

Special Issue Combining Safety
and Equity in the Post-Covid City:
New Trends between Local Policies
and Bottom-Up Practices

FUORI LUOGO

Journal of Sociology of Territory,
Tourism, Technology

Guest editors

Gabriele Manella
Madalena Corte-Real



Editor in chief: Fabio Corbisiero
Editorial manager: Carmine Urciuoli

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Summary

9. What Makes a City a City?

Fabio Corbisiero

11. Combining Safety and Equity in the post-Covid City:

New Trends between Local Policies and Bottom-Up Practices. An Introduction

Gabriele Manella, Madalena Corte-Real

15. Examining Regeneration Experiences of Urban Outdoor Spaces Through the Lens of Children's Rights

Letizia Montalbano, Elena Pagliarino

35. Social Capital and Health: New Frontiers and Old Problems in a Working-Class Neighbourhood in Naples. Testing a Reconsideration of Territorial Healthcare

Francesco Calicchia

53. Safety, Mobility and Sociality in Urban Spaces during the Health Emergency in Italy

Antonietta Mazzette, Daniele Pulino, Sara Spanu

65. Local Authorities and Civic Actions Disentangled: Legibility and Scene Styles

Sebastiano Citroni

79. Italian Cities Looking for a New Normal: Economic and Social Opportunity between Reality, Perception and Hopes. The Case of Milan

Ariela Mortara, Rosantonieta Scramaglia

93. From the "Reception Trap" to "Denied Reception". The Tightening of Migration Policies and the Centrality of Informal Settlements Between Segregation and Resistance

Omid Firouzi Tabar

107. Unmasking the Effects of Airbnb in Barcelona

Sofia Galeas Ortiz, Oscar Mascarilla Miró, Montse Crespi Vallbona

125. Endless Displacement. Migration Governance, Containment Strategies and Segregation in Athens and Turin

Erasmus Sossich

147. Public spaces transformations in Latin America during Covid-19: Community Resilience and Tactical Urbanism in Bogota, Quito and Mexico City

Raul Marino, Elkin Vargas, Maud Nys, Alejandra Riveros

3T SECTION - 3T READINGS

165. *The Changing Face of Tourism and Young Generations: Challenges and Opportunities*, Channel View Publications, 2022.

Francesca Romana Ammaturo reads, Fabio Corbisiero, Salvatore Monaco, Elisabetta Ruspini

167. *The Routledge Handbook of Comparative Global Urban Studies*, Routledge, 2023.

João Pedro Nunes reads Patrick Le Galès, Jennifer Robinson

169. *Migranti: la sfida dell'integrazione digitale. Innovazione e co-creation nel progetto H2020 MICADO*, FrancoAngeli, Milan, 2023 Emanuele Stochino reads Maurizio Bergamaschi (ed.)

INTERVIEW

173. *Old and New Problems after Covid-19: Having a Look at the US cities. A Talk with Ray Hutchison*

Gabriele Manella, Madalena Corte-Real

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READINGS FUORI LUOGO

João Pedro Nunes reads

Patrick Le Galès, Jennifer Robinson, *The Routledge Handbook of Comparative Global Urban Studies*, Routledge, 2023.

Cities, urban territories, and globalization processes are more and more connected. And yet, as the urban world becomes more diverse, plural, globalised, and interdependent, knowledge-building is also changing. Within this broad *problématique* comparative research strategies challenge theorisations, empirical practices, and methodological approaches. As the editors of *The Routledge Handbook of Comparative Global Urban Studies*, Patrick Le Galès and Jennifer Robinson, claim in their introduction, not only a new urban world is on the making, but also a new methodological world is rising in global urban studies.

Le Galès and Robinson argue that scales, interdependencies, and globalisation processes hinder comparisons in the strict methodological sense. But as the global geography of research is changing, they emphasise new conditions for comparisons involving cities in all continents and contexts are developing. In a field that «was classically not very comparative» (p. 1) the editors' point is that innovative research practices, renewal of objects and approaches, controversies, and hybridisations are major contributions to the debates on which urban studies are being re-invented. One of the book's objectives is to explore an important and innovative angle: «Urban comparisons are a major domain of global urban studies», and they reflect «the current moment of innovation and experimentations in the field where a renewed comparative imagination figures strongly» (p.5).

The editors of *The Routledge Handbook of Comparative Global Urban Studies* do the job very well. The book offers the readers a wide set of contributions framed by an open and pluralist stance on current debates, presenting different research traditions, and pertaining to different geographical areas. The chapters address conceptualizations and methods, experimentations and theorisations, contexts and circulations that fully express and expand the global urban studies comparative endeavours and practices.

According to Le Galès and Robinson, comparative global urban studies have recently seen a renaissance. First, globalization is turning the world more urban and more plural. In this broad context, urban comparisons and accumulation of research results will foster theorisations. This comparative endeavour has «to be able to take into account a vast number of cases that were largely ignored» (p.5). Consequently, the book bears upon a new geography of knowledge production and it aims to show different comparative inheritances from different geographical areas, including «concepts, methods, strengths and originality of research emanating from a wide range of geographical contexts» (p. 2). Second, the book rests upon the idea that there is a rising and widening range «of experiments in terms of research questions, design and methods, objects and processes to be compared». And, as the editors cleverly put it, «comparative imagination in a world of imperfect and innovative comparisons is required» (p. 2). Hence the importance given to empirical research, data, and research methods throughout the book, particularly on Part II, dedicated to methods and research design issues.

In the Handbook's introduction, the editors acknowledge the comparative urban studies as methodologically diverse. Some of the challenges for global urban comparisons arise from practical questions of method, others result from research orientations, for instance, either more positivist or more constructivist. Overall, along the book's parts and chapters, methodological inclusiveness and diversity are sought after and achieved. Examples of different ontologies and epistemologies are present and are highlighted by the editors. They stress how the field is crossed by different disciplines – geography, sociology, political science, history, anthropology, critical literary studies, post-colonial studies, environmental studies, science and technology studies – that contribute to the broader comparative *problématique*.

Global urban comparisons bear upon the importance given to cities and metropolis in a world-

wide scale. As Le Galès and Robinson point out, if «cities belong to a world of cities» (p. 4) these same world is structured along processes and scales that are both national and transnational. Hence the importance given to actors, organizations, and institutions, but also connections and experiences, networks and relations, circulations and mobilities. In the editors' view the handbook's contributions «mark the centrality of the question of method and the vitality of a comparative imagination» (p. 5) responding then to a changing urban world. So a new set of comparisons made on a different basis due to growing interdependencies is to be made in order to sustain knowledge accumulation and fresh theorisations.

The Handbook is organised in five Parts and forty-five chapters. Part I "Inheritance: Traditions in Comparative Urban Research" excavates different research tropes, regional contexts, disciplines, and conditions and brings to the comparative practices and their foundations. Part II addresses "Methods and Research Design". These are central components of the comparative endeavour. The chapters range from the scale of neighbourhood to transnationality, comprising the role of monographs and the phenomena of comparative practices in policy making. In "Part III Contexts" the editors aim at equating the place of context in comparison by formulating a double question. On the one hand, what theoretical approaches are open to or underpin different types of comparisons and offer a sound framework for comparative analysis. On the other hand, what and how comparative practices were developed in different regional contexts. The chapter "Segregation Studies: Overriding Context through Implicit Comparison?" by Thomas Maloutas, and the chapter "Cities in their States" by Göran Therborn, epitomize the richness of comparative-based contextualities as ways to form theoretical propositions, one of the main concerns in the Handbook. In Part IV "Connections" the focus is on globalisation circuits and circulations of various kinds in a context of complex relations and connections. Finally, Part V "Experiments" presents new research taking an explicitly experimental approach, working with different theoretical perspectives and new domains of urban life to foster innovative kinds of comparison. All in all, *The Routledge Handbook of Comparative Global Urban Studies* offers its readers with a highly valuable and wide range set of contributions that will underpin further research practice and theoretical production.

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