

## Gurr, Jens Martin; Parr, Rolf; Hardt, Dennis (eds.) (2022): Metropolitan Research: Methods and Approaches

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This edited collection emerges from a ‘Methodologies in Metropolitan Research’ collaboration between researchers at three universities in the University Alliance Ruhr (University of Duisburg-Essen, Ruhr University Bochum and Technical University Dortmund) and has a laudable aim. How we approach researching metropolitan regions is always as – if not more – important than the knowledge and understanding that is produced. The ‘how’ is what unlocks access to this knowledge and understanding, and yet how much space do we devote to questions of methodology and

methodological rigour in our day-to-day article writing? This book is therefore one of those occasional, but vital, contributions that seek to redress this balance by putting methods and approaches as the object of study rather than just the enabling mechanism.

The introductory chapter by the editors emphasises this point. Interestingly, they devote a whole paragraph to saying what this book is not (p. 10). My one concern in their framing is that for all they say the book is not, when it comes to saying what their contribution is, the argument becomes somewhat less convincing. They claim that “What is largely missing [...] we find, is a survey of methods and approaches in metropolitan research across a range of disciplines” (p. 10), with an acknowledgement that one of the few exceptions is “Seeing the City: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Study of the Urban” (Bertolini/Verloo 2020). This may surprise some readers because there are several books which do likewise, for example, Harrison/Hoyler (2018) “Doing Global Urban Research”, Ward (2020) “Researching the City”, Leitner/Peck/Sheppard (2019) “Urban Studies Inside/Out: Theory, Method, Practice” immediately come to mind. Granted they may not explicitly include the term ‘metropolitan region’ in the title, but they do discuss metropolitan regions in as much as this new collection does.

This does not undermine the value of this current collection but it does speak to a wider question which is the breadth of engagement. In positioning the book alongside Bertolini and Verloo (2020), there are similarities because both books are ostensibly rooted in place – for Bertolini and Verloo the lens is Amsterdam, for Gurr, Parr and Hardt it is predominantly the Ruhr region and Germany. This contrasts with the books I have mentioned, which are less fixed in place and start from a more global-international perspective. Personally, I would have liked to see engagement with more than the 18 references used in the introductory chapter

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to signal a broader awareness of work which is also similar in considering approaches and methods to researching urban/metropolitan regions. This difference is reflected in the book's contents. While some chapters adopt an open, international outlook in their engagement with metropolitan debates (e.g. the chapter by *Julia Sattler*) others are rooted in work produced in Germany (e.g. the chapter by *Thomas Terfrüchte*).

As with all books, the content reflects the contributor line-up, and each chapter reflects that author's own personal research and preferences. Trying to knit that together is the challenge for editors. To this end, the editors present five 'central' research questions (lightly edited here) to provide coherence to the volume. In this way, they also provide readers with an easy framework to judge the success of the volume.

- How can quantitative and qualitative approaches be reasonably combined?
- What are the possibilities and limits of different approaches to modelling complex urban and metropolitan systems?
- Which methods can be used to model and to seek to manage such complex systems – and at what cost?
- How do differing approaches – both theoretical and practical – measure up and what are the boundaries?
- How can inter- and transdisciplinary metropolitan research be organised around paradigmatic examples (e.g. 'complexity', 'narratives', 'transformation')?

From a practical perspective, the book is then organised into five main parts, with some variation in the number of chapters therein:

- Part 1 – Metropolitan space and the built environment (5 chapters)
- Part 2 – Metropolitan functions and infrastructures (4 chapters)
- Part 3 – Metropolitan resilience, sustainability, and health (4 chapters)
- Part 4 – Metropolitan culture(s) (3 chapters)
- Part 5 – Interdisciplinary and mixed-methods approaches to urban complexity (4 chapters)

If the five guiding questions are largely generic, aside from the illustrative examples, the focus for these five parts provides the main indicator of the topical focus and content of the book. As the editors correctly observe, this is not exhaustive, nor can it be. This said, the coverage of topics is broad

and creates the opportunity to tackle the central questions posed by the editors. If you are interested in metropolitan regions then you will undoubtedly find this book an enjoyable read. But turning to the question of whether the book delivers on the challenges set up in the introduction you will likely be left wanting more.

Taking the first central question as an illustration, most chapters focus on either qualitative or quantitative approaches. The chapters by *Jochen Gönsch/Jens Martin Gurr*, and *Susanne Frank/Verena Gerwinat/Ulla Greiwel/Jörg Peter Schmitt*, both discuss qualitative and quantitative approaches later on in the book but they are the exception. It is therefore difficult to say that the contributions directly engage with the question of 'combining' qualitative and quantitative approaches. It is easier to see how the chapters and volume overall address the other questions.

Added to this, the second half of the book contains three chapters on storytelling, narrative analysis and comparisons. This comes as a sharp contrast to all other chapters, which are thematic and topic driven. Related to this, some chapters discuss approaches, others focus on methods, and only a few explicitly address approaches and methods. The chapters work in isolation but considering the collection as a whole, a more consistent approach is needed across the contributions to address the central questions. This could also have been achieved more explicitly with a concluding chapter that revisits the central questions, seeking to connect the dots between the different contributions to say how – from their perspective – the collection as a whole contributes to answering these challenging questions for researching metropolitan regions.

#### Full reference of reviewed title:

Gurr, J.M.; Parr, R.; Hardt, D. (eds.) (2022): *Metropolitan Research: Methods and Approaches*. Bielefeld: transcript. 385 pages.

#### References

- Bertolini, L.; Verloo, N. (eds.) (2020): *Seeing the city: Interdisciplinary perspectives on the study of the urban*. Amsterdam.
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