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Affiliated Faculty Interview – GSC

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**Can you tell us about your latest research project?**

**[MG]**: Currently, I am convening a global research network, the [Network on Infrastructural Regionalisms](https://www.regionalstudies.org/news/launch-of-the-rsa-research-network-on-infrastructural-regionalisms-noir/) (NOIR), which is underwritten by the Regional Studies Association (RSA). It seeks to think about the way infrastructure, broadly construed, helps us understand the construction of regions. For example, Pittsburgh is not possible without the superstructure of its infrastructure that binds it together—whether it is its rail networks, labor markets, or social fabrics. There is an undertheorization of how infrastructure creates regions and regions create infrastructure. NOIR is largely interdisciplinary, drawing on the works of political scientists, geographers, engineers, political ecologists, and sociologists, among others—and together we seek to better understand this question of how infrastructure is constructed, physically and rhetorically, and how these different networks collide to create new regional spaces.

**Do you see any particular innovation as a "game changer" for cities in the next 10 years?**

**[MG]**: In a way, I am concerned with urban innovation. I think if you were to ask those working in the field from cognate disciplines like engineering or computer science, the answers would revolve around notions of smart cities and how technology can form an enabling function that can help move the city forward in some way through big data being leveraged to understand and administer spaces. Taking a contrary view, I say that it is a reliance on ‘smartness’ that can hinder issues of social equity and the fundamental reasons we choose to live in cities in the first place, like social cohesion and a sense of belonging. Thinking about innovation more fundamentally, in terms of what is at the root of urban society and how we can make it more humane—which is not necessarily a new idea, but rather comes out of the work of Mike Davis, Henri Lefebvre, and others who think about the way we can create stronger neighborhoods and use those to build stronger cities. It works slower and requires work across communities and constituencies, but I think that that is an innovation that we should be spending more time on. The University of Pittsburgh is doing this in a way through the Community Engagement Center initiative in trying to progress with a place-based agenda to strengthen community organizations and linkages between the community and the University.

**As Director of Pitt's Urban Studies program with regional expertise in North America, Southeast Asia and Australasia, why is it imperative to teach and research with a global perspective?**

**[MG]**: Our current situation is a great example; daily life in East and Southeast Asia relies on wet markets, where people go and gather the fresh produce that they need to sustain their lives. Those wet markets have a particular ecology of supply chains with different vendors and customers that buy and sell goods and is embedded in broader capitalist relationships. The exchanges and interactions of a wet market in particular city in China has global consequences; as a specific vector of disease can be introduced into a society and then be transmitted such that it begins to affect areas around the world. Understanding the global nature of modern society and thinking about the ways that local contingencies can create international or transnational impacts is an important thing for us to consider. Moving away from the epidemiological, we can think about the way that different cities transmit ideas back-and-forth through different intermediaries, like consultancies, conferences, and other modes of exchange. Without understanding the local, through city experiences, we might miss something when those local practices go global, and vice versa—if we are only embedded in a particular place and learning about its idiosyncrasies without a perspective on the global, we miss those interconnections that are shaping both the global and the local.

**Do you have any cities-related books, podcasts or documentaries you would recommend?**

**[MG]**: I recommend *Networked Disease: Emerging Infections in the Global City* (2008) by Roger Keil and S. Harris Ali, which is a take on the epidemiological aspects of urbanism. Also, Peter Gould’s book, *The Slow Plague* (1993) is a great read on the AIDS crisis and looking at the use of geographic information systems (GIS) as a way to understand the spread of disease and takes into account some of the more social aspects of disease and a how mix-methods approach can useful in comprehending how it spreads. Nakhil Anand’s *Hydralic City: Water and the Infrastructures of Citizenship in Mumbai* (2017) is another great global-oriented example of what we can learn about society through an investigation on infrastructure. As far as podcasts are concerned, I recommend Ross Beveridge’s [Urban Political](https://nam05.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Furbanpolitical.podigee.io%2F&data=02%7C01%7CRTP23%40pitt.edu%7Cdace38144aac4ca2e5a308d7d25b3d64%7C9ef9f489e0a04eeb87cc3a526112fd0d%7C1%7C0%7C637209161615849218&sdata=z5b1LnTH%2FbrXGyBEPuPVlNR9zhPiz79MtbemRWMF1C4%3D&reserved=0) podcast, which talks about topics relevant to urban and the political.