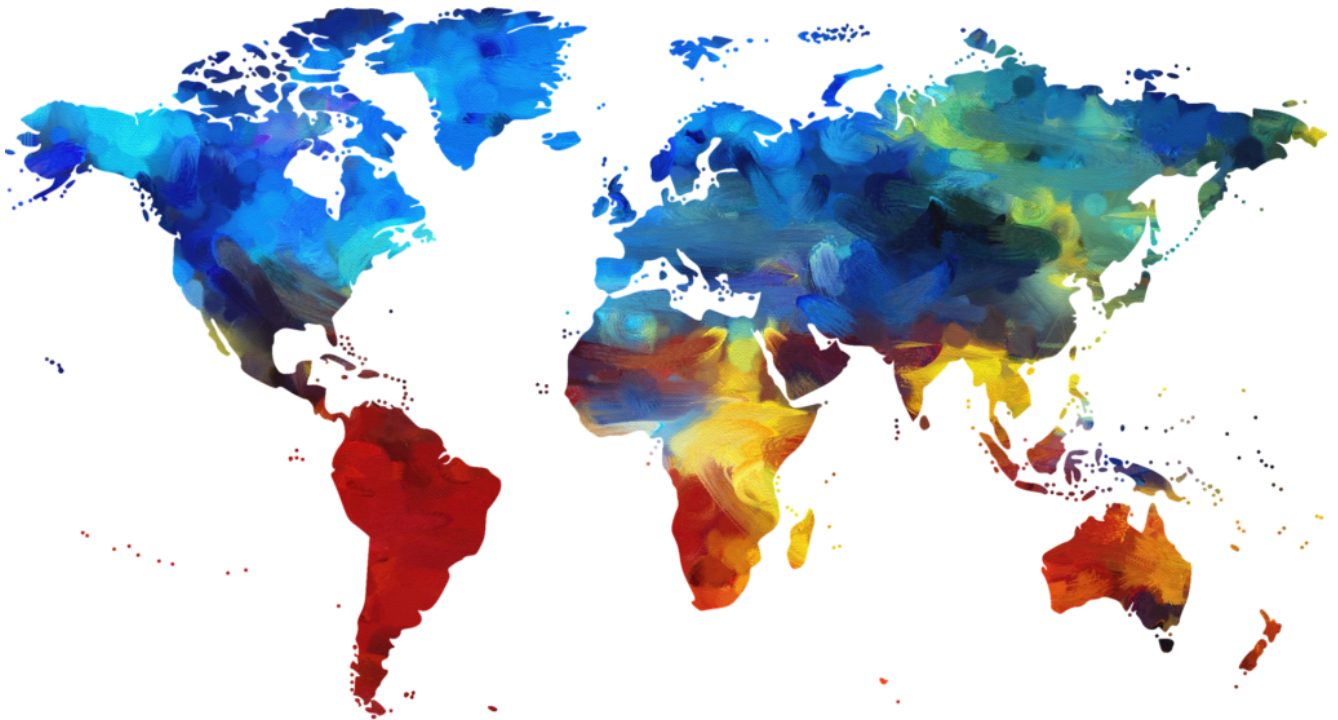


RSA Global Webinar Series - Latin America - Plenary on Urbanization in the Global South



By José Borello: RSA Ambassador Argentina and National University of General Sarmiento, Argentina

Plenary by Michael Storper titled Is Urbanization in the Global South Fundamentally Different? Comparative Global Urban Analysis for the 21st Century

The webinar was coordinated and introduced by Sergio Montero, professor at the Universidad de los Andes in Colombia and former president of the RSA Latin America Division, 2019-20. We were very pleased to have renowned professor and scholar Michael Storper deliver the opening presentation to the RSA Global Latin America webinar. Michael used slides to illustrate his presentation, which lasted about 40 minutes and, at the end, there were a number of questions and comments and a very thoughtful and emphatic response by Storper.

Michael's presentation title was: "Is globalization in the Global South fundamentally different? Comparative global urban analysis for the 21st century".

His presentation is derived from work the author is currently carrying out with Gregory Randolph, from USC. Interestingly enough his responses to this question were both yes and no.

First, he stated that urban areas are the most productive areas of national economies as a result of agglomeration economies and the concentration of people with higher education levels. He rejected the idea stated in some studies that in the global South the relevance of agglomeration may be limited.

Storper then developed his comparative analysis of the urban realm in the global South (GS) and in the global North (GN) by examining four dimensions: demography, economic development, migration, and the production of the built environment. In all four dimensions he found substantial differences in the experiences of the GS with regards to the GN; yet he argued that there are some micro mechanisms that are operating at every city in both regions and hence can be used to explain both experiences.

Affirming this he embraced the idea of science as a universal conversation in which all scholars can contribute to the construction of some fundamental blocks, hence rejecting the idea of “provincial” urban theories—one for the GS, one for the GN. He argued that the specificity of each one of these experiences does not necessarily preclude theory or, for that matter, policy integration. In fact, he argued that maintaining a global conversation makes it possible to share policy experiences and to learn across urban situations—even if some of the processes at play are different.

I would like to add a few comments to Professor Storper’s presentation. Indeed, science is a social activity and we should strive for a universal language. Yet that language should tend to be more polyphonic incorporating more blocks and perspectives, even those that seem dissonant and certainly more of those developed by social scientists working in the GS. I, and I guess many of the participants in this webinar, shared Michael’s concerns with studies that are not placed in a larger perspective. In all, Professor Storper’s paper sparked many interesting thoughts and ideas and was a real contribution to the RSA Global Latin America programme.

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