus comparative analysis on a range of parallel cases. A comparison between policy processes in mega-cities and bedroom communities, for instance, would make little more sense than a comparison between macro-economic policy and local land use control. To assure basic similarities among cases, comparative designs usually select form a range of similar cities, such as capital cities (Dietz and Myers), mid-size cities (e.g., Sellers) or massive urban centers (e.g., Savitch and Kantor). Doing so need not limit how far the results can be generalized. It does require that any generalization proceed from explicit consideration of how far other types of cities resemble those studied.

Even when similar urban regions furnish the unit of comparison, separating out the variety of processes that confront cities can still pose problems of control. The difficulties are in many ways most severe for the biggest urban regions. Beyond their role in global finance or corporate headquarters, massive urban regions like New York or Tokyo contain some of the largest manufacturing sectors, major aggregations of

educational and high-tech services, leading tourist installations, and large migrant or immigrant populations. The diversity of these influences makes it difficult to single out convincingly how any element of the economy has influenced local politics and policy. Here, breaking down the units of analysis even beyond the urban level can enable greater analytical purchase on the problem. Within global urban regions, for instance, case selection can focus on a range of more limited territorial areas or on various specific sectors of the economy.

Even with the most careful attention and a sizeable number of cases, case selection rarely suffices by itself as a means of sampling and controls.   For this reason, comparative urban research on urban governance has generally employed such techniques as Boolean analysis (Ragin, 1987), or process tracing (Bennett and George, 1997) in the analysis of cases. With the assembly of sufficiently comprehensive cross-nationally comparable data on urban regions, as in the Fiscal Austerity and Urban Innovation Project or the recently launched International Metropolitan Observatory Project, it should ultimately become possible to move beyond individual cases toward statistical testing of specific hypotheses about urban governance and politics (cf. Sellers, 1998; Clark and Hoffmann-Martinot, 1998). This more comprehensive cross-national analysis needs to be deployed in tandem with more intensive scrutiny of individual cases. Case studies can illuminate statistics, which in turn further test the findings from cases.

Comparative Urban Politics: Paradigmatic or Dependent?

In past eras of intellectual ferment in the study of politics and governance, urban scholarship has often stood at the forefront of discipline-wide innovation. As transnational processes and urbanization predominate more and more around the globe,

new approaches the study of politics and policy are again likely to pass through the study of urban regions. Even more than in the past, the dominant new patterns of settlement, the nodes of the international economy, the emerging forms of sub-national governance, and the transnational political, social and cultural identities of the twenty-first century all center in these settings. For a political science that strives to address the politics that matters most for ordinary citizens, and in particular one attentive to the needs of the powerless, the need to scrutinize politics and governance in cities is all the more compelling.

To grasp its potential, however, the study of comparative urban politics will require much more conscious attention to sophisticated theory-building and the canons of systematic comparative research. Rather than simply import concepts and analyses from comparative politics at the national level, students of comparative urban politics must develop frameworks and analyses that will better address the multilevel reality of politics and governance. Doing so will enable the study of urban politics to reach decisively beyond its origins in insular national literatures, and renew its potential to speak to the wider concerns of political science and related disciplines.

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Figure 1

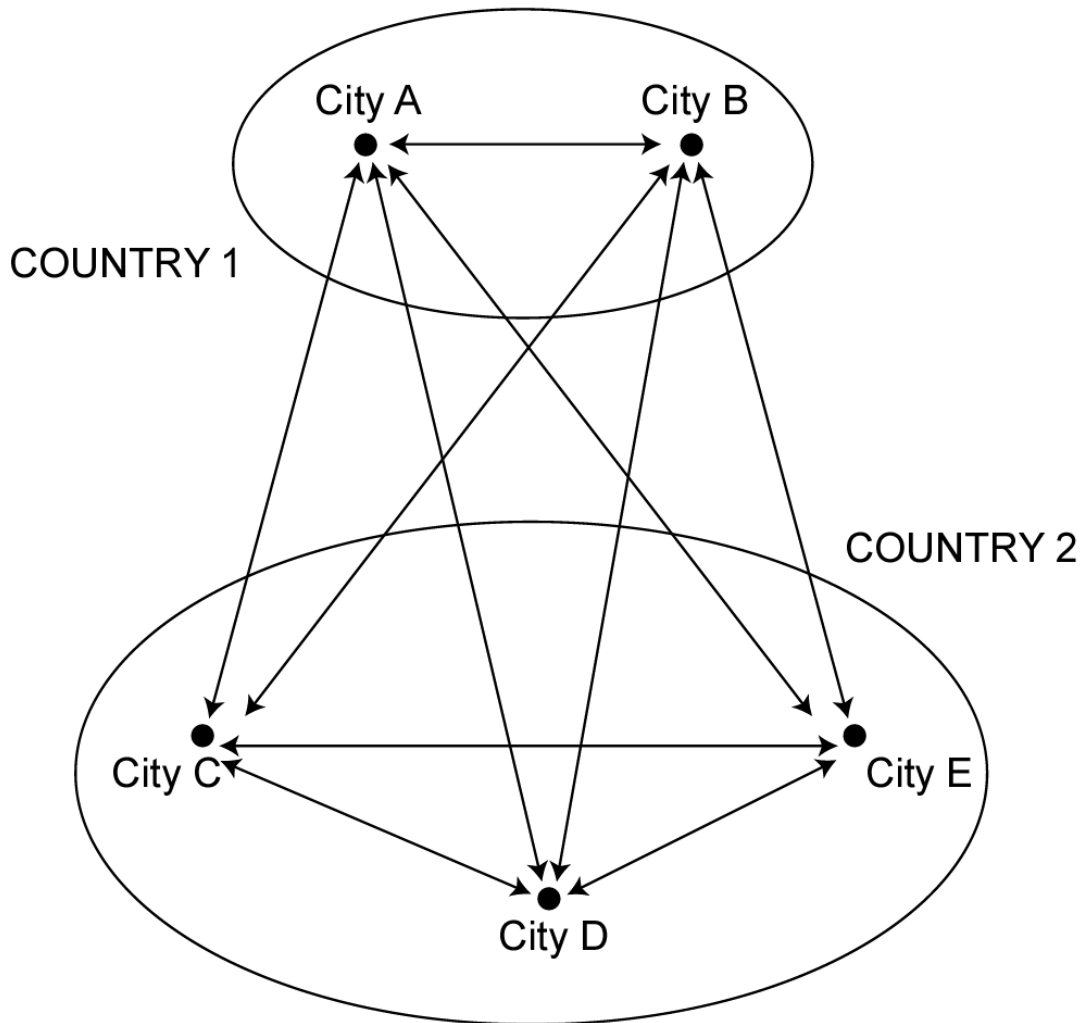## Transnational and Within-Nation Connections

Table 1

The National as an Infrastructure for Urban Politics and Governance

	National	Local
Government and policies	Governmental institutions, policies	Local government systems, policy implementation
Political organization	Organized political interests	Local representatives of organizations, electoral rules
Economic organization	National capitalist institutions	Local economic rules, business structure
Sociocultural elements	National associations, media. Social embedding	Individual and local identities, values, cognitions