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Martin Müller & Elena Trubina

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Martin Müller [iD][a] and Elena Trubina [iD][b]

[a]Department of Geography and Sustainability, University of Lausanne, Lausanne, Switzerland; [b]Center for Global Urbanism and Ural Humanities, Institute at Ural Federal University, Ekaterinburg, Russia

ABSTRACT

Global urbanism tends to think cities in categories of "Global North" and "Global South". But what about all those cities that escape easy classification into these hemispheric categories? Cities that could be said to belong to the Global Easts. This introduction to the special issue "The Global Easts in Global Urbanism: views from beyond North and South" shines a spotlight on cities in-between North and South. At the risk of being sidelined in debates in global urbanism, these cities have much to contribute to global theorizations of the urban. This introduction presents a group of articles that in different ways illustrate the breadth and depth of current research on urban and geographical knowledge production in and with the Global Easts. We specifically focus on one emergent convergence among urban research concerns, namely, problematizing the unidirectional teleology of a transition to an ideal type free market economy with democracy which is often at work with regard to cities in the Global Easts. The collected papers draw our attention to a number of co-existing temporalities and differing time coordinates and claim that it is high time for the Global Easts to contest their marginalization in the global academe.

This special issue is a situated attempt to theorize the urban from beyond the Global North and the Global South. Such an attempt is far from straightforward. One might even wonder whether there is a space left between North and South. Reading debates on theory-building in urban studies, one could be forgiven for thinking that theorizing takes place in a hemispheric world of North and South and that "the South" encompasses all those places that have not made it into the privileged North. With "the West and the Rest" binary made infamous by Huntington (1996) and Ferguson (2011), the concept of Global North/South divide is widely used to consider the differences associated with each half of the globe. Discussing "new geographies of theory" for "the 21st-century metropolis", Roy (2009, 820) proclaims that "the centre of theory making must move to

the global South". When calling for provincializing global urbanism by "empowering new loci of enunciation", Sheppard et al. tellingly elaborate on the geography of these new places: "Contemporary African and continental Asian cities are both like and unlike their European, North American, and Japanese counterparts" (Sheppard, Leitner, and Maringanti 2013, 895).

But there is an interstice between New York, London and Paris in one part of the world and Johannesburg, Kolkata and Jakarta in the other. Current debates in urban studies tend to ignore that interstice. In so doing, they fall prey to the hemispheric fallacy by assuming that North plus South equals globe. But there are cities that sit uneasily in the division between North and South. Often, these are cities that have remained outside the heartlands of European colonialism. We have chosen to call those places "the Global Easts". The "global" establishes a conversation with cities in the Global North and the Global South. The "Easts", in the plural, takes up the elusive signifier of the "East" as a place that is always elsewhere (Müller 2020a). It references the multiple Easts that come together in this strategic essentialism (Roy 2009: 822, 824), from the Middle East to the European East, once known as the Eastern bloc, to the Asian East (Shin, Lees, and Ernesto 2016).

Pyeongchang, Wuhan, Isfahan, Riyadh, Belgrade, Tbilisi, Sibiu, Bibra, Dushanbe, Khabarovsk – cities of the Global East are too marginal to be northern, yet too different and half-modern to be southern. These cities are path-dependent but rapidly mutating. They are both open to the world and closed – integrated into global flows of capital and images, while also bulwarks in nationalist practices of bordering. One might call the Global Easts a "grey zone" (Pobłocki 2013; Yiftachel 2006): suspended somewhere between North and South as the dominant categories of thinking the urban world.

Difficult to categorize, cities in the Global Easts remain, perhaps for that very reason, marginal to debates of global urbanism at large (Ferenčuhová 2016; Ferenčuhová and Gentile 2016; Gentile 2018a, 2018b; Yiftachel 2006; Wang and Zhang, this issue; Wu 2020). But far from meaning their nullification from theorizing the urban, this liminal position of cities in the Global East offers a unique conceptual resource, we think. Their in-between situation, neither completely different nor the same, represents a *tertium quid* to destabilize the all too comfortable distinctions between North and South. This *tertium quid* introduces uncertainty into urban theorizing. Uncertainty, not only about one's own speaking position, arising from the liminal position between North and South, but also uncertainty stemming from the quotidian lives of people in cities in the Global Easts.

Thinking and theorizing from outside the mainstream require a "disavowal of mastery and embrace of marginality" (Katz 2017, 596). It calls for a dual movement of problematizing: that of theory itself and that of the modes of its production. This is no different for the project of the Global Easts as it is taking shape right now (Müller 2020a; Karkov and Valiavicharska 2018; Murawski and

Bach 2020; Trubina, Gogishvili, and Martin Müller 2020, this issue, Müller and Trubina, 2020). It is conceived both as a mode of making a difference to global theorizing and, equally important, as an emancipatory project of redressing erasures and establishing a subject position for the East and Eastern scholars in the first place. In other words, the Global Easts is an intervention in the geopolitics of knowledge (Mignolo 2002): who produces knowledge for whom, where and with what effects? It aims to do more than merely include the Easts in global knowledge production – whether on cities, on societies, on polities or anything else. What is more, through this inclusion, it wants to trouble established wisdoms of where and by whom knowledge is produced and challenge the very modes of knowledge production themselves (Müller 2020b).

This impetus chimes with the decolonial drive that seems to have finally arrived in Anglophone geography (Jazeel 2017; Radcliffe 2017) and the greater awareness it has created about not just critiquing unequal power relations but also changing toward a more cosmopolitan theoretical (and indeed linguistic) habitus. Ironically, however, this decolonial drive remains resolutely focused on the (Western) European colonial experience and the resistance to it, while an Eastern decolonial thought is just now growing tender sprouts (Chen 2010; Tichindeleanu 2013; Tlostanova 2015; Karkov and Valiavicharska 2018; Kušić, Manolova, and Lottholz 2019; Wang 2014). Yet the decolonial literatures often focus on the differences between the Western and "local", "traditional" or "indigenous" narratives and conceptualizations and, perhaps, exaggerate the 'firmness' of a boundary between the global humanities and social sciences and local knowledge.

Comparative and relational approaches now inform the basis of contemporary urban scholarship as "local" and "global" urbanists alike are taking into consideration the various social, political, and cultural interconnections and complexities of the urban twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It was during the last few decades that urban scholars began to investigate analytically the commonalities and differences among the trajectories of urban development in the Global Easts and elsewhere (Robinson 2016, Andres and Golubchikov, 2016). They began elaborating different possibilities for the comparative relational study of a recurrent reconfiguration of urban alliances in order to cope with difficulties in financing the development of cities. They searched for ways to describe the convergence and divergence of neoliberal urban policies and market-led urban development in different social, political and economic contexts. They analyzed the expansion of state and transnational institutions and the promotion of market logic across all spheres of life. The focus on relationality and comparison problematizes the premise of independent, isolated societal and political developments, and emphasizes the fundamental interconnectedness and differently scaled links and networks among different practices and policies rather than the comparison of uniform abstractions, such as democracy,

progress, political regime or culture. So our claim for the larger place of cities in the Global Easts in the global academe includes not only asking which concepts (generously produced and reproduced by today's academe) are applicable, but inquiring whether these concepts indeed grasp urban realities or they need to be understood as "ideal types whose value for understanding established market economies equally needs to be questioned" (Hörschelmann and Stenning 2008: 349; see also Akçalı and Korkut 2015; Gentile 2018a, 2018b; Smart and Smart 2017).

While this special issue seeks to build bridges and conversations between multiple Global Easts, particularly with East Asia (see Wang and Zhang, this issue), it is anchored in the East we know best: the post-socialist East – those 30 countries, and their cities, that have emerged from the dissolution of socialism between 1989 and 1992. For one thing, this anchoring reflects the current limits of our knowledge and personal academic networks and is therefore testimony to the continuing strength of area-bound inquiries into urban realities. But it also appears to us that the post-socialist East, more than other parts of the world, has been pushed to the margins in the drive to make urban studies more global (Müller 2021). This special issue serves as a platform to envision a global urbanism with an East being firmly part of the conversation.

The concerns and topics shared amongst the contributions collected in this theme issue are many; however, one of the most prominent common threads consists of attempts to question the unidirectional teleology which is often at work with regard to post-socialist cities. Despite the popularity of the argument that post-socialist thought broke with "transitological" teleology, we observe that the imaginary of many scholars and laypeople remain affected by a version of the "end of history" narrative whereby the free-market global economy coupled with liberal democracy is the future that most postsocialist countries are destined to arrive (Gati 2007; Sýkora and Bouzarovski 2012; Lane 2016). "The unilateral, often tacit comparative view toward the West" (Wiest 2012, 844) testifies to intensity with which the Western mode of modernity was naturalized and absorbed by many. There is the correspondence between the directions in which structures of political organization and economy were drastically modified in the Global East and a specific moral logic that many people saw behind the traumatic transformations, namely, that the radical changes promised more opportunities and historic maturity. While the governments were busy incorporating their countries into the political (EU, NATO) and economic transnational configurations, the populations, albeit struggling or even surviving, hoped that normal life would soon be achieved.

Romanian philosopher Tichindeleanu (2013, 1) succinctly conveys the Eastern-European perspective on the experience of last decade: "Since 2008 the eruption of the crisis within the Western world and the rise of the Global South has dramatically eroded the ideological power of postcommunist foundational narratives. In the past three years, a wave of popular movements has

risen throughout the former socialist bloc, at a scale unseen since 1989 … In other words, the post-1989 civilizational promise of Europe and Occidentalism has currently reached a critical point of saturation in Eastern Europe. However, the direction taken by the accompanying disenchantment and reinvention is by no means predetermined". So both urban citizens and authorities need now to move from the overattachment to the great historic *telos*, whether this is socialism or capitalism, from the belief in the teleological causal force of economic and political progress to the acceptance of the contemporary messy present.

The papers in this issue reflect these concerns with global knowledge hegemonies, modernities and pervasive uncertainties about one's place in the world. Drawing on the ways in which modernity has been discussed by local press in the partially deindustrialized Łódź, Agata Zysiak and Wiktor Marzec demonstrate that although teleologies of progress are something that scholars should be wary of to avoid the reproduction of outdated visions, there may be "practical teleologies" stemming from the citizens' attempts to locate their city on the "time arrow" and to think of their city's "backwardness" or "inadequacy" in comparison to the more advanced cities. Zysiak and Marzec argue that the citizens of the Global East cities are inclined to apply "external benchmarks", both temporal and spatial ones, stemming from "elsewhere", to their localities and often come to unflattering conclusions. The modernity-centered attitudes of the Łódź -based journalists are just one of the many cases of the popularity of East–West discrepancies, asymmetries and hierarchies.

Reflecting on representations of post-socialist cities in the academic writings on climate change and urban areas, Slavomíra Ferenčuhová discerns two opposite conceptual tropes and narratives directly originating from the conventional teleology of development (in this case, of scholarly analysis of the climate change). She speaks of the "catching-up narrative" and the "getting-ahead narrative" and of the links between rendering the cities of the postsocialist Global East as economically "forever delayed" and scholars' susceptibility to market-based principles of urban climate policies, i.e. "environmental entrepreneurialism". Many post-socialist countries "inherited" high air and water pollution and land degradation from the times of state socialism but the current governments are unable to efficiently deal with environmental issues. Since environmental reforms were one of the conditions for EU accession, they remain among seriously contested issues, and the debates are often used by neoliberals in CEE countries to minimize the demands stemming from environmental legislation.

The various temporalities that overlap in course of urban interventions are traced by Jill Pope in the transformation of Savamala – the formerly industrial Belgrade neighborhood which went from complete neglect to aggressive regeneration. Pope examines the controversial competition of the rhythms of inertia and acceleration and coexistence of the narratives of waiting, delay and

"delayed transition" in the discourses surrounding the redevelopment of Savamala. Pope poignantly demonstrates how the city imaginary of the post-transitional moment includes citizens' multiscalar disappointments based on their reflections on the poor chances of Serbia's accession to the EU, chronic delays in the realization of all urban projects and a partial loss of cosmopolitan feel formerly typical of the Serbian capital.

To demonstrate the problematic contemporaneity of "East" and "West" in the processes of knowledge production and circulation, June Wang and Xu Zhang examine plural histories and spatialities of transnational education mobility and the West-East traffic of concepts and ideas in the context of the rapidly neoliberalizing East-Asian academe and urban development. Like other contributors, they also note the prevalence of the asymmetric power relations between the allegedly advanced West and a China lagging behind and the difficulties of making both Chinese scholarship and Chinese cities globally relevant. They note that both academics and urban authorities are continuously being put under more pressure to generate high-quality publications in the case of the academe and high-quality urban projects in the case of cities to place themselves on the highly competitive world map. This pressure to publish and build has led many to "cheat the system", that is to imitate what is already available, thus the enormous outburst of "grabbism" and *shanzhai* (山寨, fake), the Chinese term for copying and faking. The authors wittily problematize the stereotypical views on the ubiquitous Chinese fake by showing that socially, politically and economically shanzhai is the multilayered hybrid marked, among many things, by the creation of alternatives to the current world order of originality where all originals, whether these are cities or concepts, are concentrated in the West while bleak but numerous copies, or indeed fakes, emerge elsewhere.

The processes of socialist and post-socialist urbanization are often assessed normatively and one of the ways to characterize them is to use the tropes of completeness/incompleteness and over- and under-urbanization. Mikhail Ilchenko examines the ways in which specific layers of the socialist past enjoy an increased interest in a number of locations in the post-socialist Global East. He focuses on modernist architecture in Eastern Europe and different meanings this heritage has for various countries and cities. As this architecture becomes the object of aestheticization and, more generally, part of urban strategies of place-making and branding, the original ideas of social experimentation and the fundamental cultural transformations associated with this architecture are at stake. The controversial dialogue of cities with modernist heritage with the close, socialist past is informed by the grander historical narratives about the construction of socialism and the making of a new citizen. Comparing the results of fieldwork conducted in Zlín (Czech Rep.), Gdynia and Katowice with the debates around the "socialist cities" (*sotsgorod*) – experimental territories of mass urban development built in the 1920 s and 1930 s near large-scale industrial plants – Ilchenko shows the empowering, enabling potential of the

modernist heritage: it helps local activists to build historical identity and to claim that the cities in this part of the world have a full-fledged and original history. It is not by chance that the new discourse on modernist architecture in Central and Eastern European includes ideas of independence, freedom, modernization and cultural identity.

This special issue speaks back at global urban theory, but it also speaks with and to global urban theory. The articles seek not only to critique the means by which particular Northern arguments become normative, perceived as universal and "global", but contribute fresh insights stemming from the urban contexts the authors reflect on and sometimes even create in their respective countries. This is an emerging conversation to which we invite others to join. If the Global Easts are to make any difference, they need to become a collective endeavor between multiple Easts – of all those currently not represented or misrepresented in the coordinates of urban theory. The concept of the Global Easts means to create such a collective endeavor that emphasizes both difference and connectedness. The point is not to work toward an Eastern urbanism, whatever that may be, but toward a global urbanism that is more than northern and that deserves its name.

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ORCID

Martin Müller http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0734-4311
Elena Trubina http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4655-2068

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