

DIGITALIZING URBAN LATIN AMERICA - A New Layer for Persistent Inequalities?

Call for Reviews for CROLAR 5 (4)

Frank Müller and Ramiro Segura (eds.)

Twenty years after Manuel Castells' proclamation of the "Network Society" (1996), digitalization plays an ever-growing role in urban society. The "Smart City", for instance, promises more functional transport systems, access to internet technologies for all, and safe public spaces due to video surveillance 24/7. In addition, processing "Big Data" shall improve disaster prediction and community resilience in the age of "real-time urbanism" (Chandler, 2015), especially in the crisis-driven metropolises of the Global South. However, the free-to-access digital infrastructure has already been unmasked as just another myth (Coutard & Rutherford, 2016). Cities' digital "new skin" (Rabari & Storper, 2014) requires new theories and research methods to understand the spatial, social, political and cultural effects of digital technologies, the relationship between data and the urban, and the very notions of (big) data and connectivity.

Urban Latin America occupies a privileged position in this research agenda. Latin American metropolises continue to show violent expressions of social inequalities such as socio-spatial segregation, racialized violence, police and military oppression, poverty, and environmental degradation. Yet, they are also key sites for contesting the "neoliberal project" (Miraftab et al., 2015). While digitalization promises to improve life quality, economic growth and human development, it is questionable whether digitalization helps to overcome historically established structural inequalities on a global and local scale. Does digitalization simply add a new layer to "durable" (Tilly, 1996) local and global north-south inequities, with investment opportunities for the few, consumerist life styles for the many, yet disconnections and digital exclusion for the all-time marginalized?

This special issue of CROLAR – "DIGITALIZING URBAN LATIN AMERICA – A New Layer for Persistent Inequalities?" provides a forum to discuss how digital technological innovation relates to social inequalities in urban Latin America. Which are the social, political, cultural and economic opportunities and obstacles that digitalization provides for more equal, just, participatory or inclusive urbanization? We invite reviews of empirically informed research on digitalizing urban Latin America, outlining potentials and pitfalls of digitalization in urban politics and planning, surveillance and securitization, (cyber)warfare and urban insurgencies, social and economic inclusion, community resilience, social protest and methods of doing research on and in cities.

We are looking for book reviews that address, but are not necessarily limited to, the following thematic clusters:

1. Digital technologies facilitate access to public urban services and planning processes, and contribute to more effectively planning and monitoring urbanization and improving communities' resilience to disasters and crises of all kind. Digital technologies therefore touch on issues of democracy, transparency and accountability, but are also subject to critics regarding social control, extensive racial profiling, and mass surveillance.

2. Digitalization of urban planning and management techniques bears the risk of increasingly relying on expert knowledge. The question is whether facilitating access to information technology engenders a broader process towards social inclusion of marginalized groups into the urban fabric overcoming serious obstacles, for example, digital illiteracy.
3. Digitalization affects the way social protest and political resistance is organized and expressed. Yet, the use and development of social media in urban Latin America also meet with possibilities for repressive control as well as commercialization and privatization of the networks.
4. Digitalization is closely linked to urban infrastructures. In the sense of Castells' above cited work, and later publications by Graham & McFarlane (2014), Graham & Marvin (2001) and Brenner & Schmid (2014), issues of rural-urban connectivity, (infrastructural) inclusion of rural areas into Global City - steered agro-industrial networks - and thus the urbanization of the globe via networks of goods, humans and information, are increasingly subject to academic debates.
5. As today's increasingly connected "feral" (Norton, 2003) cities are considered threats for global security (Kilcullen, 2013), a growing body of literature addresses the nexus between digitalization and urbanity from the viewpoint of securitization and, in particular, urban warfare, terrorism, counterinsurgency and smart policing.
6. Researching (in) urban Latin America has been transformed by digital methodical techniques and skills and by the digital circulation and availability of research results. We also invite reviews of academic literature that applies big data analyses to studies of urban governance, land use regularization and service provision in cities and/or critically engages with the modes and implications of producing, gathering, distributing and visualizing data in and for urban studies.

CROLAR encourages reviews of publications from diverse academic disciplines. In addition to single-book reviews, this volume features review articles with a thematic focus. These reviews should cover 3-5 books on current debates or a given topic. We are also actively encouraging reviews of works that transcend the limits of academic production, aimed at a larger audience and related to current events. They will be published in the section "Interventions" and may include reviews of works by journalists, activists, practitioners, artists and others. For this particular section, we suggest reviewers to write about projects that are not in book format, such as documentaries, blogs, websites and artistic projects.

Reviews and review articles must be submitted before 31.07.2016. They can be written in Spanish, English, Portuguese or German. Ideally, the review should be in a different language than the reviewed publication or project. The formal requirements for reviews can be found at www.crolar.org.

We are looking forward to reading from you! If you are interested in writing a review or have any other suggestions or questions, please contact the editors of the volume: Frank Müller (frank.mueller@fu-berlin.de) and Ramiro Segura (segura.ramiro@gmail.com).

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