Comments on Glaeser, Ponzetto, and Zou (2015), ‘Urban Networks: Connecting Markets, People, and Ideas’

Michael Woolcock
Development Research Group, World Bank Malaysia

‘Rising South’ Conference
Kuala Lumpur, 16 May 2016
“In theory, theory and practice are the same thing. In practice, they’re not.”

Albert Einstein
Putting theory to work

• **Sound theory**
  • Meets/extends disciplinary standards

• **Really sound theory**
  • Works at different units of analysis, across time, for different groups
  • Holds whether arrived at inductively or deductively
  • Identifies limits: *conditions under which* it holds

• **Really useful, sound theory**
  • Complement to, not substitute for, empirics and politics
  • Maps coherently onto a prevailing implementing apparatus
  • Informs trade-offs, strategies for addressing ‘losers’, ‘dark sides’
From Grand Plans to sound policy to actual implementation: lots of devils in lots of details…
Implications for development policy in Malaysia
Variation, all the way down...

Score based on seven factors over the 2010-14 recovery period. Above 80 means the county is distressed.

Ten most distressed large cities:
- Newark
- Detroit
- Cleveland
- Toledo
- Cincinnati
- Milwaukee
- Buffalo
- San Bernardino
- Stockton
- Memphis
Variation, all the way down…

…especially wrt implementation

Score based on seven factors over the 2010-14 recovery period. Above 80 means the county is distressed.

Ten most distressed large cities

The New York Times | Source: Economic Innovation Group

The PRIZE

WHO'S IN CHARGE OF AMERICA'S SCHOOLS?

Dale Russakoff
So, should Malaysia ‘build mega-cities or a network of linked middle-sized metropolises?’
So, should Malaysia ‘build mega-cities or a network of linked middle-sized metropolises?’

• For me, not quite the right question... because there isn’t an answer (even when qualified by selected categorical factors)

• *How* can different parts of Malaysia—contingent on their history and prevailing endowments—ensure that all its citizens are **connected**, **contributing** and **cared for**? How can the capability of agencies tasked with implementing these policies be enhanced?
  • Understanding, in detail, sub-national variation is key

• Glaeser, Ponzetto and Zou (2015) a vital complement to, not substitute for, strategies for seeking these answers