URBAN FRONTIERS WORKSHOP CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

Territorializing Urban Frontiers:
Property, Local Social Relations and the State

*Oxford School of Global and Area Studies, University of Oxford, April 8-10 2019*

Conveners: Dr. Tara van Dijk (Oxford) and Prof. Christian Lund (Copenhagen)

This workshop investigates at *urban frontiers* - areas where land use, development and housing undergo rapid change. These transformations are often either ‘ahead of regulation’, so to speak, or actively *not* regulated by state planning authorities. The actions of landed elites, builders, real estate developers, brokers, inhabitants (old and new) and entrepreneurs of all shades re-work property rights and construct urban asset-classes for rent extraction that determine the uneven development of infrastructures and public and private facilities. While this production of urban space can be illegal, punctuated by periods of violence, contradictory and driven by a mix of livelihood strategies and profiteering, the aims are to territorialize, i.e. to fix, consolidate and institutionalize a configuration of social relations (property relations in particular) and citizenship most aligned to their needs and desires.

Frontier spaces are rarely blank canvases. Where you have people and resources, some form of property regime, however incipient or small scale develops. Already existing regimes with different institutional underpinnings and operating scales and logics play a role both in 1) how state efforts to territorialize their urban frontiers (for example: through urban development projects, municipal incorporation or annexation and the rationalization of land records and standardization of tenure) are taken up on the ground, and 2) with what consequences in terms of property relations, citizenship and the form and trajectory of urbanization in general.

Urban frontiers are often spaces with limited (deployed) statutory control. However, we find intense activities of localized territorialization and strategic, *ex post facto* legalization of unauthorized activities. Urban frontiers are inherently contradictory: the formalization of property, the ordering of space, and the concomitant emergence of real estate markets and other institutionalized regimes and circuits of resources valuation introduce a new set of rules and norms into the mix. These state and private sector projects, if operationalized, find themselves having to negotiate with existing material socio-spatial relations. Such encounters represent open moments in which actors of different stripes and scales of operation seek to secure access and control over emergent urban resource territories.

While urban formalization and expansion may sound orderly, it entails a plurality of competing territorializing projects. In this cacophony of social and economic agendas, some actors seek to perpetuate the frontier that enables an intensification of wealth accumulation, for example through real estate speculation and ‘land grabbing’. Consequently, urban frontiers are not an effect of space in the sense that it moves outwards in perfect alignment with urban expansion. Rather, urban frontiers are spatial transformations that occur when new possibilities for wealth accumulation overwrite existing social relations and local property regimes. Urban frontiers often relate to places, processes or amenities that fall within the statutory authority and responsibility of different state entities, but the actual reach of state regulatory and distributive capacity tends to be spotty and rather ad hoc.

For this workshop we invite papers that work at the urban frontiers of land, water, built environment development, and processes of territorialization and frontierification. We are particularly interested in empirically grounded work.
Practicalities:

Location: The workshop will take place in Oxford, UK at the Oxford School of Global and Area Studies April 8-10, 2019.

Participants will be selected on the basis of abstracts to be submitted to tara.vandijk@area.ox.ac.uk by January 10, 2019. Submitters will hear back by January 20.

Costs: This is a shoe-string operation, and participants will have to take care of their own travel and accommodation.

Format: We expect no more than 20 participants, and therefore ample time to discuss each contribution. Each day will begin with plenary session that sets out the theme and aims for the day. Every paper will be assigned a discussant. First the author has 30 minutes, the discussant 5 minutes and then we open it up to the whole group.

Output: Special Issue

Workshop Inspired by the following texts:


