

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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The contents are published under a Creative Commons 4.0 license. What is a city? This is the question

What Makes a City a City?

What a city is? This is the question I usually pose to my students at the beginning of my "Urban Sociology" course every year. First and foremost, the city is a space of contested change. Moreover, the very definition of the city as an empirical object is inherently controversial (LeFebvre, 1973), and only through a plurality of perspectives within a transdisciplinary framework can one attempt to approach a pure analysis of the concept of the city. It is not by chance that urban studies, beyond specific disciplinary lenses, have traditionally evoked urban transformation through the paradigm of complexity.

Although protean and iridescent cities attract scholars, they require dialogue between disciplines that, particularly in certain periods, have tended to remain distant from, or even antagonistic to, each other, such as history and geography, sociology and urban planning, geology and engineering, architecture and geometry. In urban spaces, the continuous and reciprocal relationships between space and time emerge in paradigmatic ways. The contemporary city has been said to reveal the forms of socio-spatial reorganisation characteristic of globalisation, including spatio-temporal compression (Harvey, 1989) and the associated political meanings and effects (Jessop, 2006). These phenomena can only be understood by sharing approaches and tools from diverse disciplinary traditions.

Many scholars have focused their attention on cities with the intention of enriching urban studies. This has enabled the construction of new conceptual tools, innovative maps, and original cognitive cartographies, capable of restoring to the urban subject a heightened awareness of its position within the global network of relations, and of the inherently "political" nature of this position. Interdisciplinary urban analyses seem to construct a framework of maps and representations that attempt to address crises of meaning, investigating the "black holes" produced in the social fabric of metropolises. The goal is to guide policies aimed at reducing imbalances, unsustainable polarisation, and injustices, while proposing alternative spatial and institutional configurations (Jameson, 1989; Bauman, 1999). Urban life can only take place beyond structurally determined geographical boundaries; in sociological terms, the city transcends its physical limits and becomes a state of mind.

This process, in which one's personal biography intertwines with the development of the city, inevitably reflects the historical, social, political, and economic characteristics of the city's evolution. The emergence of the urban is, in part, attributable to the obvious complexity of the object of study and, on the other hand, to the particular disciplinary paths that it would be naive to confine solely to academic affiliations and institutional positions.

Changes in cities are constant and rapid. Cities can no longer be read simply as "growth machines" (Logan & Molotch, 1987), but rather as ecosystems that influence social formations. As you will read in this monographic issue of "Out of Place", there are several causes of urban change: mobility, migration processes, inequalities in time and space, social marginality, and urban tourism—one of the proxy indicators of critical transformations that are universally affecting cities.

There have been several dramatic events that have impacted cities globally, particularly those in industrial democracies: from the terrorist attacks on New York City in 2001 to the COVID-19 pandemic. Urban contexts have been targeted by social change and have thus further contributed to questioning the organisation of phenomena associated with urban life.

Tourism, which is theoretically a phenomenon of subjective leisure and collective well-being, is, on the contrary, another clear example of how the city can become a space of social tension. If urban tourism offers entertainment, imaginative authenticity, and pleasure to city visitors, it also serves as an intervention in the everyday life of the city, with the local population simulta-

neously becoming both a part of the tourist product and its antagonist. This is exemplified by the antagonistic "overtourism" movements that, as of 2015, find their stronghold in the network SET (Southern Europe facing Turistification), which has long fought for the right to the city in the Lefebvrian sense.

The focus on tourism and its anti-urban corollaries is merely a lens through which to analyse the numerous critical issues plaguing contemporary urban life: the increasing precariousness of the right to housing, caused largely by the mass acquisition of real estate by investment and property funds for conversion into tourist accommodation; the rise in property prices; and the transformation of housing units into short-term tourist rentals. These phenomena lead to real urban massification, running counter to the principle of the right to the city for all. These tensions foster competition for the preservation of urban segments where permanent residents are often the losers, struggling to access basic activities and services such as mobility, infrastructure, healthcare, and leisure.

In this urban form, where tourism also functions as a driver of development, tourist consumption rarely compensates for the non-consumption of residents. This dynamic creates a dual form of otherness, wherein visitors encounter the otherness of the places they visit, while locals coexist with an industry that primarily serves the needs of outsiders.

As tourists traverse the globe, experiencing sometimes subtle differences between places, the city continually re-codes its spaces (Hollinshead & Suleman, 2018), spectacularising them (Judd, 1999) and reducing their otherness through the commodification of everyday life. The abrupt halt to tourism during the pandemic provided an opportunity for critical reflection on the liberal economic development model that we have now "normalised" through a neo-capitalist lens, or "mortified" from a social research perspective.

The challenge is not to stop change, but to manage it. One tool available is research, which, like this monographic issue, offers itself as a resource for the most virtuous governance of urban transformation.

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