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**URBAN RESEARCH ACROSS THE THEORY-PRACTICE DIVIDE:
MODES OF DIALOGUE AND/OR DISENGAGEMENT**

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Bio: Katharine Rankin is Professor of Geography and Planning at the University of Toronto. She is the author of *Cultural Politics of Markets: Economic Liberalization and Social Change in Nepal* (Pluto Press and University of Toronto Press 2004) and currently PI of a 5-year, collaborative research project, *Infrastructures of Democracy: State Building as Everyday Practice in Nepal's Agrarian Districts* (<https://infrastructuresofdemocracy.wordpress.com/>). Her academic publishing focuses on broad research interests in the areas of the politics of planning and development, feminist and critical theory, market formation, social economy and community development.

Corruption and transnational rationalities of roads: Insights for a theory-practice dialogue

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Abstract: In the context of research on road development in Nepal, we regularly hear about corruption—from planner-bureaucrats, from development practitioners, from policy makers and from residents of communities who become involved in road building in numerous capacities, as labourers, politicians, contractors, entrepreneurs and travellers. The mainstream donor grey literature on road development, moreover, is replete with an “anti-corruption” discourse that directly and explicitly informs practice. Rarely have we encountered a single issue that so animates a range of knowledge producers across the imagined theory-practiced divide. At the same time, we notice a relative silence on the issue of corruption in the realm of planning theory and critical development studies, two fields ideally poised to grapple with questions about the articulation of theory and practice in projects of improvement. Geography and anthropology furnish some recent contributions to forging a “critical corruption studies” that helps to gain some traction around a thorny topic that has more typically been the purview of political scientists and economists, and furnishes some insights on the ethical and epistemological challenges facing critical analysis of corruption. In this paper we engage the phenomenon of road building in the context of a massive decentralization and municipalization agenda in Nepal, as a site for critically assessing the theory-practice nexus in mainstream planning and development, as well as for forging a critical dialogue between theory and practice through research. We do so through a reading of a World Bank Road Sector Assessment Study, in articulation with themes arising in the literature on critical corruption studies and our own ethnographic research.