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Visionary cities or spaces of uncertainty? Satellite cities and new towns in emerging economies

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Theme of our issue: emerging properties of satellite cities and new towns in emerging economies

Satellite cities and new towns have recently captured urban imaginations of planners, property developers and politicians in the Global South and East, and are also emerging as a research topic in urban studies, planning and development studies. With emblematic names like Techno City, Eco City and Hope City they embody a new property investment frontier and an optimistic belief in economic growth driven by a rising middle class. This special issue critically explores the various manifestations and dimensions of satellite city and new town development in emerging economies. These cities characterize contemporary processes of urban development. Planned on greenfield sites some distance away from the existent city and the problems associated with rapid urbanization, they provide planners and developers with the opportunity to develop semi-autonomous cities based on visionary urban designs. As status projects they represent a nationalist ideal and new belief in city-planning, often reflecting forms of social engineering and a historical belief in the ability to plan for entire societies and economies. They intend to connect people, regions and sectors to the global economy, relying on branding strategies in order to attract foreign investors and to compete with other such cities elsewhere.

Satellite cities and new towns are developed in settings of rapid economic and political transformation in ways that expose the limits to urban design. Their reliance on global circuits of capital and capital injections by international financial institutions such as the World Bank, marks their vulnerability to global economic conjunctures, in turn compromising their provision of privatized infrastructure and centralized master planning. Ordinary city development and its informal aspects infringe on these cities, acting as constant reminders of their problematic scope and ambition. As social and economic enclaves, they constitute sites of spatial exclusion that privilege certain types of economic activities and middle class demands. The tension between satellite cities and new towns as planned rationalities and sites of speculative urbanism on the one hand and cities as living organisms and sites of creative reworking and social differentiation on the other, marks them as nascent spaces in which a multiplicity of development trajectories and organizational rationalities converge. In recognition of the gap between planning and lived realities of the built environment and testimony to the globalized nature of expert networks, planners and officials employ contemporary discourses of inclusiveness and sustainable urbanism. The translation of contemporary planning, policy and/or management concepts such as sustainable urban planning, risk management, renewable energy, and public participation mark these cities as unique research sites where planning

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models converge with global or regional market places and local political economies, often producing uncertainties and justifying new rounds of planned interventions.

The contributions to this issue take satellite cities and/or new towns as empirical entry points for theorizing urban development and the production of city spaces as well as providing invaluable policy insights regarding the viability of modernist planning paradigms in post-colonial societies and emerging economies. As has been argued elsewhere, the emergent governance of these cities defies urban theories applicable to the West, and heralds the arrival of more speculative forms of city governance that negotiate multiple tensions between an expansive real-estate frontier and privatized forms of city governance with the particularities of historically-sedimented forms of urbanization and the continued presence of marginalized urbanites (Goldman 2011). Besides this more outcome-oriented focus, we approach these towns and cities as policy objects that exert symbolic power as they articulate with national and international planning agendas (Watson 2014). Illustrative of this is how satellite city and new town projects are initiated by governments and central elements of national economic growth strategies (see e.g. Myers 2015). The contributions aim to conceptually elaborate the satellite city / new town phenomena in ways that situate their contentious nature between urban fantasy and their embeddedness in particular urbanization trajectories and governance settings. In so doing, we bring together a collection of papers that employ instrumentalist approaches, with a view to assess the inclusiveness of current planning frameworks and suggest place-based alternatives, and papers that critically deconstruct city-making and show their depoliticisation and exclusionary effects. We build on recent research providing valuable typologies of satellite cities in the Global South (cf. Gotsch and Peterek 2003; Gotsch 2009; Keeton 2011; van Noorloos and Kloosterboer 2018).

The spatial forms and functions of satellite cities and new towns across the Global South and East vary considerably, from gated communities, to innovation hubs with mixed use of commercial and residential development, to Special Economic Zones and new capital cities (van Noorloos and Kloosterboer 2018). The particular settings in which they emerge, whether postcolonial African settings marked by settings of relative governance deficits or the grand scale of state-led satellite city development in China, Korea and India, speak to the way they are linked to global city-making phenomena in different ways. Supporting governments differ in their orientation from developmentalist to more neoliberal and entrepreneurial. Satellite city policies respond to conjunctures that occur in local city-politics and changes in national development agendas. The cases in this special issue present satellite city and/or new town developments from different sites in the Global South and the Global East: China, Ghana, Kenya, Morocco, Rwanda, Republic of Korea, Sudan and Venezuela. Several papers in this issue adopt an approach to following city-making trajectories over time, marking the changing nature of intersection of the global and governance contexts and the complex, antagonistic, relationships these satellite cities have to the existing city. While the specific settings range from established cities to utopian cities, all papers demonstrate how satellite cities and new towns are constitutive of national policies and governance arrangements as well as being shaped through local political economies, agentic reworking by actors and pressures associated with 'ordinary' processes of urbanization and city development. We aim to contribute to these topical debates by elaborating cases of prominent satellite cities and new towns. While each of the papers focuses on one or a few case studies, in this introductory article we will add an overarching, internationally comparative perspective around four themes to be elaborated below.

A brief genealogy of an emergent phenomenon

The recent upsurge of satellite city and new town development in emerging economies, in particular in Africa and Asia, may easily obscure the fact that such projects are far from new and much less original and innovative than they are often advertised. Several concepts rooted further back in urban and regional development history are clearly related to the recent satellite city and new town projects. The term 'satellite cities' goes back at least a century: Graham Taylor is generally

credited for coining the term in academic literature in his 1915 book 'Satellite Cities' (see e.g. Lewis 2006). However, the 'satellite cities' according to Taylor were rather market-driven, unplanned results of suburbanization than consciously designed places. In more recent literature (between the 1920s and 1970s) the term 'satellite cities' was more often linked to these planning concepts and/or sometimes also as a synonym for 'industrial suburbs'. This was followed since the 1990s by concepts fitting in an advanced service-oriented economy like 'edge cities' (Garreau 1991) or 'boomburbs' (Lang 2003). 'New towns' and 'garden cities' date back at least to the late 19th and early twentieth century, as a reaction to the overcrowded and heavily polluted industrial European and American metropolises of that time. While they were initially mainly meant to provide an attractive residential alternative for working class and middle class people that wanted to escape the crowded city, later generations of new towns were also developed as an answer to urban sprawl or as new regional economic centres in polycentric regional or national city networks (Hall and Ward 1998). Tracing the first new town roots much further back in time, Wakeman (2016:, 1) even states 'There is nothing new about new towns. They have been built since the beginning of recorded history.'

Satellite cities and new towns do not always include detailed land use planning, but are often rather based on a more 'vertical vision' that links these cities in city networks at various scales: city-regional, national, and often also international. Their importance, at least on paper, often goes far beyond just their own city-region: they are often part of national government strategies for a more equal distribution of growth and wealth and/or seen as an engine to generate regional or national economic growth. The most ambitious projects even have international aspirations, drawing inspiration from cities like Dubai and being organized around attracting investors. Their scale is significant: in Africa aiming at medium-sized cities (for example in Kenya ranging between 70,000 and 185,000 residents), in Asia sometimes even reaching the scale of new megacities with millions of inhabitants. Besides these features that satellite cities and new towns in emerging economies have in common, there are also differences between the two categories. While the new towns are most often predominantly focused on housing provision, satellite cities are generally envisioned as being multi-functional, combining residential real estate (often in the form of gated communities) with industrial or business parks. In addition, new towns tend to be mostly public or public-private projects, while satellite cities are often more privatized developments.

While the development of satellite cities and new towns, and maybe even also edge cities, seems to have fallen out of grace in the advanced capitalist world, after what Wakeman (2016) calls the 'golden age of new towns' (1945–1975), they are still popular planning concepts in many emerging economies, and growing in popularity. Recent satellite city and new town projects in emerging economies may be seen as following in the footsteps of and inspired by their predecessors in Europe and the US to a certain degree, in terms of location (city edge or even at some distance from the existent city), design, development philosophy and development expectations. However, in recent satellite city and new town projects in Africa and Southeast Asia, booming megacities in rapidly developing countries 'between North and South', like Dubai, Singapore, Shanghai or Bangalore, have become more influential role models (Grant 2015). Such rapidly rising new global and world cities often do not only serve as examples to follow, but also are the source of significant flows of policy transfer, investments, experts and developers to the next wave of emerging economies. A good example of this is East Asia's influence on Southeast-Asia's urban and regional development strategies in general (Roy and Ong 2011) and satellite city and new town developments in particular (Percival and Waley 2012).

Many developing countries, and especially their capital city-regions, aspire to their own brand new CBDs, new towns, edge cities, innovation hubs and high-status residential complexes to show the world they are emerging and competitive. In some cases the ambition level is even so high that the new cities are no longer meant as satellites of the old centres, but as entirely new regional or even national centres. The most extreme examples of this are new national capitals, one of the earliest examples being Brasilia in the 1960s, but meanwhile many countries in Africa

and Central and Southeast Asia have followed that example (e.g. Abuja, Astana, Dodoma, Islamabad, Naypyidaw). Slightly less extreme examples, not new capital cities but serious challengers of the existing city hierarchy, are included in this special issue: Shenzhen (China) and Songdo (South Korea). Such developments are usually much easier to accomplish outside, and preferably at some distance of, the existing city fabric; despite frequent failures and disappointments in the recent past, the temptation of starting 'from scratch' and the illusion of leaving all 'old city problems' behind remain hard to resist for developers and policy-makers across the globe. In fact, 'starting from scratch' is impossible anywhere in the world: satellite city and new town projects are often imagined as 'tabula rasa', but there is or was always something present already. Developers and policy-makers are confronted with the choice to either erase or neglect what was already there, or incorporate it in their plans somehow: this may include old towns or villages and their populations, formal or informal institutions and infrastructures, rural land and/or nature. In this vein, analytical perspectives that foreground the way new satellite cities and new towns mirror cosmopolitan urban designs and occupy discrete spaces in a network of global cities or as socio-spatial fixities in a system of restless 'global capitalism', clearly fall short of explaining the complexity of their local to global connectedness.

Intersections, emergence and uncertainties: a proposed analytical framework for satellite city and new town development in emerging economies

This intersection between global city-making trends and local and national political economies and the aforementioned importance of studying city trajectories and emergent forms, lead us to revisit some of the urban theories regarding the penetration of global urban trends in local settings. Before outlining the papers' contributions, we will develop four themes that form the basis of our comparative perspective on this global-local intersection and satellite cities and new towns as 'becoming'. We assert that satellite cities and new towns are producing their own conditions of uncertainty, necessitating constant efforts to align with extra-local sites of planning and investment as well as efforts to curtail the unintended outcomes related to their establishment or expansion in emerging economies (see e.g. Simone 2013). Insecurities relate to their promulgation of urban inequalities, the challenges of urban governance and inherent contradictions in master planning. The final theme presented below, refers to inclusive planning options for mitigating the exclusionary outcomes and anticipating 'normal' urbanization pathways.

Urban imaginaries and symbolic power

Goldman's (2011) evocative analysis of speculative urbanism in Bangalore, India, reminds us of the reach of global capital trends to urban development in planning and its exclusive territorialization effects. The historical convergence of the burgeoning ICT sector and world-city urbanism in the 1990s presents an unprecedented moment in world city-making. In reflecting on the seismic 'public to private shift' as 'world altering' (Goldman 2011, 561), he systematically outlines the emergence of a speculative governance regime that has seen the rise of quasi-private parastatals. These parastatals channel global capital, provide infrastructure and broker land deals at the expense of (largely unprepared) marginalized urbanites and farmers using peri-urban land. They promulgate massive land expropriations and import legitimating, extra-local planning principles related to efficiency and good governance. This work echoes concerns with the social exclusionary aspects of Africa's 'urban fantasies' (Watson 2014; Grant 2015) that cater for urban and political elites, enact an active erasure of existent (peri-)urban forms and impact livelihoods of the urban poor.

The enclave effects manifest themselves in governance when satellite cities and Special Economic Zones become 'spaces of exception' where ordinary state rules are suspended in the service of global capitalism (Ong 2007) and where they receive preferential treatment by national governments in a bid to be connected to competitive networks of cities (Sassen 2011). The tabula rasa aspect of these

cities invokes the notion of the ‘development frontier’ and expansion into ‘vacant’ regions and lands where rules still have to be made (Bhan 2013, 233). Whereas this may lead to the type of speculative urbanism that displaces impoverished urbanites and caters only for urban elites, the frontier aspects may also constrain the risks of speculative urbanism. Splinter and Van Leynseele (this issue) show how city planners and officials in Konza Techno City (Kenya) planned a city ‘ahead of development’ and purchased land in greenfield sites without the necessary ICT sector-driven investment, middle class housing demand and basic infrastructure being in place. This tentative form of speculative satellite city-making in Africa, however, does not imply that they are white elephants awaiting a similar fate as the rest of the continent’s ‘failed’ development projects. Rather, in their incomplete state they still yield considerable ‘symbolic power’ that works in powerful ways by producing a narrative of the city that faces global elites and global city models, and in so doing turns away from the existent city and meeting demands from city populations and likely urbanization scenarios (Watson 2014; see also Lefebvre 1991). The way in which these cities are promoted as future engines of growth in national policies, further testifies to this discursive power.

In their ‘becoming’, these new towns and satellite cities can thus be seen to represent ‘Janus-faced’ experiments, at once optimistically looking to future economic growth whilst also seeking to break with the existent city and all that is related to the problematic past failures of urban planning (Murray 2015). Especially in the absence of any tangible land development or settlement by intended businesses or residents, we may conceive of them as visionary social constructions, which are constitutive of future-oriented, cosmopolitan city imaginaries (Simone 2004; de Boeck 2011). The modernist influences imported by international architectural consortia and parastatal agencies present a rational model that, in the case of Africa’s new capital cities, is intimately linked to forward-looking, national identities and evolutionary, developmentalist goals of emerging economies to graduate from agriculture-and manufacture-based economic growth strategies to economies driven by services (Abubakar and Doan 2017). These tendencies should not however be mistaken for a unilineal and teleological need to ‘catch up with the West’. The rising assertiveness of pan-African institutions like the African Union and the New Partnership for African Development emphasize a new-found confidence in African solutions and development of blueprints that link national development trajectories to foreign investment and global partnerships on more equitable terms and in keeping with shifts in global political economies (Grant 2015). Moreover, the most influential and inspiring examples and aspirations for Africa are no longer coming from ‘the West’ (Europe or North America), but rather from ‘the East’: East, Southeast and South Asia and the Arabian Peninsula. The rapid modernization and urbanization processes in regions and countries like China’s east coast, Korea, Singapore, Malaysia, Qatar and the Emirates (Dubai, Abu Dhabi etc.) fuel the imaginaries of what may be possible in Africa’s emerging economies. The prominent role of Chinese public and (semi-)private actors in many prestigious African urban development projects is well-known and often referred to in literature (e.g. Watson 2014; van Noorloos and Kloosterboer 2018; and several contributions to this special issue), but also public and (semi-)private actors from countries like Korea, Singapore, Russia, Saudi Arabia or the Emirates are frequently involved.

City-regions and city-doubles

Satellite cities and new towns in the Global South and Global East are often strategic elements of city-regional and/or national-level development visions. Such visions often refer to aspirations to become a ‘world-class city’. What exactly this fuzzy concept means is still quite unclear, even though many policy-makers, developers and city branders as well as many urban studies scholars present it as self-evident. The ‘short and easy’ answer to that question may be, as Derudder and Witlox (2013) summarize it: conceptually, expressing the aspiration to be part of a major cities league in the globalized economy; empirically, the presence of assets and amenities considered essential in global urban competitiveness. The latter may include major airports, multinational headquarters, top-level consumer

amenities and services, and an ‘inviting’ business and investment climate. They problematize such a conceptualization of ‘world-class cities’ as too one-sidedly neoliberal and entrepreneurial on the one hand, and as ‘un-scientific’ on the other:

(...) it is not really clear which processes and characteristics are captured (and which are not), and the ensuing lack of conceptual rigor may fuel the growth of a chaotic concept that does not inform us of anything at all. (Derudder and Witlox 2013, 12)

Remarkably, this is one of the few attempts in urban studies literature to define ‘world-class city’ as an analytical concept. Instead, it is often rather presented as urban imaginary, urban policy rhetoric, or as Roy (2011) calls it a ‘phantasmagoria’. Ghertner (2011) connects the term ‘world-class’ with an ‘aesthetic mode of governing’ and ‘planned-ness’, in which informal settlements such as slums are seen as the main obstacle to becoming a ‘world-class city’.

Such ‘world-class city’ projects, and satellite cities or new towns as elements of them, result from international ‘travelling’, ‘transfer’ and ‘inter-referencing’ of planning concepts and strategies, often combined with active involvement of planners and/or developers from abroad (van Noorloos and Leung 2017). Many emerging economies are eager to copy or even surpass successful projects from countries that are already more advanced in their development. For example, China’s rapid urban and economic transformation was inspired by Hong Kong, Singapore and Japan; China in turn inspired several Southeast-Asian countries; African and Latin American countries want to follow in the footsteps of China, Korea, India and the Gulf States; etc. However, earlier successes of planning concepts or projects are no guarantee that they will work again elsewhere. Successful (re-)application of satellite city or new town concepts and projects may eventually depend considerably on the national, regional and/or local context, including factors like governance regimes, planning cultures, relations between state, economy and society, and the capacity to attract FDI.

While such projects will therefore never be exact copies of the original(s) that inspired them and will always contend with endogenous planning and urbanization, they are often problematized as ‘generic cities’: projects that could have been built anywhere in the world and are largely disconnected from their local and regional context. The most ambitious satellite city and new town projects, some examples of which also feature in our special issue, are envisioned as better versions of their ‘mother cities’ or even as the opposites of or replacements of the existing urban areas. Murray (2015) refers to such projects as ‘city doubles’: mirror opposites of the existing urbanized landscapes around them. For the target groups of these projects, most often (upper) middle class residents and/or multinational companies, providing entire new cities including all services and facilities may be perfectly matching their needs and preferences. However, it often results in rather isolated complexes that may be better connected to distant international locations than to their immediate surroundings. The Southern Chinese city of Shenzhen may be a good illustration of this problem. In his contribution to this special issue, Bontje applies the satellite city concept to Shenzhen from a multi-scalar perspective: Shenzhen as a satellite of multiple other cities and regions both nearby and distant, but also as a collection of satellites. He questions the extent to which Shenzhen should actually be seen as one comprehensive city or rather as an area in which many, hardly interconnected, ‘urban enclaves’ have been developed (see also Douglass, Wissink, and van Kempen 2012 for other Chinese cities). In several other special issue contributions similar observations about the disconnected and fragmented nature of satellite city and new town developments come to the fore. This also fits in broader debates in urban studies about the increasingly fragmented nature of urbanized areas, like Graham and Marvin’s concept of ‘splintering urbanism’ (Graham and Marvin 2001).

Informality and ordinary city development

In light of their expansion or prolonged delays in implementation, satellite cities and new towns may also attract informal settlement practices, start to articulate with popular demands for jobs, and

become entwined with state-led reforms like decentralization and redistributive policies. Plans may encounter a pluralist government, in which various departments and governments vie over control of planning and development responsibilities or local political and land controlling elites such as traditional leaders may seek to extract authority by association or resistance. These unintended outcomes show how these ‘exceptional’ cities may in fact start to become ‘ordinary cities’ (see e.g. Robinson 2006; and the contributions of Splinter and Van Leynseele and Rots and Fernandez-Maldonado to this special issue). This assertion imposes an empirical approach to understanding how they are shaped through processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization and cannot be detached from past social and material sedimentations and the territorial assemblages in which they unfold (Collier and Ong 2005; McFarlane 2011).

Such instances where informality imposes itself and local governance structures start to compete over resources and political authority, also illustrate the limits to the thesis of satellite cities and new towns inevitably leading to speculative urbanism and the marginalization of the majority of the urban population (Goldman 2011; Watson 2014). Speculative governance arrangements and ‘efficient governance’ narratives may indeed be invoked for enabling capital infusion and developing a new real estate frontier. Yet, in the face of informality, land occupations by marginal groups and more organized resistance, it remains problematic to presume that such expressions are ‘coping mechanisms for marginal producers working within the parameters of speculative urbanism’ (Goldman 2011, 576). Building on the ordinary development trajectories of Indian cities and the failures of urban developmentalism, Bhan (2013:, 234) rather argues that ‘the planning regime is itself an “informalized entity”, one unable to carry out a speculative, territorialized urban renewal and regeneration.’ Masterplans that seek to abstract away from lived realities, suffer from their own ambitions never being realizable because the “chaos” that they seek to evade is precisely the context in which they must take root’ (ibid.).

Planning for inclusive cities

Hegemonic planning practices, which risk excluding marginalized urban populations and legitimate unequal capitalist development, may encounter popular resistance. Reflecting on the case of the Anti-Eviction campaigns in post-apartheid South Africa, Miraftab (2009) duly describes the possibility of grass-roots movements to resist relocation through mobilization of the poor, legal recourse using the state judiciary as well as using state-sanctioned participatory platforms for citizenship engagement. The potential of such movements is explained also in their ability to strategically employ both formal pathways of action (so-called state-invited spaces) and extra-legal practices. The former option implies that governments in the global South have participatory mechanisms in place that ‘invite’ dissent (see also Baud and Nainan 2008). In line with this, Nicholls and Uitermark (2017:, 513) argue that ‘Planning not only serves to establish order but also creates multiple resistances and conflicts’ and can be ‘(...) a generative source of disruptive politics in the city.’ In the context of satellite cities and new towns, however, such formal spaces of citizenship engagement often remain very underdeveloped or are even absent. The lack of presence or power of marginalized groups demanding inclusion in planned cities also militates against such grass-roots mobilization and legal action. As also highlighted above, satellite city / new town projects illustrate the state capacity to produce sites of exception where ordinary laws are not applicable and citizenship rights may be suspended. Governments or public-private growth coalitions justify this exceptional status by labelling such projects as ‘special economic zones’, ‘smart cities’ or ‘eco-cities’ and highlighting them as essential elements of city-regional or national competitiveness strategies. As Grant et al. discuss in their contribution to this special issue, these exceptional planning circumstances require an informalisation of the planning process (Roy 2009), based on the capabilities of modes of urban governance to shape spaces according to ever-changing logistics. Examples of this include allowing the state considerable territorial flexibility to alter land use (e.g. from rural to urban), deploy eminent domain and to acquire land, often in violation of national land laws that recognize indigenous landholding rights.

This can be seen as a deliberate planning strategy, affording certain actors advantages over others. Goldman (2011) also shows that this informalisation of urban planning (speculative urbanism) entangles speculators with officials.

It is in this context that several papers in this special issue argue for inclusive or integrated planning approaches in emerging economies as an opportunity for anticipating ‘unplanned’ informality and plan for inclusion of the (relative) poor in their urban designs and economic development strategies. From this perspective, our special issue connects to on-going debates in urban studies about how to realize ‘spatial justice’ (Soja 2010; see also Pieterse 2008) and which roles planners could or should play in developing ‘just cities’ (Fainstein 2010). Unfortunately, in most of the cases of satellite cities and new towns discussed in our special issue, the planning process has, or had, serious shortcomings on all three dimensions of Fainstein’s ‘just city’ concept: equity, diversity and democracy. Two policy-facing contributions in this special issue, Mutuku et al. and Spaliviero et al., discuss more inclusive planning alternatives through adoption of participatory planning methods, fostering experimentation and social learning in planning trajectories, and planning for ordinary city development and better connectedness between satellite cities and secondary cities within countries. Incorporating rights-based and inclusiveness approaches into planning, may, at least in part, help address the aforementioned deficit of legal and extra-legal channels for citizenship engagement that characterizes the satellite city and new town project.

Contributions to this special issue

This special issue consists of papers that each explore one or more of the themes discussed above, and adopt critical and relational approaches that address the manifold experiences and imaginaries associated with satellite cities and new towns in emerging economies. The papers address topics such as: branding and marketing of satellite city / new town imaginaries in a network of competitive cities; public-private-partnerships driving city development and how planning practices unfold in societies marked by rapid political and social transformation; the relations between satellite cities and their city-regional and national spatial, socio-economic and governance context (what are they ‘a satellite of’; to what extent are they self-governing or externally governed; how are they influenced by their context and how do they influence that context, etc.); and the dynamics of becoming ‘ordinary cities’ or (in a ‘worst case scenario’) ‘ghost towns’ that contend with informality and failure to meet demands by intended users.

The special issue contributions are grouped in three thematic blocks, though there are also several topics and questions (like those mentioned above) that are recurring themes throughout all or most of the contributions.

The introductory article of this special issue, written by the special issue editors, together with the contributions of Keeton and Nijhuis and Spaliviero et al., propose analytical frameworks for studying emerging properties of satellite cities and new towns in emerging economies. These contributions offer an overview, inventory and critical assessment of state-of-the-art debates in urban studies and planning practice regarding satellite cities and/or new towns and set the research agenda for moving ahead in these debates. Both Keeton and Nijhuis and Spaliviero et al. discuss international planning frameworks aimed at promoting adaptive cities and strategies to attract investment and connect cities in a network of cities. By exploring the merits of approaches, the papers reflect on the effectiveness or transferability of such frameworks in light of diverse and challenging territorial, developmental and institutional contexts. In so doing, the papers explore the extent to which planning strategies are met, the strategic roles of satellite cities and new towns in regional and national development agendas, international trends in satellite city and new town development, and similarities and differences between parts of the world. Within this set of three papers, the contribution of Spaliviero et al. has a special role, since it focuses on a methodology of assessment, evaluation and planning of satellite cities and new towns, rather than theory or conceptualization about these developments.

The contributions of Bontje, Rugkhaman et al., and Mutuku et al. all discuss issues related to topical debates on planning and developing satellite cities and/or new towns in emerging economies. They share an approach to planning as ‘policy object’, which is aligned with ideological movements and statist efforts to provide world class infrastructure and stimulate economic growth and development of competing geo-economic regions within countries. Other topics that these contributions have in common are: the way most satellite cities and new towns in emerging economies are planned and developed (often top-down planning and developed based on a quite detailed master plan, and often in public-private partnerships with a prominent role for private and/or state-owned developers); the thematic ‘branding’ of these developments (smart city, innovative high-tech city, eco-city etc.); and the various scale levels of governance involved: these satellite cities and new towns are not only of local or regional, but also of national importance, and national governments are at least as involved in their planning as regional and local governments. The cases and planning programmes discussed in these four contributions are all strategic parts of national economic development agendas, with development ambitions stretching well beyond their city-regions and partly even beyond their countries. The contributions address satellite city developments of different generations mutually inspiring and influencing each other: Shenzhen was the ‘posterchild’ of Chinese urban and economic transformation in the 1980s and 1990s; Songdo represents the rapid growth and modernization of Korea, especially in the 1990s and 2000s; and Rwanda is more recently one of the African countries aspiring to grow and modernize in a comparable way.

The contributions of Splinter and Van Leynseele, Grant et al., Rousseau and Hamoud, and Rots and Fernandez-Maldonado analyse unplanned outcomes of satellite cities and the impossibility of escaping the (political economical) realities of urban development and urbanization. Among the topics these papers have in common are: planned vs. unplanned development, formal vs. informal development and use, ambition vs. reality. These papers show the processes whereby satellite cities, through articulation with informality and the absence of the targeted middle class occupants and investors, become ordinary cities that contend with ‘ordinary’ urbanization challenges. They critically explore the various temporal stages of city development, adopting a historical perspective and a forward-looking view to the futuristic and aspirational imaginaries, and exploring the contradictory principles and the flawed assumptions of economic growth and urban transformation on which this city development is premised.

The articulation with statist formations is clearly shown in the articles by Grant et al., Rousseau and Haroud, and Splinter and Van Leynseele. Real estate is a vehicle for economic growth, tying in with nationalist agenda’s to develop into a ‘modern economy’ and related shifts from socialist to neo-liberal regimes (Morocco). In the process, diverse ideological elements become entangled. The case of Morocco shows clearly how the cities straddle inclusiveness goals and commercial concerns: ‘it [the megaproject] would presumably help to produce more social housing, promote local and regional economies and, above all, increase the international competitiveness of Morocco’s main metropolises’ (Rousseau and Haroud, this issue). Such ambivalent state involvement exacerbates planning risks. Governments in emerging economies typically have to include a measure of inclusive development and aim to construct the multi-functionality of these cities as also extending to provision of affordable housing. Yet, inclusive elements in these plans seem to be more of lip service and part of a legitimating discourse that typically accompanies such flagship projects in emerging economies. A weak governmental commitment to inclusiveness, the absence of state regulation and investments for mixed housing, may thus create new real estate frontiers where speculative urbanism is likely to emerge as the housing project descended into a ‘ghost town’.

The range of papers discuss various manifestations of satellite city and new town projects: from large-scale high-risk projects (often flagship projects in which governments have ambitiously embraced master planning as an economic growth strategy) to smaller and more modest ones, and from already mostly completed to only just started or only partially implemented, or even only existing on paper. The cases of Ghana and Kenya represent one extreme of the ‘unfinished’ scale, whereas the Morocco case shows how seventeen years down the line partly-built cities appear

as ghost towns. This contrasts very clearly with the state-driven projects of Shenzhen and Songdo, with serious backing of and being embedded in a governmental regime that has worked consistently with such longer-term, strategic master planning. In all, this shows how satellite cities and new towns emerge at critical junctures when favourable conjunctures in local or national political economies provide a structure of opportunity through which the satellite city project can insert itself. All cases show that the thesis of ‘global city making’ deserves a certain perspective from the Global South and Global East, which takes the unstable and dynamic relations informing local to global connectedness of satellite cities and new towns as the analytical entry point.

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