

Building Better Cities, Towns and Communities: What Kind of Research Agenda?

Professor Harvey Perkins

Director of

Transforming Cities

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Overview

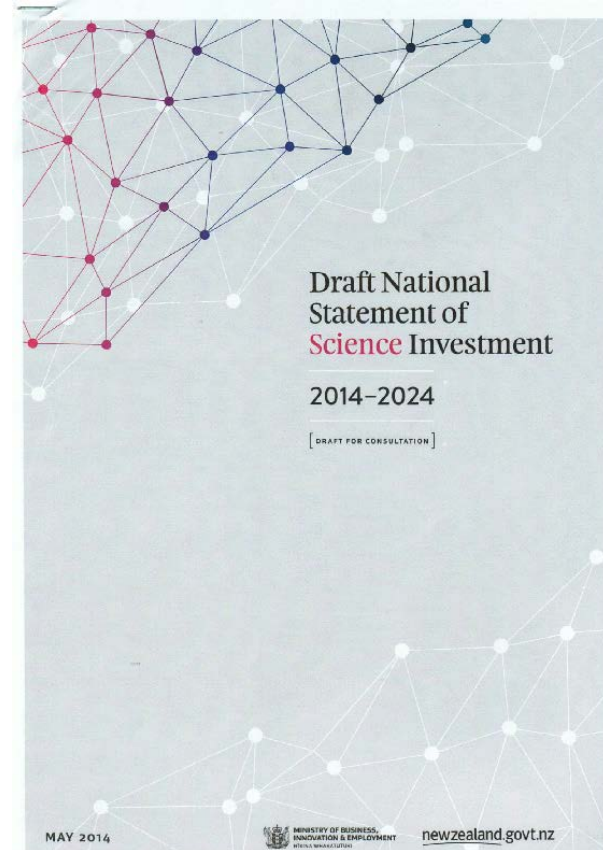
- How can we secure a research-informed knowledge base for effective urban management in NZ?
- My purpose is to show why this question is important and what might be included in a NZ urban research agenda



Photo: James Hutchinson, Source: Transforming Cities

Provocations

- MBIE Draft NSSI 2014-2024
- Key general question: Are NSSI investment priorities and approaches going to be appropriate for NZ in the changing socio-economic/socio-technical/geo-political and planetary conditions likely over the next decade?
- Vitally important to incorporate urban research as a 'sector of future need' in the NSSI.



Provocations

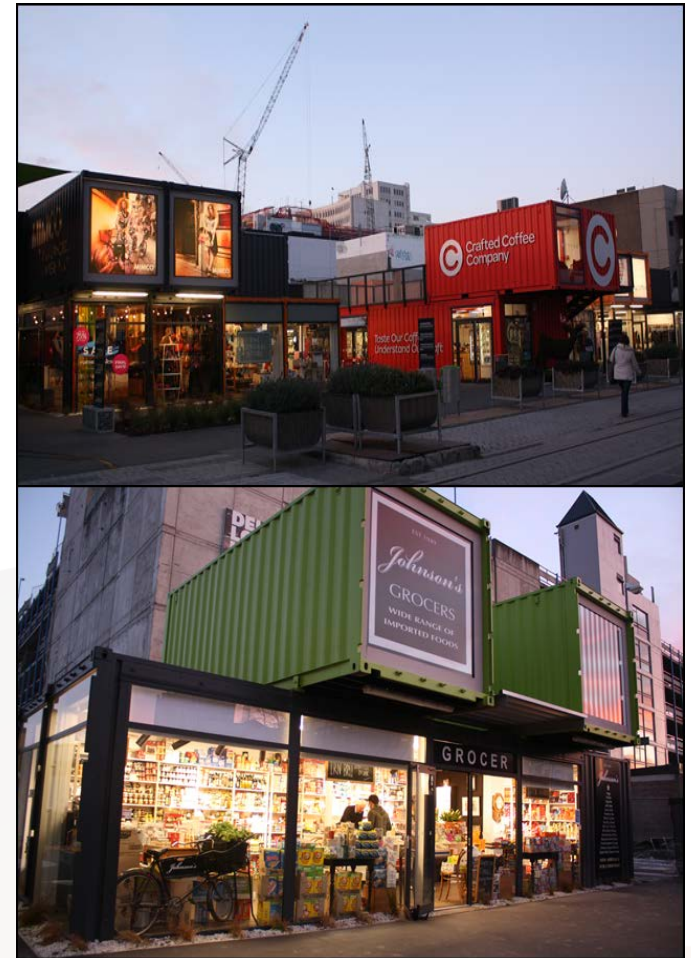
- Why? Over 50% of world's population urbanised and 87% in NZ
- Urban areas are:
 - Sites in which complex social, economic, environmental and technical processes operate
 - Settings through which people, objects, capital, technologies and ideas flow and interact globally
 - Places of urgent national and global policy concern



Photo: Harvey Perkins, Source: Transforming Cities

Provocations

- Some recognition of this in NZ research policy: e.g., resilient cities funding, NSC11: building better homes, towns and cities
- But is a NSSI dominated by STEM and economic development thinking broad enough to support research aimed at meeting NZ's desire to build better cities, towns and communities?
- Approaches developed overseas, for example, would seem to suggest not



Photos: Charlotte Šunde, Source: Transforming Cities

What's happening overseas? Example one

- Research Programme: Liveable Cities (UK) funded by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council
- Aim: to develop engineering solutions for achieving UK's carbon reduction targets tested in three UK cities: Birmingham, Lancaster and Southampton
- Researchers: a national 4-university team of engineers, designers and social scientists



Photo: Harvey Perkins, Source: Transforming Cities

What's happening overseas? Example one

- Themes
 - City analysis methodology
 - Resources
 - Wellbeing
 - Ecosystem services
 - Energy
 - Economic viability
 - Policy and governance
 - Future visions
- Combination of STEM, social science and humanities methodologies



Photo: Harvey Perkins, Source: Transforming Cities

What's happening overseas? Example two

- Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) funded by federal, state and territory governments
- 21 year history: 1993: 10 researchers, 2014: 400 researchers
- 10 university/institute partners
- Policy-relevant housing research
- Research conducted across a spectrum of disciplines including the social sciences and STEM



Photo: Paul Rovere, Source: news.domain.com.au

A New Zealand Model: Transforming Cities

- Facilitates connections among researchers within and beyond the University of Auckland with:
Research institutions; Private and public sector agencies; Non-governmental organisations; Community-led initiatives
- Promotes collaborative multi- and cross-disciplinary urban research that addresses critical societal needs



Source: University of Auckland photo library

A New Zealand Model: Transforming Cities

- Central meta-level themes in Transforming Cities' work are urban:
 - Liveability
 - Sustainability
 - Resilience
 - Governance
 - Productivity
 - Integration and efficiency
- Involves researchers from all of the University's faculties and institutes across the country



Photo: James Hutchinson, Source: Transforming Cities

A New Zealand Model: Transforming Cities

Our close connections with urban policy and practice agencies have given us a good understanding of the elements of research enquiry central to knowledge creation for urban transformation. These are:

- housing
- population
- transport
- climate change
- economic development
- physical and social infrastructure
- natural and built environments
- parks and recreation
- tourism
- arts and culture
- health and well-being
- heritage
- urban/rural boundaries
- the rural hinterland

New Zealand Urban Research

- Seen in this way cities can be thought of as **systems** in which all of these elements interact and are globally connected
- Important therefore to engage in urban research that:
 - incorporates all of these elements and their interactions
 - Recognises that these elements manifest and interact variably **within** cities and **between** cities



Photo: Smiffa2001, Redditch Cloverleaf, used under CC-BY-SA 3.0 Unported license

New Zealand Urban Research

- To illustrate this latter point it's useful to think of the differences and demands for knowledge required in the management of:
 - **Growing cities:** Auckland and Tauranga
 - **Cities in stasis:** Wellington and Dunedin
 - **Regional towns:** Timaru and New Plymouth
 - **Rural service towns** in places of **high amenity:** Queenstown and Taupo



Photo: Gerard O'Brien, Source: Reroof, May 2011.

You don't know what you've got 'til it's gone

- The importance of **all** these elements of urban research enquiry in interpreting the city have been also been reinforced by the Christchurch reconstruction
- While the national debate focuses mainly on housing, physical infrastructure, economic development and climate change, 'on the ground' understanding of the city in Christchurch shows how we need to grasp a much broader range of issues and interactions in the urban sphere

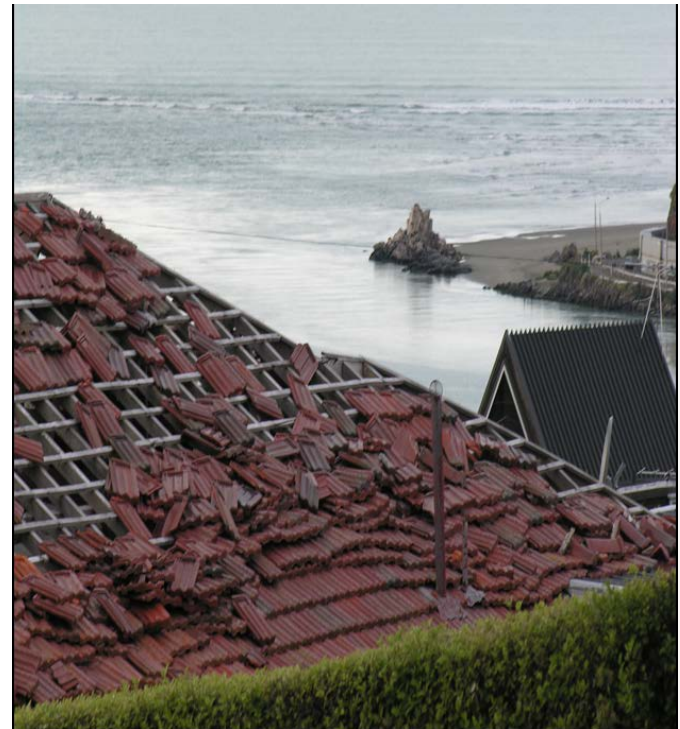


Photo: Harvey Perkins, Source: Transforming Cities

Interacting elements of urban research enquiry

Christchurch as an example:

- housing
- population
- transport
- climate change
- economic development
- physical and social infrastructure
- natural and built environments
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Conclusion: building better cities, towns and communities

- If we want to develop an effective urban research agenda in these terms, we need to:
 - Take a broad social, cultural, economic and environmental approach to urban research
 - Conduct research in a variety of urban settings and at various scales
 - Ensure a methodological balance between STEM, social sciences and humanities oriented questions and approaches



Photo: Brett Taylor, Wellington, New Zealand, Source: Flickr, used under CC-BY-SA 2.0 license

Conclusion: building better cities, towns and communities

- Engage in multi- and cross-disciplinary work
- Focus on the development of a **national** urban research community – capacity building, end-user engagement, co-learning and effective audio-visual linkages (e.g., SeeVogh)
- Engage with urban research opportunities in support of the Vision Mātauranga policy framework



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Conclusion: building better cities, towns and communities

- Pursue a research agenda that facilitates international collaboration
- Secure funding over the long term
- This returns me to my starting question:
 - How can we secure a research-informed knowledge base for effective urban management in NZ?



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