

Foreword to the thematic issue on cities in global capitalism

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Abstract

This thematic issue investigates the complex interactions between urban environments and global capitalism. It includes a range of case studies and theoretical analyses that delve into the effects of global economic forces on urban spaces. The papers explore various topics, such as the transformation of labor markets due to digital capitalism, the impact of economic activities on urban climate resilience, and the challenges of sustainable urban development. The issue highlights the necessity of interdisciplinary approaches to understand and address the dynamic relationship between urban geographies and global economic systems.

Keywords

urban geography, global capitalism, digital labor, environmental change, urban resilience, sustainable development

Izvelek

Uvod v tematsko številko o mestih v globalnem kapitalizmu

Ta tematska številka preučuje zapletene odnose med urbani prostori in globalnim kapitalizmom. Vključuje študije primerov in teoretičnih analiz, ki se posvečajo vplivu globalnih ekonomskih sil na urbana območja. Članki raziskujejo različne teme, kot so transformacija trgov dela zaradi digitalnega kapitalizma, vpliv ekonomskih dejavnosti na podnebno odpornost mest in izzivi trajnostnega urbanega razvoja. Izdaja poudarja potrebo po interdisciplinarnih pristopih za razumevanje in naslavljanje dinamičnega odnosa med urbani geografijami in globalnimi ekonomskimi sistemi.

Ključne besede

urbana geografija, globalni kapitalizem, digitalno delo, okoljske spremembe, urbana odpornost, trajnostni razvoj



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1 Cities and global capitalism: Unveiling local dimensions

This special issues presents case studies, theoretical insights, and practical experiences within the intricate nexus of urban spaces and global capitalism, a theme crucial in contemporary urban studies. Inspired by Doreen Massey's idea that 'places are processes' where the dynamics of capitalism unfold (Massey, 1994), and David Harvey's perspective of cities as arenas for contesting and reshaping neoliberalism (Harvey, 2003), it scrutinizes urban areas influenced by global economic currents. we examine urban spaces shaped by global economic forces. Additionally, the issue reflects on Saskia Sassen's concept of cities as 'strategic sites' where global and local intersect (Sassen, 2001), and Henri Lefebvre's vision of the 'right to the city' as a pathway to transformative change (Lefebvre, 1968).

Our compilation of papers illustrates the dual role of cities as both influencers and responders in the global economic framework, offering insights into urban development, inequality, and sustainability. The papers engage with the theoretical legacies of Massey, Harvey, Sassen, and Lefebvre, revealing the complex roles of cities in the global capitalist landscape.

While the thematic scope of this issue is extensive, the papers included offer a selective exploration of its key aspects. These contributions provide a diverse yet interconnected critique of how urban areas are being shaped by, and are responding to, the dynamics of global capitalism.

2. From labor markets to land use: Urban dynamics in a globalized economy

The exploration begins with a critical analysis of platform work, revealing how digital capitalism reshapes urban labor markets and challenges traditional labor relations, as seen in the article on platform work debates and concepts (Breznik & Turnšek, 2023). Companies utilize city infrastructure and affect local economies and culture. The transformation of urban areas by platforms like Uber and Airbnb reflects a significant shift in how cities function and serve their residents, raising questions about the sustainability and impact of such business models on urban life and community dynamics.

The de-industrialization of Maribor serves as a poignant case study of the broader neoliberal shifts impacting post-socialist cities, highlighting the uneven integration of local economies into the global capitalist system (Podvršič, 2023). This theme specifically in relation to Maribor, has previously been examined in the *Journal for Geography*, for example by Lorber (2006a, 2006b, 2011) and Horvat (2015).

The study on Sarajevo's heatwaves from 1901 to 2018 demonstrates the escalating impact of global capitalist practices on urban environments, establishing a clear link between economic activities and climate changes. This acts as a critical example in the thematic issue, showing how global economic forces are exacerbating environmental challenges in cities (Žiberna et al., 2023). The issue of heatwaves and associated urban heat island effects have been one of the hallmark topics of this journal (see for example: Žiberna, 2006; Žiberna & Ivajnsič 2018; Pipenbaher et al., 2020; Grujić et al., 2020).

The paper on Maribor's blue-green infrastructure by Vovk (2023) highlights innovative urban responses to environmental challenges within the global capitalist context,

complementing the thematic issue's exploration of adaptive and sustainable urban development strategies. The article builds upon the continuation of her previous work in this area, as seen in her publications in *Journal for Geography*: Vovk Korže, 2008; Vovk Korže & Blažeka, 2006).

The paper on Slovenia's urban expansion into agricultural lands (Žiberna et al., 2023b) concisely captures the consequences of global capitalist development. It explains how economic growth, driven by real estate and industrial investments, leads to urban sprawl. This phenomenon, emblematic of capitalist dynamics, demonstrates the complex interaction between economic forces, urban growth, and the reshaping of cultural landscapes. It emphasizes the pressing issue of balancing urban development with sustainable land use amid capitalist pressures. Žiberna's decade-long research on the topic of land loss due to unregulated urban expansion is also noted (e.g., Žiberna, 2013; Žiberna, 2018).

The thematic issue further delves into tourism gentrification in a Mediterranean town, as examined in the paper by Kumer et al. (2023). Here, economic development intersects with challenges in urban climate resilience. While gentrification has been a relatively recent topic in Slovenia, mainly analysed in the context of Ljubljana's post-socialist urban restructuring (e.g. Andrews et al., 2007), it is now emerging in smaller towns with various hidden negative effects, notably on climate resilience. This includes the study of Piran's community response to climate change implications (explored by Kumer et. al., 2022).

3 Looking ahead: Bridging gaps in urban geography and global capitalism

This issue not only charts the current trajectory of urban geography but also identifies critical gaps in our understanding of how global economic forces shape urban spaces. The diverse methodologies and case studies presented here underscore the need for a more nuanced exploration of the intersection between urban development and global capitalism, particularly in the context of digital labor, environmental changes, and urban resilience.

Future research should delve deeper into the implications of these dynamics, exploring questions around the sustainability of urban growth, the social consequences of economic transformations, and the role of policy in mediating these changes. Moreover, the findings in this issue have broader societal and policy implications, challenging us to reconsider the governance of urban spaces and the equitable distribution of resources in the face of global capitalist pressures. These articles collectively call for a reimagining of urban geographies in a way that is more responsive to the complexities of global economic systems, emphasizing the need for interdisciplinary approaches and collaborative solutions.

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