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The state of urban research: Views across the disciplines

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ABSTRACT

An "urban" subfield exists in virtually every social science discipline, but these subfields seldom engage one another. We asked scholars from five urban subfields to respond to questions about the state of urban research within their discipline. This article consists of their consequent essays and reflections on their responses. The questions posed included the discipline's conception of "urban," the main concerns motivating the subfield, the primary methodologies pursued, the extent to which their subfield interacted with or was informed by research in other urban subfields, and the main concepts or approaches it had to offer to other subfields or might take away from them. In our reflections, we particularly note the intellectual and institutional difficulties in creating a broader field of urban research or of engaging in truly inter-disciplinary research. We also highlight the desirability of greater engagement across these subfields through encouraging a "republic of conversation" among them.

KEYWORDS

Urban studies; urban affairs; urban planning; urban history; urban economics; urban sociology

In autumn of 2019, we (the first two coauthors) asked urban scholars from five different disciplines to reflect upon the state of their discipline's urban subfield for a panel discussion at the 2020 meeting of the Urban Affairs Association. That meeting, like most others, fell prey to the pandemic and was not held. However, intrigued by the idea, each of the participants agreed to produce a paper responding to a set of questions we posed for them about their subfield. Those papers comprise the foundations for this article.

The questions we posed included:

- What is the meaning of *urban* in your subfield: What is the conception of urban that undergirds the work in the urban subfield of your discipline, i.e., what is it that your discipline is attempting to understand? (**Meaning of urban**)
- What are the main urban research questions that the urban subfield of your discipline pursues and what methodologies are most commonly used to do so? (**Core research questions)**
- How has the subfield developed and changed over time and what has been its standing within the broader discipline? (**History of subfield**)
- What do you see as the main contributions of the urban research in your discipline, and what are the shortcomings? (**Contributions/Shortcomings**)
- To what extent has the urban subfield of your discipline been informed by the work of other disciplines? Are there any "key" concepts/approaches that your discipline might offer for export to other disciplines? Are there any takeaways from other disciplines that might be imported for the betterment of your own? (**Relationship to other disciplines**)

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The five disciplines we selected were economics, history, planning, political science, and sociology. (The absence of important urban subfields from other disciplines, particularly those such as urban geography and public health reflected limits on time that constrained both the original UAA proposal and space that constrained manuscript length.) The scholars who accepted our invitation and who are coauthors of this article are Jennifer Clark (urban planning), Samantha Friedman (sociology), Richard Harris (history), Jeffrey Lin (economics) and Thomas Ogorzalek (political science). Each of them is responsible for the section on their discipline in this essay.

While we asked each of the scholars to address the topics listed above, we did not impose a rigid framework for their responses. Each of the essays, however, addresses all five of the questions posed above, with each question identified by the short, bolded title incorporated in the parenthesis of each of the above questions.

The view from economics[1]

Research questions and methodologies

What determines the uneven geographic distribution of economic activity? This is the core question of urban, regional, and spatial economics. If economics is the study of the allocation of scarce resources, then urban economics is the study of the allocation of land or geographic space. Urban economists understand spatial structure as the balance between *agglomeration* and *dispersion* forces. *Agglomeration forces* encourage the geographic concentration of economic activity. For example, firms may benefit from density by economizing on transportation costs while exploiting increasing returns.[2] Households might cluster near other to take advantage of both exogenous amenities (beaches or views) or endogenous amenities (safety or schools). *Dispersion forces* encourage economic activity to spread out. For example, competition for the fixed supply of land increases its price, encouraging firms and households to seek out other locations.

There is broad agreement among leading economists about the "core" of urban economics. Glaeser (2008) sums up many of these themes: What are the costs and benefits of density? In other words, what are the important agglomeration and dispersion forces at work in cities? (See also surveys by Brueckner, 2011; Duranton & Puga, 2004, 2015; Proost & Thisse, 2019) At a regional scale, questions range from the basic (Why do cities exist? Why do lasting and sizable regional disparities exist?) to the applied (Why have we seen growing divergence between U.S. cities since 1980? What kinds of regional development policies work?). At a neighborhood scale, questions also range from the basic (Why do land and property prices vary within cities? What explains sorting and segregation patterns?) to the applied (Does new transportation infrastructure reduce inequality? Does new development lead to displacement? What are the long-run effects of growing up in a poor neighborhood? What kinds of neighborhood characteristics do people value?).

The economic approach to cities starts with two important foundations. One, people respond to incentives. Two, things add up. In other words, "$20 dollar bills don't lie in plain view very long, and every sale is also purchase" (P. R. Krugman, 1997, p. 75). Economists formalize these foundations in mathematical models. In that context, peoples' response to incentives is an optimization problem: somebody is trying to get as much as they can of something. "Things adding up" is a resource constraint. For example, the amount spent on housing must be the same as the amount of income from housing. The goal of this kind of modeling is to clarify our thinking about how decentralized decision-making by firms or households can lead to organized outcomes like markets—or even cities! A second goal is to make clear, precise assumptions and connect them to results are internally consistent. If we are confident in these models, they might even be used to quantify the effects of policies or the importance of specific mechanisms. And if we are skeptical about the precision of these models, it is a good idea to keep the basic foundations in mind, "for two opposing reasons—to remind

yourself not to take any particular mathematical formalization too seriously, but also to remind yourself that the basic principles of mainstream economics are not at all silly or unreasonable" (P. R. Krugman, 1997, p. 75).

A third important foundation in urban economics is spatial equilibrium (e.g., Roback, 1982). In spatial equilibrium, welfare is equalized across space (at least for marginal migrants). Intuitively, if this were not true—if welfare were higher in some places compared with others—then more households would move to higher-welfare places, bidding up the price of land and housing. The intensifying dispersion force of higher land and housing prices would then tend to equilibrate welfare levels across space.

To see how these ingredients come together in urban economics, consider the urban land use models developed by Alonso (1964), Mills (1967), and Muth (1969).[3] The goal is to explain the spatial structure of cities. Households must commute to the city center. (This is the agglomerating force.) They choose a location to commute from and an amount of housing to maximize utility (optimizing behavior). In spatial equilibrium, identical households obtain the same level of utility everywhere in the city (otherwise, they would respond to the incentive to move). With these few ingredients, the model predicts that housing prices fall, and housing consumption increases, as commuting costs increase (land scarcity at the city center is the dispersion force.) The model thus explains parsimoniously many features of real-world cities: increasing housing and population densities, increasing land and housing prices, and declining housing unit size with proximity to the city's center reflect the trade-off between accessibility and housing consumption. The model can also accommodate extensions; for example, Baum-Snow (2007) uses a version of this model to analyze the effect of Interstate highway construction on the suburbanization of population.

I have focused on the theoretical foundations of urban economics, with less emphasis on empirics. Holmes (2010) classifies three general approaches to empirical work in economics: descriptive, structural, and experimentalist. Descriptive approaches develop new summary statistical relationships (e.g., correlations) to distinguish between alternative theories that yield qualitatively distinct predictions. Thus, descriptive approaches are less interested in precise quantitative estimates; instead, they use gross features of the world to validate (or reject) theoretical models. In contrast, structural and experimentalist approaches both seek to identify quantitative impacts of policy changes. The structural approach aims to estimate "deep" model parameters of preferences and technology within a fully-specified economic model. Then, the estimated model may be used to simulate the effects of policy changes. Holmes and Sieg (2015) and Redding and Rossi-Hansberg (2017) review recent developments in this approach. In the experimentalist approach, the goal is to estimate the causal impact of a policy or specific factor. A common feature of the experimentalist approach is the use of "natural experiments" that help to define appropriate "treatment" and "control" groups, so that the analysis closely resembles an experimental design. Baum-Snow and Ferreira (2015) review recent developments in causal inference in urban economics.

Meaning of urban

For economists, location matters because it links several of the most important decisions made by businesses and households. Most obviously, housing and transportation are typically the largest categories in household expenditures, time spent traveling is significant, and migration is costly. Location also affects much of our daily lives, through work, leisure, schooling, shopping, socializing, environmental quality, opportunities, and more. Factors that affect location decisions—e.g., school quality, crime, local public finance, place-based policies—also matter for urban economists.

Economists studying location may self-identify as urban economists, regional economists, spatial economists, or economic geographers. Traditionally, urban, regional, and spatial economics and economic geography have distinct and narrower meanings, corresponding to the spatial scale of interest and differences in theoretical framework. However, while these distinctions matter for research questions, for interpreting real world phenomena, and for normative policy analysis, they

matter less for methodology or for delineating the boundaries of the field. Instead, urban, regional, and spatial economics, and economic geography use a common set of tools—optimizing behavior, resource constraints, and spatial equilibrium—to understand a wide range of phenomena at building, block, neighborhood, city, metropolitan, regional, national, and international scales (Proost & Thisse, 2019). Indeed, many leading scholars have made contributions across these distinctions. For this reason, economists who study location are often collected under the umbrella term "urban economists," even if their research interests are at other spatial scales.

Many *regional* questions are organized around the idea of a region as a local labor market and the relevant agglomeration forces coming from production factors, e.g., labor pooling or knowledge spillovers (although consumption factors are gaining increasing attention, e.g., Glaeser et al., 2001). Hence, many regional economists consider metropolitan areas or commuting zones to be the appropriate geographic unit for the analysis of agglomeration, even using the term "city" to refer to these larger units.

Many *urban* questions are organized around the idea of a neighborhood as a bundle of nonmarketed goods (e.g., accessibility, schools, safety, shopping) and the relevant agglomeration forces coming from quality of life factors. Segregation and sorting patterns within cities are important core area of inquiry. As with distinctions among spatial scales, economic studies on segregation often share the same set of common tools with studies on agglomeration—optimizing behavior, resource constraints, and spatial equilibrium.

State of urban economics

Perloff (1973) dates the beginning of urban economics as a field to around 1960, owing to increased attention to urban problems in the 1950s and to institutional support from Resources for the Future and the Ford Foundation. *Regional and Urban Economics*, later *Regional Science and Urban Economics* (*RSUE*), was established in 1971; the *Journal of Urban Economics* (*JUE*), the leading field journal today, was established in 1974. The American Real Estate and Urban Economics Association, a leading professional association, was established in 1964. But Cherrier and Rebours (2020) note that early enthusiasm soon flagged, and by the 1980s (quoting Krugman, 1991b), urban economics was considered a "small, 'peripheral' field." Wallace Oates, in reply to Mills (2000), compared the field to environmental and natural-resource economics and noted that "urban economics has been less successful in maintaining its earlier momentum."

The existence of other subfields sometimes narrows the space available for urban economics as an independent subfield. Labor and international economics are separate (and larger) subfields that often overlap urban economics. Many advances in urban economics have resulted from interactions with these other, larger, economic subfields. Mills (2000) noted the contributions of many "part-timers" to urban economics, including several Nobel laureates. Recently, there has been increasing interaction with trade, development, and industrial economists. For example, an important trend has been the development of general equilibrium, quantitative spatial models (Redding & Rossi-Hansberg, 2017) following advances in quantitative models of trade (Eaton & Kortum, 2002). These models allow for the analysis of realistic geographical space and precise quantitative predictions about the effects of spatial policies.

More recently, urban economics has grown in stature and size. One sign of this is increased participation in conferences devoted to urban economics. In 2017 in Vancouver, the annual meetings of the Urban Economics Association (established in 2006) featured about 30 sessions. In 2019 in Philadelphia, the meetings featured about 70 sessions. The number of more specialized conferences devoted to urban economics has expanded quickly as well. In addition to *JUE* and *RSUE*, urban economists are publishing in the top general-interest economics journals including the *American Economic Review* or the *Review of Economic Studies*, other top general-interest or field journals including the *Review of Economics and Statistics* or the *American Economic Journals*, or interdisciplinary field journals such as the *Journal of Regional Science* or the *Journal of Economic Geography*.[4]

Some of the recent growth in urban economics is driven by the explosion of applied work made possible by the availability of new data sources, especially spatial data. Urban economists are doing more work on place-based policy, transportation, affordable housing, and gentrification, using large administrative and proprietary databases. These data allow us to test theories, investigate mechanisms, and evaluate policies. For example, Lee and Lin (2018) analyze long-run neighborhood dynamics, building on harmonized data produced by Logan et al. (2011), Logan et al. (2014), and Manson et al. (2021). Another prominent example is the work of Raj Chetty and his collaborators. Chetty et al. (2014), Chetty and Hendren (2018), and Chetty et al. (2018) use administrative records on millions of children and their adult outcomes to estimate place and neighborhood effects.

Urban economists are also broadening their interests outside the United States and Europe. The field is expanding on at least two dimensions here. One, more economists are interested in how current urbanization experiences differ in less-developed countries compared with those in U.S. or European history. Bryan et al. (2020) review recent developments in this literature. Two, more economists are using economic tools to evaluate urban policy challenges in cities in less-developed countries. Some recent examples of research that both consider the unique urbanization experiences of less-developed countries and apply economic tools to real-world policy challenges are the analyses by Henderson et al. (2021) and Harari and Wong (2021) of slum development policies in Nairobi and Jakarta, respectively.

Relationships to other disciplines

How connected is urban economics to other disciplines outside economics? Based on citations, economics in general seems insular. Fourcade, Ollion and Algan (2015) analyze citations in flagship journals of economics, sociology and political science. Articles in the *American Political Science Review* cite top-25 economics journals more than five times as often as articles in the *American Economic Review* cite top-25 political science journals. Articles in the *American Sociological Review* cite top-25 economics journals more than seven times as often as articles in the *AER* cite top-25 sociology journals. And in an opinion survey, economists were the only group (among sociology, political science, psychology, finance, and history) among whom a substantial majority disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement "in general, interdisciplinary knowledge is better than knowledge obtained from a single discipline."

One important exception that is specific to urban economics is the influence of regional science, rooted in Walter Isard's (1956) work. As Fujita et al. (1999) note, many ideas from regional science have been incorporated into mainstream urban economics, including the central place theory of Christaller (1933) and Losch (1940) and the market potential analysis of C. Harris (1954).

Urban economists pay attention to developments in the other social sciences. The most common way is by inspiration. Lin (2011) studies the occupational dynamics of cities, drawing on Jacobs (1969), and Bleakley and Lin (2012, 2015) study the evolution of portage cities, drawing on work by geographers such as Semple (1903) and Cronon (1991). Recent work on the long-run effects of redlining (Aaronson et al., 2021; Krimmel, 2018) relies on contributions by Jacobs (1961), Jackson (1980), and Rothstein (2017), and the data digitization work of the *Mapping Inequality* project (Nelson et al., 2020). Collinson et al. (2021) estimate the effect of eviction on poverty using the random assignment of judges to eviction cases in New York and Chicago, with close links to the work of Desmond (2016). Thus, it is not uncommon for urban economists to find inspiration in work from other disciplines. In fact, I would go further and say ideas from other social scientists have been a necessary factor in progress in urban economics by uncovering new facts or by pointing out blind spots.

There are examples of deeper interdisciplinary work. One is a collaboration between Assyriologist Gojko Barjamovic and economists Thomas Chaney, Kerem Coşar, and Ali Hortaçsu (2019). They analyze a large database of commercial records produced by Assyrian merchants in the 19th century BCE. They extract systematic information on commercial linkages between cities from these records.

Then, they estimate a standard model of trade. This then allows them to estimate locations of "lost cities" of the Bronze Age! In many cases these estimates confirm conjectures by historians, and, where historians disagree, help to rule out certain conjectures. This example is a model for successful interdisciplinary collaboration.

Despite these interdisciplinary successes, it is still true that urban economists write mostly for other economists, in economics journals. Despite some recent examples to the contrary, Bertaud (2018) notes the isolation of urban economists from urban policy. A continuing challenge is that the individual rewards for interdisciplinary work, especially for tenure-track researchers, tends to be low. This isolation might be inefficient. Other disciplines may offer better or more complete policy solutions. One example is the case of land use regulations that restrict housing supply. Urban economists have long pointed to land use regulations as a main factor in rising housing prices, especially in coastal U.S. cities (Glaeser & Gyourko, 2018). But work by political scientists moves beyond these contributions by clarifying the challenges of designing political institutions and strategies for increasing housing supply in areas with high housing prices (e.g., Einstein et al., 2019).

Despite Bertaud's (2018) lament about the isolation of urban economists from urban policy, more recent work brings economists closer to urban policy making. For example, a recent article by Michaels et al. (2021) finds that modest infrastructure investments in greenfield areas in seven Tanzanian cities resulted in neighborhoods that developed larger, more regularly laid-out buildings and better-quality housing. Some other recent examples of policy-oriented economics research are Tsivanidis (2020), who analyzes the distributional effects of Bogota's bus rapid transit expansion, and Kreindler (2022), who analyzes congestion pricing policies in Bangalore.

Contributions to urban studies

Economists have insights to offer to other urban scholars. Two important ones are quantification and an emphasis on decentralized decision making. First, a primary goal of empirical economics is quantification. How big is something? Do things "add up"? Invariably, at least one economist at a workshop or seminar presentation will ask "why should we care?" The typical response format is "this has a big role in explaining X" or "X affects a lot of people." Answering a "big question" is a strict filter at the top economics journals. Overall, this tendency may push economists to devote their time and energy to questions in proportion with their importance. Another virtue of this habit is that sometimes things that seem like they might be small or minor turn out to be very big (and vice versa). This can be a useful contribution to both scholarship and policy. For example, Brinkman and Lin (2019, 2022) estimate the harm done to central city quality of life from Interstate highways. This builds on a large social science literature concerned about the negative effects of highways (e.g., Crockett, 2018; DiMento & Ellis, 2013; Robinson, 1971; Wilson, 2008). We estimate that highways caused large declines in central city quality of life: the quality-of-life channel alone accounts for about one-third of the population loss of central cities and the welfare losses from quality-of-life declines are equivalent to about five percent of income. The large size of these losses is interesting because it suggests that targeted mitigation policies (e.g., the Big Dig) could be cost effective. They are also large relative to the estimated benefits of the Interstate system as a whole: Allen and Arkolakis (2014) estimate the gross welfare gains from the Interstate highway program due to increased goods trade was 1.1 to 1.4%. Quantification can add to our knowledge.

A second potential contribution of economists is to emphasize the important role that decentralized decision making plays in determining spatial structure. One example is the recent work by Shertzer and Walsh (2019) on the emergence of racial segregation in northern U.S. cities. Existing literature has emphasized collective action by whites to exclude blacks from certain neighborhoods as the driving increased segregation. The contribution of Shertzer and Walsh is not to deny the role of government policy or other forms of collective action, including coordinated violence against black arrivals. (Indeed, they likely had large effects, as emphasized by Rothstein, 2017.) Instead, they argue that white flight was also a significant factor in increased segregation. According to their estimates,

segregation would have increased by about 30 to 50% as much as it did over the 1910s and 1920s due to white flight alone. Shertzer and Walsh's work illustrates both economists' focus on quantification and on market mechanisms.

Conclusion

In sum, the core question in urban economics is to understand the uneven spatial distribution of economic activity. Urban economists use optimizing behavior, equilibrium conditions, and agglomeration and dispersion forces to understand the geography of economic activity at all spatial scales. Urban economics is growing, driven by cross-fertilization of ideas with other subfields of economics. There is some interaction with other disciplines outside of economics, but mostly as inputs into research targeted to other economists. Economists' focus on quantification and market forces may be useful for other social scientists studying cities.

The view from history[5]

In the broadest definition, urban history is concerned with whatever has happened in urban areas. Ideally it shows how the urban setting has dynamically shaped the lives of urban residents and the wider society.

More than most urban scholars, urban historians define their interests within national contexts. They tend to state or imply that the national experience has been distinctive, having been influenced or determined by a particular past, in terms of immigration, ethnic composition, path of economic development, and/or forms of government. For that reason, although some comparisons are made in the following comments, they are framed primarily with respect to American urban historians and may apply less elsewhere.

History of subfield

Urban history gathered momentum in the 1960s and early 1970s, flagged a little as the urban crisis waned but then in the United States has revived strongly since the late 1980s. There, the *Journal of Urban History* was established in 1974; in Canada, the *Urban History Review* was founded in 1972, becoming a peer-reviewed journal by the end of the decade; in Britain the *Urban History Yearbook* first appeared in 1974, becoming a journal, *Urban History*, in 1992. Since their establishment, these publications have remained the main outlets for historical research on these three countries, and for English-language research in urban history worldwide. In the United States, an Urban History Association (UHA) was formed in 1988. A companion organization with overlapping membership, the Society for American City and Regional Planning History (SACRPH), was formed in 1986. For up-to-date surveys of what American urban historians have had to say on a wide range of issues, see, Gilfoyle (2019).

In this millennium, there has been growing (although still modest) interest in transnational connections and comparative research (Ewen, 2016; Sandoval-Strausz & Kwak, 2017). Much of this interest has concerned the movement of ideas and practices of urban policy and planning, including the promotion of suburbanization, zoning, segregation, and urban renewal (e.g., Hall, 2002; Nightingale, 2012; Ward, 2002). This has added to a continuing interest in migration and has been complemented by an increasing body of work on cities outside of North America. Some urban and planning historians based in North America have a tradition of research in Britain and Europe, and a rapidly-growing body of scholarship in the Global South, including Latin America. Their main organizations are the European Association for Urban History, the Urban History Group (UK), the UHA, SACRPH, the International Planning History Society and, most recently, the Global Urban History Project (GUHP). All have an online presence, and notably in the case of the UHA with its *Metropole* blog.

Meaning of urban

Since at least the 1960s, leading urban historians have urged their colleagues to articulate more explicitly the particular ways in which the urban environment matters: how it shapes the life and work of local residents, and the development of the wider society (Harris, 2021, pp. 8–10). However, like their colleagues in other urban subfields, most appear to define their concern simply as being anything that happens in cities. A partial exception concerns the history of urban governance and infrastructure, including its connections to the history of public health and the environment (e.g., Tarr, 1996). Here, scholars have shown a keen awareness of the impact of urban settings.

In general, urban historians are interested in how and why particular cities have evolved, rather than with the overall urbanization process at the national scale, or with the features that all urban places share. Their focus is empirical, not theoretical, and—at least in principle—with trying to understand cities in their totality. Their explanations emphasize agents of change, including entrepreneurs, municipal governments, planners, and federal policymakers, as well as neighborhood and other grass-roots organizations. Like other urbanists, they have focused disproportionately on major metropolitan areas, neglecting smaller cities and towns. In that context, they have commonly focused on central cities or individual suburbs, rather than larger or smaller geographical units.

Complementing the focus on specific cities, urban historians have tended to focus on the urban experience of particular groups. In the 1960s and 1970s their emphasis was on social class, immigrants, and social mobility (Thernstrom, 1973); subsequently the emphasis shifted to women and then minorities, whether racialized or otherwise disadvantaged (e.g., Hirsch, 1983; Peiss, 1986). These emphases are consistent with the focus of social history, broadly defined, with its emphasis on "history from below." That said, in recent years more scholars have been examining business and finance issues associated with urban development and policy.

Their research has usually been framed by periodizations of the past. These periods have usually corresponded to those emphasized in national histories (e.g., the Reform Era, the Depression; the postwar boom), especially since the late 19th century when cities have both expressed and shaped national life. They also correspond to distinctive periods of urban development and governance. Lately, interest has shifted in favor of the 20th century, including the early postwar decades. This finds expression in research on suburbs and urban planning. The urban historian's contribution to the discipline has been to ground generalizations pertaining to the character of specific periods, the experience of particular groups, the nature of grass-roots politics, or the impact of disease. Urban historians show how such varied forces have dynamically intersected.

Research questions

Research questions reflect the interests listed above and may be phrased most generally as "what has been the nature of the experience of people living in urban areas," "how and why has urban change occurred," and "with what consequences for people and the environment"?

Traditionally, influenced by available records, historians have depended on qualitative sources. These have mostly been textual in character, including the records of municipalities and other state or private organizations, newspapers, diaries, and the like. In part because of their readier accessibility, government records in general have been favored. Those interested in the physical character of the built environment have also consulted maps, photographs, and the environment itself. Those interested in the postwar period have also used interviews.

Since the 1960s, a minority of urban historians have undertaken quantitative research that makes use of public records, including the census and property assessments (e.g., Hershberg, 1981; Olson & Thornton, 2011). Quantification was initially associated with the "new" urban history of the 1960s. This stimulated controversy, as advocates made inflated claims while some skeptics retrenched. However, except among historical geographers (e.g., Doucet & Weaver, 1991), interest was waning by the 1980s. As yet, the data revolution of the current millennium has had a limited impact. Especially

during the pandemic, many have accessed the online resources that archivists have made available, but few have exploited the quantitative potential of sources such as Google's NGram Viewer or of digital newspaper archives. More recently, some use has been made of GIS techniques in the analysis of historical data. For example, LaDale Winling has helped pioneer online projects on redlining and federal elections (Nelson et al., 2020; Winling, 2020). Although such work has won respect, it has not yet been widely copied because the necessary techniques have not been part of historians' training. In general, quantitative analysis has relied on descriptive statistics rather than advanced quantitative techniques.

Relationship to other disciplines

Urban historians are aware of work in other disciplines but such influences, although numerous, have usually been left implicit. They think of themselves as interdisciplinary, although it is unclear whether that is more true than for other disciplinary views of cities (Ewen, 2016; N. H. Kwak, 2018). The greatest influence has come from urban sociology, notably the Chicago School, and, from the 1960s, from social history. The imprint of political science has long been apparent and, since the 1990s, from the "cultural turn," which has inspired renewed interest in minorities and in textual analysis (Gilfoyle, 1998). This has confirmed the salience of race as a theme in the work of American urban historians. A recent survey of members of the Urban History Association found that the most influential modern work of urban scholarship is Thomas Sugrue's exploration of the racialized roots of Detroit's postwar urban decline (Harris, 2019; Sugrue, 1996). Another, steadily growing, influence has come from environmental studies. This is a field where William Cronon's (1991) study of 19th-century Chicago and its relation to the Midwest—the second most frequently-mentioned work by UHA members—was itself a pioneer.

The influence of geographers, notably in studies of the built environment, has been more muted in the United States than in Canada and Britain because of the lower profile of geography in the U.S. educational system. That said, the geographer David Harvey ranked as the most influential non-historian in the UHA survey, and fifth overall. Although economic historians played a role in the development of urban history on both sides of the Atlantic, in the United States their subsequent influence (and that of economics), has been modest (Mohl, 1998). These comments point to three shortcomings of American urban history: the relative neglect of economic processes and of the metropolitan and (despite Cronon's influence) regional scales, coupled with a paucity of comparative research that goes beyond the national frame of reference. There is potential for American urban historians to learn from the work of urban geographers and economists, including some of the concepts and techniques of those disciplines.

Contributions/shortcomings

Except perhaps in the 1960s, urban research has never been prominent within the discipline of history in North America, and less so than within geography, the social science discipline in which I was trained and with which I am most familiar. In part this is because, for the greater part of American and Canadian history, the majority of people lived in rural areas.

More importantly, the case for an "urban" interpretation of white settler colonial history in North America has not been effectively developed and sustained (c.f. Harris, 2021). The argument has occasionally been made, notably by Arthur Schlesinger (1973), Eric Lampard (1983), and Maurice Careless (1989), but its influence within the broader discipline has been limited. This contrasts with the situation in Europe, where the national and continental role of cities has long been recognized from Pirenne (1925/1952) onwards (Hohenberg & Lees, 1995).

That said, I would suggest that there are three important takeaways from urban-historical research. They are easily stated; more difficult to put into practice.

(i) The past matters (it is not even past!). There is always a legacy that shapes current events and possibilities, taking the form of institutions, memories, habits, or the built environment (Harris & Lewis, 1998; Sewell, 2005). Sometimes this has been expressed as "path dependency" (Sorensen, 2015). A closely related takeaway is the need to think critically about, and closely, at, causality. The order in which things happen matters, as the current COVID19 crisis is dramatizing, and chains of causality are complex. This is relevant (say) to the implementation of policy or to the sequence of development, and at all scales.
(ii) Context matters. Historians insist that the meaning and impact of any action or event depends on the temporal context—*when* it happens. An historical geographer such as myself would give equal weight to the geographical context—*where* it happens.
(iii) Minimize jargon: use only when absolutely necessary. Historians have always attached importance to creating an accessible narrative and writing style. This is important for reaching non-specialists (including other academics) and for keeping readers engaged. They are wary of neologisms, which often restate the obvious or re-label what already has a name.

In return, recognizing some of the shortcomings of the subfield, I would suggest that historians could usefully import the following.

(i) The concept of externalities, as applied (mostly) by economists. It would encourage discussion of the (neglected) urban economy and also nudge greater consideration of the distinctively urban aspects of city life (c.f. Harris, 2021).
(ii) The methodologies of comparative research, especially when applied to urban places in different countries, and the influence of transnational flows of people, capital, and ideas (Ewen, 2016). This would encourage a less national/ parochial outlook.

Although, by definition, urban historians are primarily interested in the past, many have studied policies and programs. Their interest was given momentum, if not initiated, by the urban "crisis" of the late 1960s and early 1970s and has persisted. It has been sustained by the way urban historians have increasingly focused on the 20th century. They have shown that an understanding of the past is relevant to our understanding of current urban issues, and some have viewed this within an international context (Harris, 2020; Klemek, 2011; N. Kwak, 2015). Implicitly, then, they suggest that, when calculating the impact of new initiatives, policy-makers should consider the weight of the past. Perhaps because they are aware of that weight, historians rarely make specific suggestions for the future.

The view from urban planning[6]

The meaning of urban in city and regional planning

In the case of city and regional planning, the "urban" is and remains the dominant scale of action and analysis in the discipline (Clark et al., 2018). Often, though not always, planners push the discrete administrative boundaries of "the City" itself. "City and regional planning" includes regional planning whether this definition of regional speaks to metropolitan areas (functionally defined city-regions) or sub-national regional territories (Friedmann & Weaver, 1979; Harrison et al., 2021; Watson, 2021). The rural also occasionally enters the frame, especially when discussing supply chains and production networks in industries ranging from food systems to advanced manufacturing (Donald, 2008; Glasmeier, 1986). Often the discipline, particularly in the U.S., identifies as "city and regional planning" rather than "urban planning" leaving debates about the boundaries and definition of both city and region for internal discussion and projecting a unified front to external audiences and cognate disciplines.

What distinguishes the research approach in urban planning from other urban-focused sub-disciplines is the emphasis on the production and the management of place and the tools available to shape the spatial organization of economic activities. City and regional planners are interventionists

as well as analysts and observers. Planners focus on the design and construction of spaces of exchange and interaction, logistics and flow. And in so doing, they alter and direct economic and social activities (from transportation to shelter to leisure). Planners enable and restrict the use of spaces with dedicated tools such as land use regulations and as well as a wide array of financial incentives and penalties such as subsidies, taxes, and fees. More so that other urban disciplines, planners are in the business of managing cities and regions in real time, in real places, for *and with* real people. Planners then see the city as territory for facilitating and organizing community activity through a series of tools and techniques capable of shaping that action. Notably, urban planning, as an academic discipline, guides and produces both a practice and a profession. As such, it is deeply tied to the actions of the profession and attentive to (if not preoccupied by) both its critique and optimization (Clavel, 2010; Davidoff, 1965; Krumholz, 1994).

What results from this approach is a persistent struggle with the normative. In other words, there is a constant tension between (1) describing and analyzing the city, (2) maintaining the systems and processes that produce and operate within it, and (3) in recommending how best to organize, deliver, and manage urban systems and processes. Further, this emphasis on the *should* question not just the *what* and *how* questions binds planning to a discussion about values, goals, and criteria that many other disciplines can finesse or obscure or simply "take as a given." For example, the *Journal of the American Planning Association* (JAPA) has long required authors to include a "takeaway for practice" section of articles. JAPA thus requires analyses to speak beyond the descriptive or explanatory specifically to the question of *should*. For planners then, the normative becomes an unavoidable inevitability.

History of urban planning as a discipline

Much has been said about how urban planning came to be, emerging out of a stew of other disciplines. These allied disciplines range from social sciences like political science, geography, and history (several highlighted in this article) to the postwar applied social sciences of public policy, health, and administration as well as business management and industrial relations and finally to the professional practices such as civil engineering and architecture. In the mid-20th century, city and regional planning managed to emerge as a free standing applied social science with its own professional practice and well policed disciplinary boundaries.[7] However, the story of city and regional planning as a discipline remains fluid and contested. One need only to look at the array of institutional contexts in which city and regional planning programs sit at research universities (Colleges and Schools of Arts and Science, Architecture, Engineering, Design, Public Policy, and Geography) to observe the persistent absence of consensus about where urban planning *belongs* among the other "urban" disciplines.

The American Planning Association (APA), the professional planners' association, keeps a timeline of milestones in the evolution of urban planning on its website. The timeline has served to shape many a syllabus for early career faculty pulling together their first planning history and theory course for professional degree students. What is striking about the milestones that make the timeline is how these notable events are so deeply entrenched in a siloed and domain-driven approach to defining city and regional planning. The timeline is dominated by great moments in federal urban policy and path defining judicial decisions (e.g., the Housing Act of 1961, Berman v. Parker). This seems perhaps curious for a discipline for which the sub-national scale is the primary terrain of operation. This heavy emphasis on national policy rather than state, local, or even the "city scale" underscores the dominance of land use and transportation planning in the discipline—both historically shaped and enabled by judicial decision making and federal spending.

The American Planning Association's timeline is largely silent on the theoretical evolution of the discipline of city and regional planning. There is little documenting how planning has developed a set of processes for negotiation, advocacy, participation, and conflict resolution vital to community development planning, sustainability and resilience planning, and even economic development. And so urban planning, just like its allied urban disciplines tends to be dominated by a "great moments" in

addition to a "great men" (+ Jane Jacobs) approach to defining the discipline (Hall, 2014). The difference, of course, is that urban planning has a professional practice which forces an acknowledgment, if not a true reckoning, with what is *actually* happening on the ground and in cities. In other words, *actually existing* urban planning (Brenner & Theodore, 2002).

Relationship to other disciplines

Although there have long been efforts to align the boundaries of the academic discipline and the practice through professional certification, much like in architecture and engineering, these efforts tend to provide an uneasy truce around questions of the scope of urban planning and its relationship to its cognate disciplines. That is to say, what is it that counts as *planning* as opposed to what counts as urban history, sociology, economics, or policy? It is not unusual to have such academic debates, but such internecine conflicts often detract from larger issues.

And among the larger issues is the connectivity between the processes that produce urban systems and the governance of them (Clark, 2020b; Ekers et al., 2012). The dominant subfields of city and regional planning illustrate the balancing act between analysis and intervention. For example, economic development planning specifically shines a spotlight on the spatial distribution of economic activities. Understanding urban agglomerations and the processes and actors (including firms and institutions) involved in them drive much of the analytical work in economic development aimed at combating deindustrialization and investing in sustainable regional economies. And, in the cases where urban agglomerations are not central to the analysis, often it is how to drive development in their absence (read: in non-urban spaces) that is of primary concern.

For people outside of urban planning, and even sometimes for those within the discipline, the question of whether there is *a theory* of urban planning is a great source of consternation. Within the discipline, almost every subfield has a foot in a cognate discipline. For example, transportation planning allies with civil engineering. Environmental planning partners with urban ecology. Economic development planners overlap with economic geographers and urban economists. Community development planners find common ground with sociologists and anthropologists.

Research questions and methodologies

Urban planning research often relies on the analytical approaches typical of other applied social science disciplines, for example, descriptive and inferential statistics as well as econometrics (Ewing & Park, 2020). Arguably, city and regional planning has made its most distinctive and quantitatively complex contributions through the development of spatial modeling and analysis in the subfields of regional science and economic development planning (Isard et al., 1998). That said, the discipline has long been concerned with projecting alternative futures in order to inform long range investments in infrastructure projects and programs (Klosterman et al., 2018). And, because every community requires these capacities, planning has emphasized the design and development of tools and techniques that use widely available longitudinal data that can be both easily applied and clearly explained (Goodspeed, 2020; Patton et al., 2013).

As a consequence, the areas where urban planning research intersects with other urban disciplines often follows streams of analysis rather than broader areas of theory. In this sense, the field of urban planning's apparent "nearest neighbors" do not fully reveal the theoretical foundations of the academic discipline but rather a broadly shared set of applied social science methods and analytical approaches. In other words, neither the American Planning Association's great moments timeline of planning practice nor a catalog of methodological approaches indicates what is distinct about how planning views and engages the urban. For that we turn to the theoretical position of place within the discipline.

The production of place is both iterative and cumulative; it is layered. It involves economic, political, social, cultural, and ecological processes. It engages systems that are purpose-designed as well as those emerging from *ad hoc* processes. At the heart of urban planning research are questions

about the analysis and coordination of these socio-technical systems within the governance frameworks developed to manage them (Robinson, 2015). Place is more than a key variable in these constructions; it is the landscape on which systems and processes play out

For planning it is the variation between places—neighborhoods, cities, and regions—that defines the scope of research questions. How are variations produced? By what systems, decisions, communities, policies, histories, initial conditions, or endowments are the differences between places developed and maintained? And further, are there then ways to design systems and processes that produce more equitable, sustainable, and efficient outcomes? Deep within planning, lurking beneath the surface, is a theory of change for communities and institutions (Forester, 1996; Grengs, 2002).

Urban planning's key contributions: Toward equitable and sustainable urban development

Among the most sustained debates within urban planning has been how to manage growth and change. And, within that debate lies an even more problematic discussion of how to manage *decline*. The wrenching experience of deindustrialization that began in the Northwest and Midwest of the U.S. as well as in parts of the UK and Europe in the 1970s and 1980s threw the discipline into an identity crisis that is rarely acknowledged but well understood (Clark, 2020a). As a post-WWII applied social science that gained prominence in the mid-20th century as cities grew and expanded on a wave of population and economic growth associated with mass production, industrialization, and internationalization (if not globalization) urban decline came as a shock to the system. In particular, economic development planning, still hanging on to the economic base method, has not fully recovered (Pike et al., 2006).

That is not to say that there were no other crises for the discipline that predated the challenge to economic growth and expansion. Coming out of the period of 20th century urban renewal and mass suburbanization some planners confronted the inequalities created and exacerbated through technocratic and top-down approaches to large-scale planning projects. Discussions of advocacy and participatory planning, community development, and a whole discourse around equitable access to housing, schools, and job opportunities began to enter the classroom by the 1970s and 1980s (Clavel, 1994; Clavel & Wiewel, 1991; Goldsmith, 1982; Goodman, 1972; Harrison, 1974). By the early 21st century the study of structural racism became part of the analytical and theoretical discourse in the discipline especially around land use, housing, and jobs (Chapple 2002; Giloth 2000; Immergluck, 1999; Pulido, 2000).

The reframing of urban planning away from an emphasis on managing economic growth (upwards) and toward managing opportunity and access with an explicit focus on distributional equity and environmental sustainability remains partial and incomplete. That said, this is one of the dominant factors that distinguish urban planning from other "urban" disciplines: this persistent struggle with the normative (Bolan, 1980; Klosterman, 1977). As Dolores Hayden (an architect) once challenged us to consider "What would a non-sexist city be like?" (Hayden, 1980). For planners, the challenge has been not just to think about that world but to make it.

The issue of scale continues also to complicate the academic research and response in practice as planners. For contemporary urban planners there is not one scale of analysis or intervention (Clark & Christopherson, 2009). National policies drive neighborhood opportunities (Immergluck, 2009). Global production networks shape regional innovation systems (Christopherson & Clark, 2007; Clark & Doussard, 2019). Local real estate markets are inexorably linked to international patterns of financialization (Christopherson, 1993; Weber, 2015). Economic opportunity is shaped by increasingly complex spatial divisions of labor (Doussard 2013; Massey, 1984). It is no longer a *Village of Euclid, Ohio v. Ambler Realty Co*. (1926) urban planning world, if it actually ever was. As planners work through the calls for equitable and sustainable cities from within the discipline and from urban communities themselves the powerful tool of land use regulation becomes defines a localized scale of action in an endlessly globalizing world.

Amidst all this complexity it is that focus on the community *as it is*, and communities as their residents want to be, that shapes city and regional planning as the discipline and the practice (Forsyth, 2019). In recent decades this has led to a shift away from a focus on technical interventions of city planning: the road, the mass transit system, the housing project, the convention center to the "goals" of city planning: resilience, sustainability, mobility, equity that exposes the current controversies in the discipline.

For decades academic urban planners claimed a seat at the applied social science table following the "neutral" and arms-length empirical approach to social, economic, and political problems distanced from discussions of goals and values so common in cognate disciplines. Two decades into the 21st century and 40 years into the post-Fordist economy there is a new generation of urban planners—academics and practitioners—who never worked in the world where growth was expected and equity (or at least *enough* equity) was assumed to flow from it. It is unclear whether and to what extent the other "urban" disciplines will find themselves facing this same transition. Arguably, what has always distinguished urban planning, these deep ties to place and practice, are the defining factors in this reframing of the core concerns and core questions of the discipline. But in any case, it will be interesting to watch whether this time it is planning that leads and the other urban disciplines follow.

The view from political science[8]

For the past half-century, urbanists have been at the margins of political science, even as other disciplines have sustained their interest in cities. This marginality is the result of long-term disciplinary realities: first, the traditional situation of urban politics as a subfield within the study of a particularly anti-urban nation—the U.S.; and second, new methodological trends, which urbanist political scientists were neither well-positioned nor ideologically predisposed to lead.

Each of these factors has changed dramatically over the last decade. In this essay, I provide a brief sketch of urban politics as a field within political science as a discipline and suggest a few ways in which urban political scientists can make major disciplinary contributions again by breaking down long-standing parochial boundaries.

The meaning of "urban"

Political science is a broad discipline with units of analysis that range from the supranational governance institutions like the United Nations down to individual psychology. The core organizational and analytical object of the discipline, however, has tended toward the nation: relations between nations and the political processes within nations that lead to policies. A sociological concept like "urban" does not always find a natural place for emphasis within this nationally-focused framework. Because urban political science has mostly been a subfield of American politics, our concept of "urban" is particularly constrained and distinctive in its operationalization. Other disciplines and cross-national studies tend to focus on functional economic and cultural units (such as metropolitan areas, in the U.S.), or smaller units that map onto person-level experience (such as neighborhoods). In the U.S., those units typically have no consequential decision-making bodies, or elections, or policy implementation capacity. Because of our disciplinary focus on those authoritative state actors, urban political science tends to focus on municipal politics. Historically, the focus has been on case studies of politics in large cities central cities, but in the past 2 decades it has become much more common to study the hundreds or thousands of smaller municipalities as well. Employing this institutional definition rather than a sociological definition means that the study of "urban" politics tends to actually be the study of "local" politics, even when those localities don't really exhibit the core features of "urbanicity"—geographic *density* of activity and *scale* of community. These factors vary considerably within and across American cities, so even studying big cities in the U.S. can often mean studying places that are very different in terms of raw urban characteristics

Core research questions

The core research questions in urban politics tend to be smaller-scale versions of those considered by other areas of the discipline. Most empirical work can be categorized either behavioral or institutional. In general, behavioral research on urban politics asks many of the same questions that are asked at the national level but asks them in local contexts. These core questions often include "What are citizens' preferences/modes of participation, and what factors shape them?" Institutional research often follows in the tradition of local political economy, assessing how local decisions are made, which actors hold disproportionate power, and how local governments interact with other governments. There is also historical-institutionalist research on the origins of local government institutions, which have evolved in the U.S. since the late 19th century. Because there is institutional variation across local governments within the U.S., scholars can also fruitfully combine these behavioral and institutional approaches, for instance, through analyses that ask how particular configurations of local institutions shape political behavior or patterns of institutional responsiveness (i.e., representation), or how preferences and institutions interact to shape policy outcomes. As in the broader discipline, there is also a group of urbanists who chiefly interrogate normative theoretical considerations.

History of urban political science

As in other social sciences, the study of cities was a major part of applied and scholarly political science when the discipline organized itself in the early 20th century. Urban politics is organized by tradition as a subfield of American politics, so most leading members of the urban politics community have focused on city politics within the U.S.[9] Therefore, even as megacities in every global region have become a key object of inquiry for urbanists in other disciplines, the particularly anti-urban characteristics of American politics itself continues to shape our subfield research agenda, refract analyses, and limit disciplinary position.

Since the Second World War, the place of the subfield within the broader discipline has waxed and waned, making it a perennial "Subfield of the Future." These phases track changes in both the real world and the discipline itself. For a generation, many central figures in political science cut their scholarly chops researching city politics. These researchers used a local lens to develop major theories of community power, pluralist democracy, political development, and the relationship between politics and administration. Probably the most famous of these is Robert Dahl's (1961) *Who Governs?*, which used cutting-edge techniques to posit a durably compelling account of both power and American democracy itself using local data from a single city. The "urban crisis" of the 1960s and 1970s continued this attention to the city, and these locally-generated insights contributed to key theories of (American) democracy broadly.

Over time, however, urban politics have become much less central to the study of politics due to changes in the real world and in the discipline. In the world, the suburbanization of the U.S. meant that most Americans lived in places that tend to have—by design—invisible, low-participation politics in which little is at stake and from which we might not be able to learn very much about democracy (Oliver et al., 2012). The dramatic contention and high-stakes of big-city were no longer front-and-center in most Americans' lives.

The waves of methodological innovation that have transformed political science over the decades also marginalized urban scholarship. The most foundational of these was the behavioral revolution, which shifted political scientists' research from the formal analysis of institutions to empirical analysis, rooted in positivist hypothesis testing, of actors in the political system. At first, midcentury behaviorists like Dahl saw local polities as prime settings for collecting such data, but most urbanists resisted the subsequent waves of advanced survey analysis, thin rationality and game theory, and experimental design and causal identification that washed over the discipline.[10]

Localists' disciplinary position were also weakened by the insights of scholars drawing on public choice economics. They developed a persuasive model of local government in the U.S., according to which the viable policy menu of local democracies was highly constrained by the porous borders of subnational governments (Oates, 1999; Peterson, 1981; Tiebout, 1956) This vision of a "limited city" suggested that even in places where governance demands and political conflict over resources were acute, even responsive city governments were too constrained to do much about it.

Explicit theory-generating assumptions and replicable hypothesis testing made political science more scientific, reinforcing "discipline" in terms of both a scholarly habit toward conformity and a shared language of analysis in top journals. But they also shifted the political scientists' debates away from normative concerns—is it OK that power is so unequally distributed? How should we think about a democracy in which perennially excluded minority groups lose so much, toward more facially neutral, systematic descriptions of empirical reality and the precise estimation of relationships between variables? These approaches resemble science more, but they are also less connected to a scholarly vision of improved democracy.

Many urbanists were resistant to this quantification and remained committed to interpretive analysis of cases and found themselves on the losing side of a disciplinary epistemological cleavage —even as many of the subfield's leaders worked in a distinctively interdisciplinary way. Indeed, some of the preeminent urbanist political scientists of the late 20th century—Ira Katznelson, Clarence Stone, Margaret Weir, John Mollenkopf—hold joint appointments and have been as apt to contribute to scholarly conversations in history, sociology, or policy studies as in political science itself. Such urbanists are reluctant to separate their work from the engaged study of public problems. This decision entailed an unfortunate tradeoff between relevance in the world and status within mainstream political science.

Resurgence

Over the last decade, empirical advances have re-blurred the line between urbanists and other (Americanist) political scientists. Trounstine (2009) outlined a program for reinvigorating the subfield, which has been broadly adopted by the next generation. For starters, there has been a shift from "urban" to "local" politics—a change in focus that allows large-N studies of all local governments, including suburbs, school districts, counties, and special districts. Data collection efforts for these small governments are often costly, but because they allow for structured comparisons that the single "case" of American national politics cannot provide, methodological trends now cut in *favor* of studying local politics. The collection of massive individual-level datasets such as voter files and social media data allow analysis of and across particular places (See, e.g., Brown & Enos, 2021; Kogan et al., 2018; Schaffner et al., 2020) These can be profitably combined with other administrative or proprietary data sources to push the limits of "big data" in new directions, for instance, by using text-as-data techniques to examine participation in local government meetings (Einstein & Glick, 2017) or studying how constituents interact with local officials in the "virtual polity" of social media (Ramanathan & Ogorzalek, 2018). Finally, the spread of field experiments and other design-based inference techniques are often more practical on a local population than a national one, and can often be combined with the rapidly expanding quantitative geographical approaches to (partially, ostensibly) address some questions of inferential validity, allowing scholars interested in urban phenomena to provide the kinds of evidence and speak the ascendant technical language preferred by the discipline's leading methodologists (e.g., Enos, 2017; Nuamah & Ogorzalek, 2021)

However, there are trade-offs entailed by going from urban to local. Issues may get studied out of convenience rather than importance, and not all the observations in a dataset are necessarily comparable: is New York City really just another local government, comparable to the proverbial Smallville in a single dataset? And if we exclude the big cities as outliers, are we missing key phenomena? Fortunately, 21st century political scientists are much more likely to be trained in multiple methods

than in the past, equally comfortable in spreadsheets, the streets, and archives. Mixed methods allow generalizable quantitative approaches to coexist more comfortably with the thicker understanding of actual cases long common in the subfield.

Significantly, this generation of scholars remain focused on real-world problems they can observe in person and incorporate into their empirical work: inequality in participation, patterns and causes of intergroup comity (or conflict) in community politics, and the outsized role of business interests in structuring political outcomes. These are the same concerns that drove previous generation(s) of urbanists, but by examining them with the idiom familiar to disciplinary gatekeepers, they are raising the profile of (U.S.) local politics within the discipline.

Limitations and potential contributions

The last decade has seen urban politics scholars adopt conventional quantitative techniques to profitable ends, moving the subfield spiritually closer to other Americanists. But becoming more like Americanists and more connected to data in the U.S. means potentially losing sight of key developments in "urban" phenomena *per se*, because urbanism is more global than ever, and the U.S. big cities are only a little different than they were a generation ago. The subfield's resurgence can be accelerated by bringing these new tools along while softening the parochialisms encouraged by the discipline.

First, breaking out of the constraining organizational position of urbanists as a subfield of American politics can leverage a cultural explosion of interest urbanicity itself. While there has been a limited urban renaissance in the U.S., perhaps opening up space to see beyond the "limited city" (Ogorzalek, 2021; Schragger, 2016), the real urban action has been in other nations, especially in the fast-growing megacities of the Global South. To put it bluntly, most urbanites, most big cities, and most urban change, is outside the U.S., so researchers interested in distinctively *urban* phenomena can benefit from looking around the world than from looking only within one particular nation.[11]

Rigorous cross-national urbanism is not easy; it adds layer of analytical complexity because cities in different nations navigate very different institutional and political fields. For the newer generation of scholars trained to think first about isolating variables and reducing complexity for structured comparison without confounding factors, introducing entirely new national systems seems like a step in the wrong direction, the introduction of an irresolvable "k > n" problem.

Fortunately, there is a long tradition of comparative urbanism, especially outside the U.S., which is increasingly becoming organizationally wedded to urban politics (rather than a separate, comparativist project). Comparativists often work in an interdisciplinary manner—blending historical case studies, quantitative tools, policy studies, ethnography, and geographic approaches in a single work—and we are sure to profit from seeing these methods applied to big questions.[12] The methodological approach that seems most promising here is a shift from variable-oriented analyses to robust case-oriented research (Brady & Collier, 2004; Ragin, 2008). Comparativists use these tools to compare nations, and the same logic can apply to cities within or across nations. For all their quantitative sophistication, almost none of the current generation of Americanists have adopted these non-correlative methods of quantitative comparison, though urban politics would be a prime subfield for these methods' deployment.

The second move flows from the first. Many urbanists have been content to limit their studies to the U.S. But comparing the political economy of the fragmented U.S. metropolis to its counterparts abroad is a fruitful way to connect political institutions with social and economic outcomes, or to see how even big differences in local policy effort can be overwhelmed by market conditions (see, for instance, Freemark et al., 2020; Le Galès & Pierson, 2019; Taylor, 2019).[13] Sociology and economics do this as a matter of course, but American political scientists do not. Institutionally, American cities are distinctive from their counterparts elsewhere: they are far less likely to be coterminous with their metro area, they tend to have weaker authorities within the national constitutional order, and there is no metropolitan "state" to make policy or hold elections. These factors tend to make political scientists

throw up their hands because we cannot see where the "politics" is occurring. This kind of analysis may require transcending our disciplinary habit of focusing only on the internal processes of legally sovereign units to more effectively (and still systematically) grappling with how the city—understood as a social and economic community, rather than merely a political one—governs itself and navigates its broader context. Fortunately, most urbanists have read Stone (1989) as well as Dahl (1961), so understanding the importance of informal governance arrangements will not be entirely new.

Finally, urbanists can draw out the place of cities in national politics and political economy by overcoming methodological localism. The rise of the urban-rural partisan divide has become a defining feature of contemporary politics across many nations. Understanding the roots and interpreting the meaning of this divide, is a vital public project with many scholarly puzzles yet to be explained. Recent books by Rodden (2019) and Ogorzalek (2018) provide different accounts of how this national divide arose, looking closely at voting patterns but also using tools and theories from history, geography, economics, and sociology to explain these shifts over time. Taken even further, scholars could consider transnational urban politics, as cities adopt robust relationships with each other across national borders (for instance, through mayoral alliances like the C40) or develop their own policies in response to transnational migration flows, such as the provision of formal identification for nationally-undocumented immigrants.

Relationships to other disciplines

Most of these recommendations are aimed at political scientists, who probably stand to learn more than teach in interdisciplinary exchange; our methods borrow heavily, in trendy waves, from other disciplines, and our urban analyses are often a lagging indicator of overall scholarly insight.[14] The limitations described above—a narrow American tendency, the privileging of isolating relationship between variables over understanding whole social phenomena, and devotion to formal definitions of the political city—can be in part transcended by skillfully deploying case-study comparisons and a less rigid definition of "urban/city" employed in other disciplines.

Still, some central habits of political science that can contribute to fruitful disciplinary cross-pollination. For instance, political science's emphasis on the role of policy and the state in shaping all sites of action—even those, like markets or culture, that may be read as prior to or independent of politics—can yield powerful insights about where power is located and how it operates. This is especially true in the ongoing ebb of the neoliberal consensus, which is likely to make the central role of politics and power in policymaking more obvious again. Scholars in other fields may also profit from historical-institutional analyses of the origins and development of sovereignty-wielding institutions, and the interplay of institutions, which may have unexpected effects when new social practices or laws are layered on top of what came before.[15]

The generational updating of urban politics has also coincided with return to a disciplinary emphasis on public relevance in developing research questions. For a discipline with "political" right there in the title, it is perhaps surprising that there is a perennial disconnect between the scholarly research agenda and the consideration of current public problems derived from the unequal distribution of power even in democratic societies—the place where Dahl and the other pluralists started several decades ago. Because these engaged concerns have remained central for urbanists, this community of scholars is well-suited to guide the discipline back to its core concern of strengthening democracy.

The view from sociology[16]

Urban sociology, and sociology more generally in the U.S., were founded by sociologists in the early 20th century at the University of Chicago. Broadly speaking, urban sociology focuses on two distinct yet related areas of study—urbanization and urbanism. Urbanization broadly considers issues surrounding the growth and changes in urban places from cities to specific neighborhoods. Urbanism for

sociologists is focused on the impact of urbanization on communities and individuals. There is generally agreement on several broad questions that shape the study of urban sociology within these areas, although the key theories and methodologies used by urban sociologists tend to differ between these two areas. While historically some debated existed over the strength of the identity of urban sociology, I argue that it is a strong subfield within sociology and has much to offer to the larger, interdisciplinary field of urban studies.

Sociology is broadly conceived as the study of human society. The discipline focuses on many topics that include social stratification, social institutions, culture, social organization, and social change. Urban sociology also considers these topics, but urban sociology explicitly connects these dimensions to urban places and communities. Place is not always the focus of sociologists, more generally.

History of the subfield

Any attempt to understand contemporary American urban sociology must trace the sub-discipline's roots back to the Chicago School of Sociology a little over one century ago. It is there that the macro- and micro-level traditions of study were established and have been carried forward today into the broad distinctive areas of urbanization and urbanism. Robert Park and Ernst Burgess are perhaps most well-known for linking the study of American cities to plant and animal ecology so that sociology could establish itself as a science. In building this broader sociological theoretical foundation, the subfield of urban sociology was born.

The scholarship of Park and Burgess focused on characterizing the population and housing growth and changes taking place within and between neighborhoods of Chicago and in the overall city. This ecological study of cities and neighborhoods undergirds research in the area of urbanization that has existed for over 100 years. At the same time, Park and his student Louis Wirth, among others, focused on the impact of this urbanization on individuals and on the culture of cities, which leads to the emergence of the second core area of urban sociology, urbanism.

The meaning of urban

The meaning of urban is dependent upon the two areas of study within urban sociology. Scholars that focus on urbanization generally define urban based upon the size of places. There is a wide range of definitions, depending upon the countries within which places are examined, and even within countries, like the U.S., there are different definitions (Gottdiener et al., 2015). In the U.S., for example, the Census Bureau considers places with a population size greater than 2,500 to be urban. An urbanized area contains a population of 50,000 or more.

Scholars that work in the subarea of urbanism generally define urban based upon the nature of people's social ties. Rural areas are considered to be places composed of people that know one another, but urban areas consist largely of people that are strangers to one another (Wirth, 1938). As such, urban areas are heterogeneous in nature, and many of the ties that people have are "impersonal, superficial, transitory, and segmental" (Wirth, 1938, p. 12). Whether urbanites lack a complete sense of community is the source of much debate in the field and a subject of great interest among those focused on urbanism.

Research questions

Several key research questions have guided the research on urbanization, and studies in this area have tended to use ecological theoretical models and methods, which focus on explaining variation and changes in aggregate units of analyses like neighborhoods, places, cities, or metropolitan areas by considering the population, environment, organization, and technology (Gottdiener & Feagin, 1988; Lee, 1988). At least four questions have guided research in this area: (1) What is the nature of the social organization or the way groups and individuals display their relations within urban areas at one point

in time and over time? (2) How do ecological factors, like population, the environment, and technology, affect the social organization within urban areas temporally? (3) What is the nature of the linkages of the social organization of urban areas to one another and across nations? and (4) How do ecological factors explain the variation in the connections between urban areas within and between nations?

In contrast to the study of urbanization, urbanism scholars tend to focus on the micro-level unit of analysis, usually focusing on individuals. Studies in this area use qualitative and quantitative methods and rely on non-ecological theories including political economy, socio-spatial models, and cultural perspectives. At least three research questions have guided this area of research since urban sociology's inception at the Chicago School: (1) How does urbanization or urban scale affect individual well-being through changes in the social organization of places? (2) Does urbanization contribute to a lack of a sense of community in urban areas? and (3) How do cultural elements of urban areas affect urbanites? These questions are outgrowths of the concern that urban sociologists in Europe, like Durkheim, Toennies, and Simmel, had in the late 19th century about whether and how the shift of the population to a more urban environment and of the economy from agriculture to industry would negatively or positively impact individuals (Lee, 1988).

Urban sociology's contributions

Contemporary studies of urbanization focus on many topics, including residential segregation, gentrification, neighborhood racial and ethnic change, urban growth, suburbanization, and city linkages via globalization. Following in the footsteps of previous urbanization scholars, today's research in this vein relies mostly on aggregate-level data from U.S. decennial censuses and American Community Survey (ACS), and this research tends to be quantitative in nature, with the unit of analysis focusing on neighborhoods, cities, metropolitan areas, and places within metropolitan areas or cities. In recent decades with the availability of neighborhood-level data from the ACS and the ability to harmonize data across time, there has been more of a tendency for researchers to focus on neighborhoods.

From a theoretical standpoint, much of the contemporary urbanization research employs theoretical models grounded in human ecology to study these phenomena. Human ecology examines the connections between population change, organization of communities, the environment, and technology. However, in the last part of the 20th century, there was a paradigm shift from human ecology to the new urban sociology that caused urban theory to shift to include a range of theories that may be seen collectively as a sociospatial approach, including perspectives by Castells (1977), Harvey (1985), Gottdeiner (1985), and Lefebvre (1991), and focus on the impact of structural factors (e.g., government agencies and officials; institutional actors in the real estate industry; business interests) and the interplay of active, agent-based economic, political, social, and cultural factors on urban phenomena (Gottdiener & Feagin, 1988). As a result of this shift, urbanization scholars have included measures in the study of urbanization that gauge the effect of the agency of institutional actors and those actively involved in making decisions that affect local housing markets. For example, Gotham (2002) offers an alternative theoretical framework to the ecological invasion and succession model in characterizing neighborhood racial change by explicitly incorporating the roles of schools and real estate agents, among other actors. Rothwell and Massey (2009) develop measures of density zoning, which reflect the active decisions of local governments, business interest, and homeowners, and incorporate them into studying changes in racial residential segregation over time, controlling for other typical ecological measures used in this research. These measures have been used in other research on segregation (e.g., Massey & Tannen, 2018).

Contemporary studies of urbanism focus on many subjects, including neighborhood social organization and disorganization, the latter of which refers to a breakdown in the social structure of relations and a lack of social control; collective efficacy and social ties; neighborhood effects on individuals; urban poverty and eviction; immigrant ethnic communities; cultural elements in

urban life relating to gentrification and immigration, among other phenomena; and individual health outcomes as they relate to segregation and residential inequalities. The data used in these studies are both qualitative and quantitative in nature, and the unit of analysis can range from individuals to neighborhoods or larger community areas. Today's scholars working in the area of urbanism are still very concerned with the impact of urban areas on communities and the well-being of their residents. However, in recent decades, urban sociologists working in this area have used multilevel models to consider the impact of various forms of urbanization on the well-being of individuals.

In contrast to the era of the Chicago School, most of the American population today lives in metropolitan areas. Contemporary urbanist scholars are interested in comparing areas with differing degrees of social organization. This line of work is similar to the scholarship of Park, Wirth and others at the Chicago School, like Shaw and McKay, but the causes of the disorganization lie less in the increase in urban scale that existed around the time of the Chicago School and more in terms of the inequalities that exist from the urbanization processes of uneven urban growth, residential segregation, racial and ethnic change, and gentrification that have occurred within America's cities in recent decades.

Robert Sampson's book *The Great American City* (Sampson, 2013) is an excellent example of contemporary scholarship on urbanism and has become a modern-day classic in urban sociology. Sampson situates individuals in a larger social context and discusses the impact of different facets of that context on individual behavior. In neighborhoods where collective efficacy and organizational capacity are greater, individuals have lower moral cynicism and higher levels of altruism that leads to better outcomes as compared to those living in neighborhoods with weaker levels of collective efficacy and lower levels of organization capacity. Sampson's book is critical in showing that individual behavior cannot be considered independently of the neighborhoods, surrounding neighborhoods, and cities within which individuals live. He shows that the notion of community is critical in people's lives, even in an era when people consider community to be lost. He also shows the critical role that nonprofit organizations and social networks in relating to individual's well-being.

Another book that is a modern-day classic among urbanists is Matthew Desmond's book on *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City* (2016) that exposes the connection of individual poverty to place and specifically to the struggle for families to remain housed. Desmond's work in this book has raised awareness of eviction as a social problem in urban America among scholars but also among the public at large. His work does what previous urbanist scholars have done before him. Desmond elucidates what it means to be poor in today's urban areas and clearly shows the impact that eviction has had on this process.

Tracing the work of urban sociologists from the Chicago School until the present day, it is clear that the dual focus on urbanization and urbanism is the backbone of scholarship in urban sociology. The research questions that were asked at the turn of the 20th century continue to be asked over 100 years later. What has changed are the theories, data, and methodologies that urban sociologists have at their disposal to answer these research questions. For example, the availability of big data and methods to analyze such data, like computational textual analysis, has allowed researchers to advance studies of the nature of inequalities in the availability of housing in the rental market (e.g., Besbris et al. 2021, 2022).

Shortcomings

A main limitation of urban sociology is that its scholarship in these areas of urbanization and urbanism has often been fractured by conflicts over which theoretical and methodological approaches are superior to advance knowledge in the field. The article by Gottdiener and Feagin (1988) is a great example highlighting the tension between the theoretical camps in urban sociology, as the abstract claims "the explanatory superiority of the new urban theory." In reacting

to this article, Smith (1995) wrote the article, "The New Urban Sociology Meets the Old: Rereading Some Classical Human Ecology," to suggest that there should be "more dialogue and less theoretical polarization." Methodological debates have also been part of these tensions as human ecologists tend to use more quantitative methods and new urban sociologists use qualitative methods.

These tensions have not been in vain, however. Urban scholars working from more of a human ecologist and quantitative approach have heeded the calls by new urban sociologists, like Gottdiener and Feagin (1988), to include measures into their analyses to capture the structural forces that affect urban outcomes. As mentioned above, in studying residential segregation, scholars in this camp have included measures of zoning, which reflect the active decisions of local governments, business interest, and homeowners, into quantitative studies of residential segregation (e.g., Rothwell & Massey; Massey & Tannen, 2018). The recent availability of appraisal maps by the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) has led to the careful, quantitative examination of the causal impact of the explicit, racist policy of institutional redlining on contemporary racial residential segregation, which is an excellent example of the blending of these theoretical perspectives and methodologies (Faber, 2020). From a methodological standpoint, several researchers, like Krysan and Crowder (2017), have successfully blended quantitative and qualitative research in studying urban phenomenon; Krysan and Crowder (2017) received the Robert E. Park Book Award from the Community and Urban Sociology Section (CUSS) of the American Sociological Association for their book. Thus, the earlier polarization has challenged researchers in urban sociology, particularly those working from a more ecological and quantitative orientation, to expand their approach; it has led to significant advancements in urban sociological research; and researchers in the field have banded together to recognize significant and impactful work that utilizes multi-method approaches.

But we are not out of the woods yet. As Brown-Saracino (2017) highlights, theoretical and methodological approaches have divided the study of gentrification, which has impacted the conclusions made in scholarship from different orientations. Quantitative, urban scholars tend to downplay the impacts of gentrification on the poor and people of color, while qualitative researchers choose case studies that reveal significant, long-term negative impacts on marginalized groups. By formally highlighting these significant differences and tensions between quantitative and qualitative urban sociologists studying gentrification, Brown-Saracino (2017) it has moved us a step in the right direction. This important article will challenge researchers from both methodological camps to move toward a middle ground and develop strategies to ultimately produce better research on gentrification.

In addition to conflicts among urban sociologists, the insularity of American urban sociology is a shortcoming. In general, in examining urbanization and urbanism in America, American urban sociologists tend to limit their literature reviews to articles focused on American society. However, this is changing. The international audience of urban journals is expanding, and the leadership of these journals is increasingly representative of this larger breadth of their international audiences. These shifts will, no doubt, have an impact on expanding the scope of literature reviews in articles by American urban sociologists to include international scholarship.

Relationships to sociology and other disciplines

Urban sociology's origins in the U.S. are inextricably linked to the origins of American sociology that developed at the Chicago School at the turn of the 20th century. Toward the end of the 20th century, however, scholars began to question whether the sub-discipline had a solid identity (Lee, 1988). In large part, this questioning of urban sociology's identity grew out of the fact that the U.S. became largely urbanized, and some began to wonder whether a "sociology of the city" was still necessary (Gans 2009; Lee, 1988). Lee (1988) also points out that some scholars felt that the proliferation of interdisciplinary urban research weakened urban sociology's unique identity. Some continue to question whether urban sociology's identity is in jeopardy (e.g., Wu, 2016).

Just like Lee (1988) argued more than 30 years ago, the data today suggest that urban sociology is a sub-discipline that is alive and well. The American Sociological Association (ASA) has 52 sections within its professional organization, allowing faculty, students, and practitioners to share research interests and provide networking opportunities, particularly at the ASA annual meeting each year. Sections bolster the strength and identity of sub-disciplines by allowing their officers and members to organize sessions and roundtables for the annual meeting. In addition, sections have their own newsletters, award competitions, and business meetings at the annual ASA meeting.

By all accounts, CUSS is thriving, which I take as an indicator of urban sociology's strength and visibility as a sub-discipline within sociology. Membership data for the ASA sections from 2020 reveal that the average number of members in each section was 472 (ASA 2020). In 2020, CUSS had 552 members. More importantly, CUSS is one of only four sections that has its own journal, *City and Community*. The journal started in 2001, and according to *Journal Citation Reports*, its five-year impact factor grew from 1.141 in 2012 to 2.155 in 2021. It's clear that urban sociology has a strong identity and remains a vital part of the sociological discipline.

Although urban sociology has the great fortune of having its own journal, urban sociologists are not locked in a sociological silo. Instead, they must be fluent in urban research of the other main disciplines, political science, economics, history, and geography and planning. Most of the widely regarded urban journals are interdisciplinary in nature, including *Urban Studies, Cities, International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, Journal of Urban Affairs*, and *Urban Affairs Review*. In addition, urban sociologists and urban scholars, more generally, must be attuned to comparative differences in the urban phenomena that they are studying.

Urban sociology has benefitted greatly from scholars in other related urban disciplines. From geography, urban sociologists have adopted incredible data visualization and statistical tools to enhance the study of urban phenomena. The adoption of an historical lens on issues like residential segregation and immigration from urban history has provided useful conceptual frameworks for urban sociologists who analyze historical data like HOLC maps and decennial censuses from 1940 and earlier. Urban sociologists rely on studies in urban political science to suggest ways to incorporate political elements of urban life into sociological study, like the impacts of zoning policies on residential segregation or political party preferences on people's residential preferences. The field of urban economics has probably been one of the most influential in terms of causing urban sociologists to carefully consider the role of neighborhood effects on individual behavior.

Urban sociology contributes to other disciplines as well. Probably the most important influence has been the Chicago School's legacy. Many urban scholars in other disciplines have focused on similar research questions because of the influence of Park and his colleagues. Perhaps one of the greatest influences on other urban disciplines and outside of the urban arena, including those focused on public health, has been the focus on residential segregation initially examined by Park and colleagues and later reinvigorated by research by Massey and Denton (1993). Taken together, the dialogue that urban sociologists have with other urban disciplines has not only strengthened urban sociology as a sub-discipline but also equips urban scholars with a more developed and cutting-edge toolkit with which to tackle the study of urban issues. This benefits us all.

In addition to publishing academic research, urban sociologists, along with urban scholars from other disciplines, are actively engaged in research that relates directly to public policy. One of the best examples of this interdisciplinary, urban collaborative work is the Moving to Opportunity Project that has examined the impact of the mobility of poor households to neighborhoods with lower poverty levels, relative to remaining in poorer neighborhoods (e.g., Goering & Feins, 2003). Recent research of participants in this study has demonstrated significant positive effects of their mobility to neighborhoods with lower poverty levels (e.g., Chetty et al., 2016). Urban sociologists and urban scholars of other disciplines have also done significant work examining housing discrimination against protected groups as well as investigated subprime and predatory lending, which relate to the effectiveness of the Fair Housing, Equal Credit

Opportunity, and Community Reinvestment Acts. This work is highly valued by the sub-discipline, as several of the lifetime achievement award winners have built their careers on research directly related to these policies (e.g., Nancy Denton, Douglas Massey, Gregory Squires, Anne Shlay, Chester Hartman).

The future of urban sociology is bright. The discipline remains highly visible with sociology as well as within the larger scholarship of urban studies. The dialogue among urban scholars from all disciplines strengthens urban sociology, other urban disciplines, as well as important conversations about urban public policies.

Synthesis and comparison across subfields[17]

Our five colleagues for this article have provided informative and thoughtful descriptions of their discipline's urban subfield. Our hope and expectation were that these essays would serve to stimulate questions and reactions about the nature of these urban subfields and their relationships to each other and that urban scholars across the subfields will find them useful and intriguing. To facilitate that process, in this section we provide a synthesis and comparison across the subfields. Looking across the reports, we see similarities and differences as well as possible implications for broader issues. Our comments in this section are organized around the five original questions. In the final section, we raise some related observations.

The meaning of *urban*

What is the unit of analysis for urban research and scholarship? Does urban mean a focus on the largest (central) cities, the metropolitan area, suburbs, smaller cities and towns outside of metropolitan areas, all of the above? (And/ or, is the term used to mean something closer to a form of social organization, as in "urbanism"?) The question can lead to important answers, both to help us understand the differences among the subfields, and also to ensure that researchers from the various urban subfields understand what others are talking about when they use the term "urban."

The essays indicate that each urban subfield has included research on all or nearly all of these geographic scales, though in most cases there has been a dominant focus. In economics, Lin observes that the main feature that urban economics is concerned with is "location" and that such a focus can produce research on a variety of urban scales. He notes that for many urban economists the metropolitan area is the most relevant scale, because it is the area within which meaningful agglomeration economies occur and important markets—particularly the labor and housing markets—operate. But he also emphasizes that some urban economists also focus on the neighborhood level, conceiving the neighborhood as "a bundle of nonmarketed goods (e.g., accessibility, schools, safety, and shopping)." Friedman reports that sociology's focus has been on a set of concerns related to social organization and how ecological factors like population, environment, and technology affect social organization at all urban scales. Political science has been concerned predominantly with large cities, though Ogorzalek argues that recent trends are for research to focus on all local governments, with local government population size used as a possible explanatory variable. Harris states that urban history has been concerned mostly with major metropolitan areas and their central cities and/or inner suburbs, while Clark argues that urban planning research has occurred on all geographic scales.

Beyond these geo-political scales lies a rather different issue: the substantive characterization of "urban." By this we mean something like, for example, "large, dense, and heterogeneous" (Wirth) or "the places where traditional society goes to corrupt and deteriorate" (also Wirth and also Jefferson and other anti-urbanists per White) or "modern" (as per the globalists etc.) or the locus for civilization, creativity, and culture (Liza Minnelli singing "New York, New York"). These ideas might be described as lying anywhere on a spectrum from unexamined assumptions to explicit hypotheses. Raising all this up for more rigorous discussion would enhance the urban field's understanding of itself and open opportunities to more thoughtfully shape its future.

Core research questions and methodologies

Each urban subfield has a variety of research concerns and questions, but in most cases our authors had no problem nominating a few dominant or overriding ones. As with notions of "urban," the research questions and the methods chosen to implement them influence the form and content of the product and what we think we know.

Urban economics, according to Lin in his opening sentence, asks the question, "What determines the uneven geographic distribution of economic activity?" noting that, if economics is "the study of the allocation of scarce resources, then urban economics is the study of the allocation of urban land" across space. He goes on to state that key questions in urban economics include what are the important agglomeration and dispersion factors at work; what are the costs and benefits of density; what are the processes that tend toward equilibrium across space, and, despite these, why do disparities across regions continue to exist; why do land and property prices vary within cities; and what explains sorting and segregation patterns?.

Friedman states that sociology is, broadly conceived, the study of human society, while urban sociology is the study of human activity focused on place—urban places and communities. More specifically urban sociology is concerned with *urbanization*—issues concerned with the growth and changes in urban places—and *urbanism*—the impact of urbanization on communities and individuals. Key research topics include the nature of social organization (and disorganization) within urban areas, particularly at the neighborhood level; the ways in which ecological factors like population, the environment, and technology affect social organization within urban areas; how groups and individuals relate to each other within these areas; the effect of urban areas (relative to non-urban ones) on individual and group behavior and relationship to each other; and racial and economic segregation over time and its causes and consequences.

Urban history, according to Harris, is focused on three broad questions: what has been the nature and experience of people living in urban areas; how and why has urban change occurred; and what have been the consequences of these changes for people and their environment.

Ogorzalek observes that the core concerns of urban politics as a subfield have varied over time. He notes that urban politics research asks many of the same questions that the discipline asks at the national level such as what are citizens' preferences and modes of participation, what factors shape them, and how are these preferences linked to political decision making? Key concerns for institutional urban political research include how local decisions are made; which actors hold disproportionate power (who governs or who has the ability to make key decisions on the allocation of resources); which groups are advantaged or disadvantaged by government activity; and how local government interact with one another.

Clark cites the major concerns of urban planning to be its emphasis on the production and management of place and the tools available "to shape the spatial organization of economic activities." As the reference to tools suggests, she observes that urban planning—unlike the other urban subfields—is interventionist and action-oriented. Key research questions include what variations exist among places and by what systems, decisions, policies, and initial endowments are these variations produced; are there ways of designing systems and processes that produce more equitable sustainable, and efficient outcomes; and, more recently, how to manage urban decline as well as growth.

What are the dominant methodologies used to pursue these research questions, models and/or approaches of the subfield? This was the question to which the authors gave the most diverse responses, many focusing on very specific traditions of their subfield. Lin stated that urban economic approaches could be characterized by optimizing behavior and equilibrium conditions, with a focus on agglomeration and dispersing forces. He emphasized that quantification has been a foundational bedrock of urban economic research.

Urban sociology, according to Friedman, traditionally relied upon an ecological approach, but beginning in the 1980s the ecological approach has been challenged by "the new urban sociology," an alternative theoretical conception that emphasizes both structural factors and the effect of individual

agency. She notes that ecological research has tended to be predominantly quantitative, while the new urban sociology scholarship more qualitative, though recently there has been some convergence. She also observes that scholarship in urban sociology has often been hampered by conflicts over what the core questions are and what are the best theoretical and methodological approaches to bring to bear on them.

Harris characterized urban history methodologies as empirical rather than theoretical, relying on qualitative sources, particularly texts and documents. He added that there has been some quantitative research (cliometrics) during recent decades, but that urban history remains a primarily qualitative field, although there some recent research has made use of GIS techniques in the analysis of historical data.

Urban politics research, according to Ogorzalek, was once preoccupied with formal analysis of urban political institutions with thick and intensive case studies. It was embedded in theoretical and normative concerns related to pluralism, who governs, and the distribution of power. However, as he explains, it was slow to adapt to the behavioral revolution, with its emphasis on empiricism, positivist hypotheses testing, and quantification and, later, formal analysis, rational choice, and game theory that swept through the broader discipline. He observes that over time many urban politics scholars have adopted conventional quantitative techniques and multi-method approaches.

Again, in contrast to the other subfields, Clark emphasizes that urban planning is an action oriented as well as research subfield and that action oriented approaches include negotiation, advocacy, participation, and conflict resolution. She observes that methodologically planning as a field has pioneered in developing and utilizing spatial modeling and analysis in the service of informing long-term futures for a community and to project costs and benefits of long-range investments.

History of the subfield and standing within the discipline

Many of the subfields appear to have gone through a similar cycle of growth and innovation, followed by a substantial period of decline within the broader discipline and, more recently, a resurgence accompanied by somewhat greater acceptance within the broader discipline.

Lin traces the beginning of urban economics to the increased attention to urban problems in the 1950s and 1960s and to institutional support made available through two foundations, Resources for the Future and the Ford Foundation. However, he notes that the early enthusiasm for the field soon faded and quotes Paul Krugman, who, at the beginning of the 1990s, called it a "small, peripheral field." However, he observes that there has been an increased growth in the stature of the subfield, as evidenced by increased participation in conferences on urban economics and more frequent articles by urban economists in the top economics journals.

Ogorzalek states that the study of urban politics was a major part of the discipline of political science in the early part of the discipline's history and up through the "urban crisis" of the 1960s and 1970s. Indeed, many of the main contributors to the study of national politics, such as Robert Dahl, began their career and shaped their theoretical approaches in the urban politics arena. However, he argues, over time urban politics became "less central to the study of politics." He attributes this both to changes in the external world (the "urban crisis" fell off the nation's policy agenda) and to methodological changes discussed above that transformed political science as a discipline but were resisted by those in the urban politics subfield (particularly behavioral research and quantification) and resulted in the marginalization of urban politics scholarship. He observes that more recently many leading urban politics scholars have adopted the now conventional tools of the broader discipline and have reinvigorated the subfield as a result.

Friedman notes that urban sociology's origins are closely linked to the origins of the broader discipline of sociology and the Chicago School at the beginning of the 20th century. She observes, however, that during the last part of the 20th century the rationale of the subfield came into question, partly because some wondered whether the nearly full urbanization of American society made an urban subfield redundant and also because an increasing amount of urban research in other disciplines

as well as interdisciplinary research weakened the subfield's unique identity. However, she concludes that, based on membership and participation in the Community and Urban Sociology section of the American Sociology Association, the subfield is currently thriving.

Like the other subfields, Harris, our contributing historian, observes that urban history "gained momentum in the 1960s and early 1970s, flagged a little as the urban crisis waned but then in the United States has revived strongly since the late 1980s. However, he concludes that, except for the 1960s, urban history has never been prominent within the broader discipline. He attributes this in part to the fact that for most of the periods historians study the majority of people lived in rural areas.

Clark notes that urban planning grew from a "stew of other disciplines," and did not emerge as a free-standing discipline until the 1950s. The urban subfield (city and regional planning) is nearly synonymous with the discipline that has evolved since that time, although other subfields have emerged as well. She notes that most of these subfields have a foot within a cognate discipline, such as political science, economics, and geography or applied fields such as public health and public administration and that most of these "cross-disciplinary alliances" are based on similar interests, data and methods rather than on theory. However, she observes, the nature of city and regional planning as a discipline remains a contested issue among academic planners, even extending to what "counts as planning as opposed to what count as urban history, sociology, economics or policy." She emphasizes that, unlike the other four urban subfields considered in this essay, urban planning is an explicitly applied social science with a "balancing act between analysis and intervention."

Main contributions and shortcomings of the urban subfields

As suggested by the question, our essayists nominated contributions of their subfields that they felt were, if not unique in their subfield, quite different in importance when compared to other subfields. Lin, our contributing economist pointed to the focus on quantification and decentralized decision making as urban economics' most important contribution. Our historian suggested that the increasing recognition by other disciplines that the past matters, often expressed as "path dependence," was an important contribution of urban history.

Ogorzalek observed that the subfield of urban politics has moved more toward the mainstream of American political science in the past few decades, particularly methodologically, but that, "becoming more like Americanists and more connected to data in the U.S. means potentially losing sight of key developments in "urban" phenomena *per se.*" In particular, he decries the tendency of American urbanists to concentrate on isolating the relationship between variables over understanding whole social phenomena. He argues, however, that political scientists' emphases on policy and the state in shaping action can provide insights on where power is located and how it operates, an important concern for other urban subfields as well.

One inference from the essay by Clark, our contributor in urban and regional planning is that the interplay of research and practice that characterizes the field brings together the two endeavors in a more productive relationship than is the case in more disciplinary bound urban subfields.

Our contributors were virtually unanimous in identifying a common shortcoming: an excessive emphasis on research within the American context and a lack of sufficient comparative research and research on cities in non-western countries, including global cities. Ogorzalek, our contributing political scientist, notes that urbanism is more global than ever, but the U.S. big cities are only a little different than they were a generation ago. He argues that "To put it bluntly, most urbanites, most big cities, and most urban change, is outside the U.S.—so researchers interested in distinctively *urban* phenomena can benefit from looking around the world than from looking only within one particular nation. He notes that there is a strong tradition of cross-national urban studies outside the U.S. and that urban politics scholars in the U.S. should adopt methods of comparative urban research —which is often cross-disciplinary in manner—and apply these both to cross-national studies in which American cities are one case and to cross-national research generally.

Harris recommends that urban historians adopt the methodologies of comparative research, especially when applied to urban places in different countries, and the influence of transnational flows of people, capital, and ideas (Ewen, 2016). This would encourage a less national/ parochial outlook. Friedman makes a similar critique of urban sociology, noting that "the insularity of American urban sociology is a shortcoming."

Relationship to other disciplines

Lin terms urban economics "insular," observing that urban economists pay attention to other social scientists primarily as a source of inspiration, i.e., as a source of identifying topics worth studying.

Friedman observes that urban sociologists have made use of and benefitted from research concerns, approaches, and tools and methodologies of other urban subfields, giving examples such as the focus of neighborhood effects on individual behavior in urban economics, the historical approach to the issues of residential segregation and immigration, data visualization from urban geography, and statistical tools from a variety of disciplines. She says that other urban fields would do well to adopt an interest in residential segregation and inter-group interactions, both of which are fundamental interests of urban sociology tracing back to its origins in the Chicago School.

Harris observes that urban history scholars have been affected by both sociology (the Chicago School) and political science. He suggests that what urban history has to offer other urban subfields are that the past matters (what other disciplines have recently come to recognize through an interest in "path dependency") and, more broadly, context matters. He also suggests several desirable imports from other urban subfields to urban history: adoption of the concept of externalities; more use of comparative research methodologies; and more emphasis on economic processes.

Ogorzalek observes that the "urban" unit of analysis in political science makes it more difficult to engage with other urban sub-fields, since urban politics has focused on governmental units, while other urban subfields are primarily concerned with specific geographies (metropolitan areas, neighborhoods, the suburbs). He argues that the most important need for American urban politics scholars is to view cities and urban politics as a general subject worth studying, with the urban government and politics in the United States only as one case. Finally, Clark, as already discussed, notes that nearly every subfield in urban planning grew out of or has a foot in another of the social science disciplines, so that researchers are likely to be both well aware of and to utilize the tools and concepts of other disciplines.

Reflections[18]

In this final section, we focus on the theme that pervades the entire paper: our conviction that the future of urban studies will greatly benefit from broader and deeper discussions of gnarly topics that have hitherto been mainly ignored or minimized. We suggest a "republic of conversation" to help make such a future more likely.

If urban studies can be said to encompass the study of urban phenomena, regardless of the discipline or disciplinary subfield within which the study occurs, what do our essays about the five urban subfields suggest about our ability to generate and accumulate knowledge in the field of urban studies?

We begin by expressing our view that the quest for the understanding of urban phenomena rests on a solid existing foundation. Looking across the five subfield reports, our respondents describe a situation with considerable strengths, admirable production and accumulation of knowledge and understanding, and growing institutions—solid ground for building further. The evolution of core research question and of theory and methodological approaches and

tools, often with considerable debate and dispute, within each of the subfields, is testimony to a healthy set of subfields. These kinds of controversies are essential to healthy scholarship and the development of knowledge.

Challenges abound but within that healthy context. The most obvious challenge, as these reports from the disciplines not surprisingly suggest, is a lack of coherence across the subfields. It is worth noting that the main concerns of each do not add up to a coherent program of urban scholarship and research, nor, of course, are they intended to. However, it is also fair to observe that relatively little effort has been expended in trying to add them up. Perhaps the challenge is best stated as a collective lack of attention to and methods for fitting together the results and insights of the various disciplinary research endeavors. To a substantial extent, they are simply blind to one another. From basic empirical descriptions to policy recommendations, urbanists tend to prioritize the separate disciplines' autonomy over development of the "field."

This is not necessarily all bad. Specialization has its advantages. The hoary analogy of several blind people describing an elephant at least yields a description of an elephant, and from several different perspectives. Thus, for example, despite our essayists indication that their subfield is concerned with "urban" at all or nearly all geographic scales, it is nonetheless true that there is a relative predominance of focus at the metropolitan level by urban economists, at the city (and particularly big city) level by urban politics scholars and urban historians, and at the neighborhood level by sociologists. The range of core research questions across the subfield together provide a fuller understanding of urban areas than does the focus of any one subfield alone.

Despite separate subfield histories, there have been common developmental trends, particularly with respect to research questions worthy of studying and—with the exception of urban history—the adoption of quantification techniques as important research tools. While each of the subfields presents research questions that appear discrete, there are important similarities, often hidden in the way individual subfields present their core research questions, that cut across the subfields. All, for example, focus in one way or another on space, place, or location within space. All of the subfields express a research interest in explaining variation across place and across place over time. Urban history examines many of the same concerns of the other urban disciplines, though over time rather than contemporaneously, even while many of the other subfields pursue their research interests through focusing on trends, changes over time, and why these changes have occurred. In all of the subfields, urban is an extremely flexible workhorse, sometimes employed as an independent variable, sometimes as a dependent variable, and often as a control variable in studies.

Indeed, there are even common denominators that might suggest key factors that shape the histories of these subfields. Changes in the ebb and flow of the policy and political status of urban areas and urban topics clearly have affected perceptions of the subfield's significance and importance.

However, our essayists suggest that, however desirable, and for a variety of reasons, there is relatively little interaction among participants of the various urban subfields, relatively little learning across disciplines. This relative isolation stands as a barrier to knowledge.

The relative lack of interdisciplinary work is of particular concern. The argument that advances in knowledge are increasingly likely to occur in the interstices among disciplines suggests that inter-disciplinary or trans-disciplinary studies are important to the generation of knowledge. Unfortunately, the organization of the various disciplines serves to discourage interdisciplinary work. The achievement of tenure and promotion is an extremely strong incentive for faculty members, and discipline-based departments tend to give considerably greater weight to publications in journals within the discipline rather than interdisciplinary journals or journals outside of the discipline.[19]

A key dynamic in bringing about inter-disciplinarity or, indeed, the accumulation of knowledge in the field of urban studies, may perhaps be as much or more a matter of conversation across discipline lines and reading and inspiration across the subfields than of formally interdisciplinary research projects. This is a conception of a field as a republic of conversation, and the question is how this can be encouraged. We do not mean to urge that the topics discussed above—the meaning of urban, the main concerns for research, and appropriate methodologies and approaches—must be decided or even ultimately agreed upon across disciplinary sub-fields. We do recommend that more discussions about such potentially abstract and gnarly implications of the study of urban areas would benefit the further development of knowledge about the areas and also improve the work of participating scholars.

There is an additional feature of the responses by our five contributors that suggests another barrier to knowledge: the widespread acknowledgment that, despite an increasing amount of comparative research and research on global cities, our knowledge of urban phenomena is overwhelmingly derived from research conducted within individual countries, and particularly those within the western sphere. Indeed, this geographical bias has been a complaint from non-western writers for at least 2 decades. They have argued that, too often, the experience of cities in the Global South has been either ignored, or else viewed—and distorted—through the prism of Western theory. Instead, they have urged researchers to interpret those cities in their own terms, and to develop new—or at least to extend existing—theory accordingly. A substantial body of work has been growing (e.g., Parnell & Oldfield, 2014). Some researchers have applied concepts first developed in the South to cities everywhere. Others have questioned whether conceptions of "the urban" can be universal. But one of the most enduring refrains has been the need for comparative research that explores and tests such arguments (Robinson, 2011).

But what of the future? The study of urban areas—"urban studies," if you will—is built institutionally on several pillars: the urban subfields, their disciplines as well as "urban studies" programs and degrees that stand outside of individual disciplines, and the variety of scholarly "urban studies" apparatuses (conferences, associations, journals, etc.). Also contributing to the urban field is the ecology of non- academic people and entities (funders, think tanks, advocacy organizations, public sector entities) engaged on the subject.

The question is how we can shape these now only loosely inter-related parts into a more closely-knit network with greater engagement across the components? The result of such an endeavor would be, we hope, more interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary research; an increased sharing, or, at a minimum, understanding, of methods across subfields; greater recognition and consumption of work beyond one's disciplinary home; and greater emphasis on comparative research and on non-Western and global cities. The result, in short, would be a better understanding of urban phenomena.

Perhaps the key initial ingredient is simply more reading and conversation across discipline lines. We have emphasized in this Reflection the benefits of greater discussion, formal and informal, among participants around salient aspects of the challenge. The result we envision would be a "republic of conversation" across the subfields and beyond, the responsibility for which would be borne by every element of the broad field—teachers in their classroom, researchers, journalists, the sub-discipline leaderships, the urban research organizations, the journals, think tanks, foundations. The outcomes we seek are to make the field more aware of itself, to explore the important topics that tend to be overlooked or ignored, and to enrich the experience of urban studies for people and institutions.

Notes

1. This section is authored by Jeffrey Lin, Vice President and Economist, Research Department, Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia. The views expressed here are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia or the Federal Reserve System.

2. As emphasized by Fujita and Thisse (2013), agglomeration forces are governed by the fundamental trade-off between increasing returns and transport costs. The intuition is simple. In the absence of increasing returns, firms would be able to spread production evenly over space without efficiency loss, while bringing transport costs to zero—a "backyard economy." In the absence of transport costs, firms would concentrate their production in a few plants to benefit from the highest possible level of efficiency.
3. At regional scales, core models such as Roback (1982), Henderson (1974), and Krugman (1991a) have analogous features.
4. In economics, the "top five" general-interest journals are the *American Economic Review, Econometrica*, the *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, the *Journal of Political Economy*, and the *Review of Economic Studies*. In addition to the *Review of Economics and Statistics* and the *American Economic Journals*, other top general-interest journals include the *Journal of the European Economic Association*, and the *Economic Journal*. Other field journals in economics, such as the *Journal of Labor Economics* or the *Journal of International Economics*, publish articles of interest to urban economists.
5. The author of this section is Richard Harris, Professor Emeritus, School of Earth, Environment and Society, McMaster University.
6. The author of this section Jennifer Clark, Professor and Head, City and Regional Planning Section, the Knowlton School College of Engineering, The Ohio State University.
7. For example, the city and regional planning department that I currently head at The Ohio State University recently celebrated its 60th anniversary.
8. The author of this section is Thomas Ogorzalek, an independent scholar and Founder of Co-Lab Research.
9. In this essay, I use "discipline" to refer to formally professionalized approaches to intellectual inquiry within the academy (i.e., political science, sociology, history, economics), "field" to refer to subdivisions within disciplines, and "subfield" to refer to subdivisions within fields. These terms reflect how professional associations, universities, and departments tend to organize themselves in the U.S. and thereby structure the incentives for research. In political science, urban politics has mostly been a subfield within the "Americanist" field.
10. The study of public opinion became easier with advances in computing and the proliferation of national samples, but most nationally-representative samples are useless for understanding opinion or conflicts within particular cities. The central debates about institutions, often conducted in the language of decision- and game-theoretic approaches, narrowed their focus to the national level, where the rules were complicated enough and where they could use more easily collected data from Congress to study the kinds of nonevents and institutional development that had previously been more fruitful to study locally.
11. It can also be very satisfying to bring those ideas home and share them with our fellow city-zens seeking to make urban policy improvements.
12. For recent methodologically sophisticated and policy-relevant and work in comparative urban political science that contributes to rather than replicates Americanist insights,, see, Gross et al. (2018), Kubler et al. (2013), Mayka (2019), Auerbach et al (2018), and Paller (2019), and Xu (2021).
13. The now-mature subfield of American political development, which has always been driven by comparative-historical analysis, can serve as a model here.
14. For instance, while the concept of the "global city" is a decades-old concept for urbanists it has not appeared in a research article in the top political science journal. Similarly, while the institutional racism of American housing markets was thoroughly chronicled in what are now classics of sociology and history (e.g., Massey & Denton, 1993; Sugrue, 1996), only very recently have political scientists made marginal contributions to understanding the politics of housing policy (eg. Thurston, 2018; Trounstine, 2018).
15. This is the idea of "intercurrence," a scholarly concept central to the field of American political development (or comparative-historical institutionalism), and profitably wedded to urban politics by essays in (Dilworth 2009; Dilworth and Weaver 2020).
16. The author of this section is Samantha Friedman, Associate Professor and Internship Director of Sociology and the Director of the Center for Social and Demographic Analysis at the University at Albany, SUNY.
17. The first two listed coauthors, Harold Wolman and William Barnes, are the authors of this section.
18. The first two listed coauthors, Wolman and Barnes, are the authors of this section.
19. On the other hand, a not uncommon critique of urban subfields is that in many cases urbanists are unconcerned about whether or the extent to which their research contributes to the larger endeavor of their disciplines. They meet the requirements of the disciplines whilst at the same time not fussing too much about what the urban sub-discipline contributes to their discipline's larger picture. For these, it is tempting to speculate that the urban subfields serve as a refuge from the demands of their broader discipline while at the same time serving to isolate them from the need to build analytic frames across the subfields.

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William Barnes was Director of Policy Research at the National League of Cities and Visiting Scholar at The George Washington University. He held a PhD in History and Metropolitan Studies from the Maxwell School at Syracuse University and was an active participant and a member of the Governing Board of the Urban Affairs Association from 1991-1997. Barnes's publications included a book, coauthored with Larry Ledebur, *The New Regional Economies*, and articles in journals including *Urban Affairs Review, Public Administration Review*, and *Government and Policy*. His areas of specialty included urban politics and policy, regional governance, local democracy and public participation, and municipal finance. Barnes died on April 25, 2022.

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