HOW TO BUILD A GLOBAL CITY

Recognizing the Symbolic Power of a Global Urban Imagination

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INTRODUCTION

World Urban Forum: Medellin, Colombia, noon.

"So, how do you build it?" My interlocutor, at the time of the interview, is a well-known mayor of an equally well-known city. He is quite honestly and not too sarcastically asking me about the "recipe" for "building a *global city*." Of course, he has his own practice-based opinions and I have my scholarly skepticisms. Can we really determine which "ingredients" make an urban settlement "global" by some measure? Can we combine them according to some written or spoken advice as if they were a ready-made recipe? Can they be put on a "menu" of sorts for city leaders the world over to choose from according to context? Such an attempt would be neither the first nor the last. The answer to "how to build a global city" might make it into a newspaper article, a well-paid speaking engagement at a major international forum, and gather a few retweets on social media. It might even get a book deal like this one, strategically placed on a corner shelf of an airport bookstore, for the jet-setting business-class entrepreneur to summarily skim through on a hop between Hong Kong and Toronto. My interlocutor and I speculate about this over a cold drink at a mass gathering of "urbanists" of all sorts who have flocked to the Colombian city from all corners of the globe. "Powerful stuff," admits my interlocutor. I could have dismissed the query (or perhaps rhetorical question) by my interviewee, but I sensed the question held much truth in its intent—at least for those in a position to shape the direction of urban development in countries around the world. The power of that "stuff" is

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what drove me to write not a recipe book but an account of the ingredients and the chefs that attempt to make cities "global"—a global urban elite, so to speak.

The *global city* is not a new subject in academia. In fact, some early peer reviewers of material for this book amply questioned the need for yet another lengthy tome about a possibly tired concept such as that of the global city more than three decades after it was widely popularized by the homonymous book by Dutch-American political economist Saskia Sassen. While one could even contend the modern scholarship about global cities has nearly a century's worth of lineage, we could also argue that the role of cities as turnstiles of global connections goes deep into the history of civilization. Some of the notions that I will discuss—and go in search of in three cities—have in fact accompanied humanity for as long as we have built stable marketplaces surrounded by dwellings and allowed them to link with each other in the exchange of goods, people, and ideas. Some have even argued that it is in fact dangerous to continue portraying a concept that has contributed to ever-greater inequality in an unevenly urbanizing world prey to capitalist ebbs and flows. So why should we continue to seek more knowledge about an old subject? The idea of the global city seems anything but tired, even when confronted by a sudden halt in global flows as at the outset of 2020 or indeed the deep economic recessions throughout the past century. In a moment of crisis, and in the wake of continuing deep inequality, understanding the way we build cities to be globally intertwined might matter fundamentally as much as for those that do so as for those that seek to redress their inequalities. The goal of this book, then, is to point out the complexity of the ideas (plural not singular) that underpin the continued success of the global city and of those who put them into practice. These are powerful ideas, often wielded by powerful people, and thus I would contend they still merit a discussion of how their power works. In the tradition of political science, as Rod Rhodes put it, we might still need to get "up close and personal" with the global urban elite and its global urban imagination.

In particular, I went in search of the ways in which twenty concepts underpinning the way we speak of and imagine the global city in academia are used and connected in the urban development of three places with distinct global aspirations. These are the stories of Singapore in Southeast Asia, Sydney in Australia, and Dubai in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). In recounting these stories I aim not to dismiss the importance of dwelling and the lived experiences of those that inhabit each city, often with little voice and capacity to shape its form. Rather, it is explicitly with an eye toward the impact of ideas on the lives of these "cityzens" that I unpack the (symbolic) power and politics of the global city and the elites that underpin it. The result is a somewhat systematic collection, with some degree of correlation analysis, of 170 semistructured interviews conducted between 2009 and 2018 and also a large number of ethnographic vignettes, doc-

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ument and policy analysis, as well as accounts of some events which have shaped the global orientation of these three places in the last half century.

This is not a work of just structured conversations but also of quiet observation, opportunist querying, and lots of note taking on ideas about the globalization of urban governance that I have scribbled on the side of my own participation in the "symbolic system" of global urbanism. Sydney, Singapore, and Dubai are by all means not apolitical places. From the strongly articulated political feelings that I encountered in the Australian metropolis, to the art of reading in between the lines in the Southeast Asian "Lion City," to the carefulness of critique and quick glances over one's shoulders that characterize these conversations in the Emirate, the debates and contrasts about how and why these cities should globalize are not always free from retaliation, stigmas, and professional implications. Some level of discretion is advisable. Because of these and other practical fieldwork necessities, behind the glossy data and the charts that pepper this book are scribbled pages in a notebook, not neat field reports or a library of tape recordings. This approach leaves much to the author's own interpretation and near on-the-spot filing (as each interview was then directly coded anonymously in a spreadsheet right after most conversations), which requires much contextual knowledge but is also subject to my own inevitable biases as a scholar and practitioner of urban governance. For this I assume all of the blame and ask for a degree of trust from the reader. Throughout the book, data are represented by narratives or are visualized either through graphs or infographics for the sake of readability and accessibility of the discussion to a wider-than-academic public, with perhaps some apologies for the more methodologically minded readers, and of course offer an open solicitation for more technical engagement beyond the confines of the book.

To be clear, the goal here is not to test how much impact academic-speak about the global city has in practice. Nor is it about tallying the most popular ideas, finding the most well-known scholars, or drawing a strict line between the urban researcher as thinker and the urban practitioner as doer. Practically, in fact, I account for many scholars as part of that very global urban elite in some ways at least. Rather, the main aim of this book is very much one of capturing the complexity of what it means to be (and become) "global" for a city beyond a trope, that of *the* "global city," and into its subtleties, toward a more refined understanding of the (global) urban imagination that drives the development of places like Singapore, Sydney, and Dubai. I take a selection of the key ideas supporting global city research and juxtapose them in a disaggregated way against the ways key elites are shaping urban development, from planners and architects to government officers and corporate managers or, indeed, local academics, to guide the investigation of the way we speak of and imagine global cities. The aim of this approach is to encourage a greater appreciation for what unites practice and theory and academic

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tradition, and to encourage the circulation of ideas as to the globalization of urban settlements, as I advocate for a progressive and yet engaged agenda for global city thinking. In that, this is a book of conversations and about conversations, sprinkled with snapshots of viewpoints about the urban development, and indeed the global urban imagination, of a trio of cities few would dispute are now relatively global presences onto the world atlas.

My inquiry started with curiosity as to the ways elites speak of global cities, as my influential interlocutor did, and their alignment (or not) with the scholarship behind this concept. It eventually evolved, as several chapters of the book seek to illustrate, into an inquiry into the imagination that stands behind this global city-speak and diverse urban aspirations that bolster it. Imagination, the (symbolic) power to cast and recast its orientation, and the future (of cities as well as of globalization) are key themes of the book. They emerge jointly, in my view, as that field of the possible where a more progressive and cosmopolitan way of thinking about the "global" in the "global city" can be found, fought, and socialized not just by rejecting the elites altogether but by taking a proactive stance in driving their focus by speaking a common language and promoting a different kind of urban aspirations. This is, I am sure, likely a minority view of action research and scholarly activism. Yet it is also, as I stress across the book, no critique or dismissal of the power of other forms of activism. Rather, perhaps owing to my bias toward diplomacy and negotiation as forms of interventions into politics, my proposal for a cosmopolitan, progressive, and engaged scholarship of the global city should be read as but a viable alternative to these at the very least.

Undoubtedly, the events of 2020 and the global health crisis that ground to a halt many of the globalizing connections spotlighted in this book pose a fundamental question as to whether the "recipes" I discussed in Singapore, Sydney, and Dubai could really work in the long run. Dubai's viability as a global hub is yet again into question, while Sydney and Singapore confront hard locked-down economic downturns and deep questions about their dependence on global circuits of capital. This work, fortunately or unfortunately, was completed between the last few months of 2019 and the very outset of the crisis. To that extent, I chose neither to alter the heart of the study, the subject of the vignettes and experiences narrated here, nor to hazard far-fetched predictions on the future of cities as we know it in a now so often invoked "post-COVID world." I hope this exercise in understanding global city-speak and imagination, and in accounting for the symbolic power of an idea that charted much of the trajectory of urban development in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, will serve as both a lesson as to how we got here and a more nuanced guide for where we might go next. In that spirit, I invite you to jump in with feet on the ground in Singapore, on an evening in the early 2000s.

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SPEAKING OF GLOBAL CITIES

World Cities Summit: Singapore, 6:00 p.m.

Every other year since 2010, the World Cities Summit has taken place in Singapore's iconic Marina Bay Le Sands, where an international plethora of urban development dignitaries gather to celebrate and share ideas about the prosperity of cities. Awarding a "world city prize" in the name of Singapore's founder, Lee Kuan Yew, the event embodies a now well-established way of looking at a fast-urbanizing planet via the lens of "world" or "global" cities: places that are highly connected across national boundaries, turnstiles of global logistics, and home to cosmopolitan societies. The summit is an apt chance to meet these cities in person. This year the awardee is the Colombian city of Medellin, represented by characteristic shots of its overbuilt hilly *barrios* and the Metrocable gondola lift system towering above the city's suburbs. The Colombian metropolis is joined at the summit by a number of honorable mentions including Toronto and Sydney, recognized as "facilitat[ing] the sharing of best practices in urban solutions that are easily replicable across cities."[1] These are widely recognized as "global" cities: focal points of globalization in an age where our planet is increasingly urbanized.

Of course, having researched the term "global city" and its characteristics for quite some time in my career, I remain healthily skeptical of what this global city-speak conveys. Yet I am also captured by the grip this idea has had on the built environment profession at large over the past few decades.[2] Perhaps most famously depicted in British geographer Sir Peter Hall's *The World Cities* (1966) and in Saskia Sassen's *The Global City* (1991), it is in a way scholarly jargon

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that has gone mainstream—or at least it is a clear bridge between the dusty pages of academic volumes and the shiny leaflets of elite urbanist gatherings. In chatting with some of the summit participants, I am assured this is not just branding. "We take these urban theories very seriously," one of three Singaporean ministers present at the ceremony tells me during the event's reception. There is a complex relation between the way the academe conceives of these concepts and the shape they take in the words, deeds, and aspirations of those who build these very cities. "University-speak may be quite incomprehensible, but the ideas of global city making, of a global form of urban practice . . . , well those are there to be seen all over the world," continues an Australian development specialist contracted to the City of Sydney who is enjoying a glass of wine with us. What we are talking about here is the sense that the global city, as an idea, conveys more than a simple slogan. Embedded in it are numerous assumptions about the way cities ought to be and, in fact, *are* built in the twenty-first century. This is, in short, a "global urban" imagination.[3]

A few minutes later, I am in a quiet corner of the hotel, scribbling some of these thoughts in my small field notepad, only to notice a colleague nearby who is intent on the same act and subtly giving away her academic identity, as only scholars do when they see each other in the field. Later identifying herself as a fellow doctoral researcher hailing from an Ivy League institution, she introduces herself and admits to overhearing part of my earlier conversation. In an act of academic comradery, she dismissingly whispers to me, "Oh these people." The summit, like many other now-well-established events in what is perhaps a regular conference-based marketplace of global city ideas, is ripe with citable quotes and signifiers for an urban researcher trying to make sense of cities in a time when the lives of urban dwellers all over the planet are not just interconnected by globalization but often decided by elites. It is a prime representation of the political economy of a powerful idea such as that of the global city and its grip on the way major contemporary hubs of globalization like Singapore are being developed and governed.

Except that the global city is not just an idea. Perhaps more correctly it is a field of urban imagination that gazes globally rather than locally. In a sense, as Donald McNeill fittingly put it, it is a more of a "genre writing" represented by the likes of Hall, Sassen, and many others, and one that can demonstrate more than a century of scholarly lineage.[4] To many in urban studies (across planning, geography, and architecture, for instance), it is directly associated with the social and spatial reconfiguring of internationally connected places, and of course their inequalities. It evokes a sense not just of turnstiles of the world's economy, as Hall put it in his 1966 book, but also of the socioeconomic implication of globalization on cities, with its polarization between the haves and the

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have-nots—the crux of Sassen's 1991 *The Global City*. From this point of view, the global city is a portmanteau that blends into an easily graspable signifier, a multiplicity of meanings and concepts about the logics and implications of globalization on places around the world. It is a shorthand for a complex global urban imagination that spurs not only a global sense of place but also its underlying debates about the desirability and complication of cities becoming globalized. This is not just theory or popular writing: its implications and, I wonder in Singapore, teachings are continually translated in the tangible practices that politicians, developers, planners, and many others perform to quite literally build the urban hubs of our planet. If we take this beyond the often-inscrutable parlance of the academe, the global city might in a larger sense stand as one of the most successful urbanist genre writings of our recent times. It is an umbrella concept for a body of meaning transformed and transferred by the political economy of global urbanism, which becomes tangible buildings and everyday habits for millions of people living in these cities. In this sense, the global imagination of the global city is very practically intertwined with life on its streets.

Of course, from a more critical scholarly viewpoint, one could easily shrug off the value of this event in particular, and of the whole circuit of global city-speak in general, as many have repeatedly done for at least the past two decades. Yet the facts at hand might eventually force us to engage with this business and its elites if we want to bridge beyond the walls of research and academic debate. This does not necessarily mean buying into those elites. Rather, it is about understanding the imagination and aspirations that underpin their operation so that we may better advocate for progressive reforms.

The imprint of global urbanism has a distinct infrastructural presence across continents and a sizable reality in global markets. Millions of people traverse continents to and from these cities, trillions of dollars are rerouted via their financial and logistic hubs, and their presence plays a central role in how we imagine places far across the globe. "We build global cities," my above-mentioned Singaporean interlocutor tells me at the summit, "so how could you possibly do away with the concept? Just look outside!" In this sense, the words of my developer friend are not too different from something that Peter Hall himself told me at the beginning of my research journey. While I was sitting among the piles of books and scribbled manuscripts in his Ealing studio in 2009, he stressed: "the point is to take this thing of the world city seriously," because one cannot ignore its existence in that, he reminded me, it is "made of money, bricks, and aspirations." I henceforth ventured in those three directions on the world cities map, to get a grasp on the political economy of global city-speaking more specifically, and in search of the money, bricks, and aspirations embedded in the politics of global urbanism more generally. The Singaporean episode that I recount

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above, as well as many others I report in the pages of the book, is perhaps not statistically significant or universally binding in its theoretical implications. What it represents quite fittingly, however, is a set of three interconnected features of this global urban imagination I aim to illustrate here.

First, that we should not ditch the global city altogether but rather take it as less of a monolithic concept and more of a stand in for a body of meaning of global urban thinking (and research)—a shorthand, as I have defined it above, for that field of urban imagination that gazes globally from a specific place. Albeit contested in scholarly debates, as I note below, this idea holds a powerful status in urban practice and offers a unique gateway into the powers that are shaping the so-called "urban age," whose aspirations shape much of the urban development the world over.[5] In times like these, it becomes paramount, for both the academic and the practitioner involved in shaping globally connected urban centers, to better understand how the global city presents us with a "tactical battleground," as McNeill pointed out in his work on Paris, Sydney, San Francisco, and many other global hubs, where the politics of urbanization take place.[6] Second, that when speaking of global urban practices, whether to advance or criticize them, we must understand this idiom as part of a broader political economy of global urbanism constituted by a system of ideas, gateways, and experts that shape the way our built environment is made the world over. Conversely, and third, that both the scholars that theorize these ideas and the practitioners that use them need to confront the responsibility implied in these ideas: there is an inherent politics of imagining global cities (as concepts and as real lived places) where the translation between research and practice, text and everyday life, author and object, needs much closer attention.

As I argue, the global city and those who are complicit in the construction of global urban imaginations can wield substantial power over the trajectory of urban development. The global city exists objectively, embodied in the globally oriented and internationally influenced infrastructure of these cities, as well as subjectively, in the gestures, habits, and ways of thinking of both urban practitioners and urban dwellers. In this sense, the power of the idea(s) of the global city in modern times is, as I illustrate by borrowing from French political sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's work, a "symbolic" form of power. It wields the capacity to control the social production of distinction, connecting and dividing our imagination of a globalized world and shaping our understanding of the nature of cities. I do so by building on the work of two British urban geographers, Donald McNeill and Tim Bunnell, who, respectively, have been calling for greater attention to the practice of global urbanism and to the importance of urban imaginations and aspirations in shaping the lives of billions of city dwellers the world over.

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Global Successes and Scholarly Backlashes

In November 2013, after a period of relative anonymity, Dubai captured the front pages of major newspapers after it was chosen by the Bureau of International Expositions to host the 2020 Expo. "We renew our promise to astonish the world," pledged Dubai's ruler Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum.[7] Commentators discussed whether Dubai might be "back" on the global scene and ready to "wow the world" once again through its futuristic urbanist plans to host the event under the "biggest souk in history."[8] The announcement—and the grandiose plans for a 438-hectare *souk* (market) structure joining Dubai, its key regional port of Jebel Ali, the new Al Maktoum International Airport, and neighboring Abu Dhabi—sparked renewed interest in the global "return" of Dubai after the crisis of the past years. Until then, anyone who had listened to the predominant narrative on the subject could have easily assumed that Dubai had sunk into the sands of the Emirates like a modern-day Atlantis, crumbled into its ambitious project and vexed by the never-ending aftershocks of the 2008 global financial crisis.[9]

At the same time, Sydney was making headlines as it reasserted its primacy among global city success stories. For a decade now, the Australian city had consistently been in the spotlight of the global media, which regularly report it at the top of a variety of livability, quality of life, and cultural rankings. In November 2013, Sydney was once again named as one of the best city "brands," where it ranked behind only London on a proclaimed "best city" pedestal, while also making its traditional appearance at the top of widely read annual lists like those of the *Economist* Intelligence Unit, *Monocle*, Conde Nast, and the *Financial Times*. Despite the Australian metropolis's troubles, from coping with the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) to soaring housing prices to challenging social polarization, Sydney seemed to have emerged as a successful and desirable paradigm of the contemporary global city. Even the serious riots of December 2005 in the suburb of Cronulla and the blazing bush fires that threatened its vast suburbs in the very same weeks of shining media successes in November 2013 seemed to have been quickly forgotten as Sydney stood in the global imaginaries as a livable and hospitable "Harbor City."

Parallels to the Singapore story echoed repeatedly in the halls of the World City Summit are blatant here. Growing evidence testifies that a new generation of cities are seen as rising to global renown. Yet scholars, perhaps more than most public commentaries, have yet to accept the seductions of this global city rhetoric. On the one hand, crushed under its entrepreneurial ambitions, the apparent demise of Dubai after the 2008 GFC was for many a memento of the volatility of the global city aspirations of planners and scholars alike.[10] On the other hand, the often unquestioned global success of Sydney and Singapore seems to many a risky smoke

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screen in front of growing polarization concerns in destinations often desirably thought of as modern and livable. Throughout the first decade of the 2000s, the hype and excitement around the global city paradigm sustained the sprawl of a globalizing rhetoric across both urban academia and practice. Many now assert this focus has engendered a problematic worldview of the global city where "categorizing, ranking and labelling cities has become so prominent and so damaging to the future prospects of cities everywhere."[11] Urban studies has witnessed in the past decade at least a pervasive emergence of a strong critique of the global city scholarship of the 1990s and early 2000s. Mostly driven by critical geographers, postcolonial studies, and Global South planners, this backlash against the commercialized popularity and categorizing imperative of the early days of the global city scholarship has made a notable dent in the credibility of the global city as a sound theoretical and practical framing. The debate, at the turn of the 2020s, still echoes in many parts of academia. For instance, some in geographical forums pointed alternatively at the unfair straw-man treatment of the global city tradition, whereas others noted it might be time to put the concept to rest and move on.[12] As Jenny Robinson noted in her plea to ditch the term and focus instead on the "ordinary" realities of cities big and small, the term might be meaningless for the study of wider processes of urbanization and might in fact be politically dangerous for scholars to reiterate a "synecdoche" that perpetuates inequality in the built environment. It plays into the hands of the rich and weakens the space for the voiceless. Rather, scholars should throw their intellectual and political energies behind alternative formulations that can support a very different type of urban politics. Global city scholars are, in short, accomplices to the socioeconomic divisions their scholarship might help uphold. These critiques have echoed regular calls for a shift in focus from the "globalist" bias of the global city to an "ordinary city" research orientation where all cities are seen as "global" or "global(izing)" to some extent, and the "global city" should be discredited as a dangerous "master category."[13] Should we then jettison the global city altogether? Or would this disenfranchise academics even further away from the elites that are driving urban development globally? Can we even distill academia from some of the (local or global) circuits of these elites when scholars themselves occupy positions of privilege and often engage in these very activities? As even anecdotal evidence from the stories above reveals, the global city certainly remains a pervasive presence in urban practice: what, then, are we to make of this scholarly crisis, in which the practical orientation in metropolises the world over seems to have been seduced and taken over by this concept? Are academic concepts in (or against) global city research too exoteric to be graspable or implementable on the ground? Or are academia and built-environment professions fundamentally at odds with each other? As I suggest here, we need to step beyond the assumption that the global city is but a brand.

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More Than a Brand

The global city is perhaps one the most apt instantiation of our globalized, unequal, and often dissonant times. It connects the momentum of urbanization that has been driving more and more people to cities with the planetary connections of globalization that have been recast socioeconomic relations across the globe. If this intersection of global flows and urban processes has historically been embedded even in the rise of premodern metropolises in the East and West such as Carthage, Jerusalem, or Chang'an, the impact of modern-day globalization on cities has but added to such a complex nature and expanded its contradictions. This is made even more disorienting once we realize that today many of these globalizing processes, networks, and ideas are actually made and recast in these very cities, which become at the same time engines and subjects of the global reconfigurations defining the twenty-first century. In the eyes of many, some cities in particular appear to many to be more central than others in articulating these processes. London, Paris, New Delhi, and Hong Kong, to name just a few, are so intertwined with the global imaginary and the networks that shape international affairs that it seems almost futile to name them in addition to their countries of origin. Rather, these cities have emerged as interconnected parts of a global urban geography that has transcended national borders and local specificities. They have become, as Sassen's famed expression summed it up, "global" cities. As Sassen puts it in *The Global City*, if globalization is often characterized by abstract and ephemeral dynamics where time and space are frequently recast, resulting in contradictory effects, we can attempt to "filter" them, she says, through the specifics (e.g., culture, political structures, economic functions, history, and buildings) of those places where they are mainly articulated. And we can identify a specificity of some more prominent or "central" places, if not a hierarchy of cities. The processes they articulate are not free from power and power relations and are hierarchical in themselves in today's economic-centric globalization. I firmly believe that theoretical tenet is as true today as it was in 1991—even though we face a global urban condition that is perhaps drastically different from that of the late 1980s. Intra- and inter-urban inequality, particular articulation of flows, and agglomerating characteristics of place still ring true in the twenty-first century.

Certainly, as the Singaporean anecdote above suggests, the global city is no longer, if in fact it ever was just, a scholarly phenomenon. A global urban imagination pervades the conversations and aspirations of international and local elites the world over. It has now catalyzed mounting popular and policy engagements characterized by exponential growth in global city reports, plans, campaigns, and documentaries. Moving beyond academia in the late 1990s and

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setting itself as a widely employed expression in much of the mass media and local government conversations, the global city has become a central protagonist of the discussions surrounding the popularized rise of the "urban age" at a time when cities are at the center of global attention.[14] Global city-speak, and its underpinning imagination and aspirations, has progressively surfaced as an explicit growth and internationalization strategy by local authorities and city leaders. This is, of course, not limited to the three cities analyzed in this book (Dubai, Sydney, and Singapore), and parallels worldwide are easy to find beyond the obvious models of London and New York. In fact, as the ideas upholding the global city gain traction and global urbanism is practiced far and wide across built-environment professions (and more), a new generation of global hubs is fast affirming itself beyond our traditional international reference points.

It is the case, for example, of Hong Kong and its Brand Hong Kong initiative, launched in 2001 to promote the Chinese Special Administrative Region as "Asia's World City."[15] Coupled with the finance initiative Invest Hong Kong, which is aimed at attracting larger quantities of inward capital and the development of a new art and leisure district in West Kowloon, Hong Kong's approach has to date managed to position the metropolis as not solely a core hub of East Asia but a top-ranking competitor at a global level. In this case, the city government took the lead in recasting the global image of the metropolis and promoting it through a "globalizing" strategic plan and a new global city narrative for the emerging Asian center. A plethora of growing international centers like Hong Kong have been pursuing a rhetoric of globalization by invoking the global city in campaigns, strategic plans, urban renewal policies, and media statements. It is this widely accepted popularity, then, that forms much of the thrust of my inquiry in this book. On the one hand, the urban studies scholarship is now split between being well accustomed to global-speak and, in many instances, rejecting it. On the other, the global city has also progressed as a luring focus for emerging cities seeking worldwide fame, as well as for established economic, commercial, and political capitals concerned with maintaining their grip on global publics and flows. In this rise to everyday fame, some of the ideas supporting the notion of the global city change, move away from each other, and find new meaning as they are filtered through the specifics of places like Singapore, Dubai, and Sydney.

To capture these processes in this book, I mix systematic discourse analysis with ethnographic and participant observation of urban development elites in Singapore, Dubai, and Sydney. Data collection for the study involved 170 one-on-one qualitative semi-structured interviews (for roughly thirty to forty-five minutes each), conducted with these elites. Interviewees were thus selected via snowball sampling for their role in shaping, or commenting on, the urban development trajectories of the three cities. Of the total number of inter-

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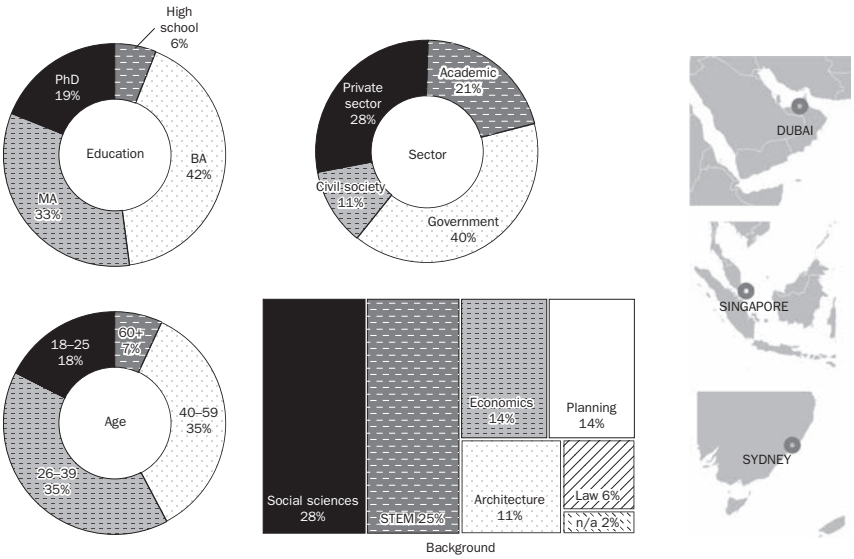


FIGURE 1. Outline of interviews (education, sector, age, and background profiles).

views, fifty-four of these conversations focused on, and were carried out in, Dubai, fifty-eight in Singapore, and fifty-eight in Sydney.

Qualitative data from the interviews were coded to identify explicit or implicit mentions of twenty core concepts that underpin the global city literature (see chapter 2) and its key contemporary debates (see chapter 3), ranging from the idea that global cities are sites of "command and control" of globalization (often attributed to Saskia Sassen) or that they perform "gateway" functions in world affairs (e.g., Peter Hall), to questions of how these cities are broken apart socioeconomically through "splintering urbanism" (e.g., Steve Graham and Simon Marvin) and how a "metrocentric" bias affects urban thinking (e.g., Tim Bunnell and Anant Maringanti). This allows me to paint a picture of what kind of "global city-speak" (as Donald McNeill put it in 2017) is at play between major urban governance stakeholders in these cities, and to discuss the politics of the global city in a more nuanced fashion than simply using it as a single concept.

The Symbolic Power of the Global City

The ways in which we build global cities today are very much intertwined with the creation of difference and distinctiveness. We aim to put a place on the map while also engaging in a market for similarity that attracts and is familiar to those

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TABLE 1 The study's twenty concepts

CONCEPT	SAMPLE ACADEMIC LITERATURE	OVERALL SALIENCE	MOST CLOSELY CORRELATED CONCEPT
Rescaling of urban governance	Brenner, *New State Spaces* (2004); Keil, "Globalisation Makes States" (1998)	0.088	Cosmopolitanism*
Metrocentricity	Bunnell and Maringanti, "Practicing Urban and Regional Research" (2010)	0.088	Off the map**
Relationality between cities	Sassen, *Cities in a World Economy* (1994); Söderström, *Cities in Relations* (2014)	0.100	Off the map**
Command and control functions	Sassen, *The Global City* (1991); Taylor and Derudder, *World City Network* (2004)	0.103	Opportunity*
Network ghettoes	Marvin and Graham, *Splintering Urbanism* (2001)	0.118	Elite*
Capturing a "global" opportunity	Clark, *Global Cities* (2016); Glaeser, *Triumph of the City* (2011)	0.126	Entrepreneurship**
Cities "off the map"	Robinson, "Global and World Cities" (2002); Yeoh, "Global/Globalising Cities" (1999)	0.138	Metrocentric**
Worlding	Ong and Roy, *Worlding Cities* (2011)	0.138	Premium connections*
Hierarchy of global cities (and hierarchical relations)	McKenzie, "The Concept of Dominance" (1927); Taylor, "Hierarchical Tendencies" (1997)	0.141	Off the map*
Materiality of globalization	McNeill, "In Search of the Global Architect" (2005); Amin, "Spatialities of Globalisation" (2002)	0.147	Placing**
Urban cosmopolitanism	Sennett, "The Social Experience of Cities" (2002); Price and Benton-Short, *Migrants to the Metropolis* (2008)	0.147	Premium connections*
History embedded in urban order	Peter Hall, *Cities in Civilization* (1998); Rimmer and Dick, "The Historical Dimension" (2013)	0.159	*Rescaling*^

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Urban innovation	Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2002);	0.162	Materiality~
Urban entrepreneurship	Harvey, "From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism" (1989); Hall and Hubbard, "The Entrepreneurial City" (1998)	0.168	Opportunity**
Placing globalization	Sassen, *The Global City* (1991)	0.171	Materiality**
City/urban leadership	McNeill, "Barcelona as Imagined Community" (2001); Rapoport et al., *Leading Cities* (2019)	0.176	Off the map**
Polarized or "dual city"	Mollekopf and Castells, *Dual City* (1989) Massey, *World City* (2007)	0.180	Worlding*
Premium connections	Marvin and Graham, *Splintering Urbanism* (2001)	0.250	Materiality*
Gateway functions	Peter Hall, *The World Cities* (1966); John Friedmann, *World City Hypothesis* (1982)	0.250	Relationality*
Urban/transnational elites	Beaverstock, "Transnational Elites in Global Cities" (2001); Sklair, "The Transnational Capitalist Class" (2005)	0.265	Off the map*

^Weak correlation

*Moderate correlation

**Strong correlation

~Negative correlation

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we want to draw to our cities. Cities coexist, as Jenny Robinson reminds us, "in a world of cities."[16] They seek to be a bit like each other while also being a bit different. In this business, logics of group-making, as cities compare themselves with selected others, are commonplace. Likewise, a rich cadre of what we could tag as "symbolic entrepreneurs," who drive people's perceptions by presenting diversity and similarity across this world of cities, is thriving in an increasingly professionalized work of global urbanism. From consultants to major built-environment firms, and from academics to public commentators, these all play a part in shaping the politics and power of the global city, both generally as a concept and more specifically as situated places. This is the highly power-laden and quintessentially global world of the political economy of the global city.

These dynamics are well captured in the notion of "symbolic power": the power of distinction. According to Bourdieu, who originally described it in the social theory of the 1970s and 1980s, symbolic power is a form of influence that does not take hold in isolation from other powers—be they economic, social, or cultural.[17] Rather, symbolic power represents the capacity to control the social production of distinction by relying on and deploying other forms of power, such as money, cultural and religious constructs, or social class. The influence of symbolism rests on one's capacity of "constituting the given by stating it."[18] Symbolic power allows people and institutions to "structure" the "reality" around those who are subject to it.[19] It is a practice of mediating social experiences and imposing socially accepted meanings, which in turn affect the actions of others. This form of influence can be exercised only with the complicity of those who are subject to it.[20] Appreciating the ways in which symbolic power operates requires understanding the processes and dynamics that underpin the social world's "symbolic systems,"[21] the intertwined dispositions of symbols (such as languages, images, and built spaces) that form the subtext of human interaction. Symbols and symbolic systems allow for differences in similarity, and consequently for the coexistence and continual creation of individual as well as group identities. Mastering symbolic power in this sense means "pursuing distinction" and voluntarily producing separations and social worlds that affect others' identities and freedom for action. Symbolic power is thus exerted by socializing others into a certain representation of the environment we live in, therefore getting them to act accordingly.[22] Typically, it is exerted by either communicative or physical means, though hybrid forms abound in the digital age. For example, a group sitting in a lecture hall can be "coerced" into exiting the room through its windows if the speaker's rhetoric is so compelling that it convinces the audience that this is the only way out. However, our cold-blooded orator can achieve a similar result through more material means such as a set of "exit" signs on the windows, or even by erecting a wall in front of the room's only door. Distinction is so pro-

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duced thanks to the speaker's symbolic "capital," a potential constituted by mediating other forms of power such as the speaker's oratory and social status in the first instance, or economic and material capabilities in the second example. From this point of view, I unveil the symbolic power of the notions that support the idea of the global city, and more generally of today's global urban imagination, as well as the politics (as in power relations) that those people and institutions that use these ideas are embedded in.

Why do these aspiring global cities need to emphasize diversity and uniqueness in addition to those functions that traditionally portray them as global? Why look for specificity beyond those more common command and control features that, the literature tells us, are core in defining global cities? The reasoning is twofold. First, these cities have sought to differentiate themselves from their national rivals by achieving primacy at the national level. Second, they have repeatedly claimed their uniqueness on a worldwide stage. Take Sydney, for instance. At the domestic level, the Harbor City represents itself as "Australia's iconic face to the world, its international visitor flag-bearer."[23] However, this flagship role is coupled with frequent rhetoric on the particularity of the Harbor City in the crowded ranks of global city pretenders. As the popular slogan for the See Sydney campaign that flourished in 2009 summarized it: "There's no place in the world like Sydney." The global city is seen to be unique, yet it exists in a commonly globalized urban world. The world and the city are imagined, and spoken of, in a common-but-different way of casting the "global." The campaign, much like several others since at least the 2000 Olympics, was built on recognizable images of iconic buildings like the Opera House or Sydney Harbor, stunning shots of the coastal richness of Sydney's beaches, and dynamic representations of a vibrant, cultural, tourist-friendly city. This representation is not unique to the Australian city, of course: much of Dubai's public relations, let alone those of Singapore, have been built on a mix of those unique-but-global features described thus far. Yet these representations, and the ways elites cast and recast cities, beg not just for criticism of their often-predictable global urban imagination, but also for a more refined way to understand how this imagination operates, even how scholars and researchers are embedded in it. Nuance in the "global urban-speak" and the imagination underpinning the global city is what follows in the next chapters. I map the global city ingredients my affluent and powerful interlocutor had asked me about in Medellin in 2014, as dictionary of global city-speak, or maybe as inventory of the things that make up the global city. Upon this we might construct a more effective way to drive the global urban attention at least partly away from competition and success and a little more toward the needs of urban dwellers and more progressive urban futures.

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