

Inequalities revealed and new rights to the city - abstracts

- **Aashish Khakha** <as_khakha89@yahoo.in> (Tata School of Social Sciences/Mumbai) - *Covid-19, Tribal Migrants and their future in Urban India*

ABSTRACT: The Covid-19 pandemic has unleashed multiple hardships upon the migrant workers of India. With the nationwide lockdown being announced on 24th March 2020, millions of migrant workers had to deal with the loss of employment and income, food shortages and uncertainty about their future. Several thousands of them and their families went hungry. With no alternative to survival, they began walking back home, with no means of transport due to the lockdown, and with no help from either government, central or state. A lot of migrant workers have been from tribal/indigenous communities, who belong to the most socio-economic and politically vulnerable groups in the country. A large majority of the tribal migrants work as domestic laborers, construction workers or in the hospitality sector. With the announcement of the lockdown, several of them lost their jobs with no alternate source of employment with them. They were forced to go back to their native places and seek employment in government programs that weren't enough to feed their families. This situation has exposed a pre-existing struggle for social justice and to dignified access to urban life in the face of growing urban inequalities, revealing what Lefebvre (1968) called the stark inequalities regarding "the right to the city." This paper will engage and address the issues and problems of tribal migrant workers from two different geographical regions of the country – Central India and the North East. So far, the city has remained a space having an exclusionary character. Keeping this in mind, I would like to explore the possible ways in which a sense of belonging to the cities could be envisioned for them.

- **Sattwick Dey Biswas** <sattwick@gmail.com> (India) - *Exodus: Right to the city & migrant laborers in India*

ABSTRACT: In the immediate aftermath of the COVID-19 lockdown, the concept of right to the city has received a renewed interest. In India, often invisible, ignored and forgotten (mostly) informal migrant laborers became unashamedly visible when after three months of stringent lockdown, millions of migrants attempted to return to their home. The horrors of their inhumane treatment by the employers and the state became too difficult to ignore for the media, the state, and the politics in India. This horror has an uncanny similarity with Lefebvre's (1968) post-World War II worldview "God is dead, man too". The 'newly' visible plight of the migrant laborers remained the middle-class Indian absurdities of considering India as an enlighten, democratic, and economic powerhouse. This encourages us to explore migrant laborers' experience of the right to the city, 'space', and the modes of production in urban India. The paper is based on a systematic literature review (academic and news media), in-depth telephonic interviews with ten returning migrant laborers (at least 40 minutes each), five employers of migrants, and land use maps. It demonstrates how differential rights to the city (1) contribute to the invisibility of migrant laborers, and (2) how different land use contributes to the existing mode of production in urban India.

In light of this 'great'(sic) Indian exodus during COVID-19, the paper re-reads Lefebvre's "Right to the City" (1968) and "The production of place" (1971/1991). The reinterpretation of Lefebvre's thoughts on the right to the city and 'space' open opportunities and challenges. Lefebvre's city typically contains a concentration of surplus product which relies on low wages. The surplus also heavily relies on low-to-highly skilled migrant laborers and reduction of 'space' for the same group. The sudden exodus of cheap and skilled laborers activates 'reset' button on the established tightness in the employment demand-supply equilibrium. The primary impact is on wages but also in the modes of production in the city. All of a sudden, the entitled urban middle class cannot get their cheap domestic help, and home-delivery of food/groceries/online shopping and the waste are piling up in the city because the laborers are not there to clean. Thousands of micro and small industries do not

want the access to cheap government backed credit because of absence of cheap skilled workers and demand. If and when a reverse migration will take place, the right to the city and 'space' between the informal migrant laborers and the rest will try to find another compromise. Whether or not the new equilibrium will firmly re-establish previous relationships or Nietzsche's 'Superhuman' will ultimately arrive (Lefebvre 1968, 149), it is yet to be fully understood.

- **Larissa Riabova** <larisa.riabova@yandex.ru>; Ludmila Ivanova <ludmila_ivanova@mail.ru>; Svetlana, Britvina <onions-99@yandex.ru>; Vigdis Nygaard <viny@norceresearch.no> (Luzin Institute for Economic Studies (LEIS)/Murmansk) - *Rise of the volunteer movement in the Murmansk region during the COVID-19 pandemic*

ABSTRACT: In the last five years, Russia has seen an increase in public interest to volunteer activities. At the national level, 2018 was declared the Year of Volunteers, and in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has made volunteering more important than ever. Our study of the increased volunteer movement in the Murmansk region during the coronavirus crisis is part of the Norwegian-Russian project on the role of NGOs in the North-West Russia. The start of the project coincided with the beginning of the pandemic, and at this stage our goals are to understand how and by whom new volunteering endeavors have been established, and how these structures work in the region during the pandemic. We also aim to find out what the effects of the rise of new volunteer groups are in respect to local social needs, and what (and whether) might be consequences of this surge in volunteering beyond the crisis in terms of effects on local communities.

The preliminary results show that the new structures in the form of local volunteer centers were activated across the region during the first month of lockdown. These centers appeared thanks to the vertical nation-wide coalition of public and political organizations – All-Russia People's Front – and connections of the regional and local authorities with this structure. At the community level, the new endeavors brought together volunteers from different local organizations such as businesses, local administrations, volunteer movements, sport clubs, as well as students. Their work serves the social needs in local communities and contributes to alleviate the impact of the pandemic on well-being of vulnerable groups, and positively affects social well-being of volunteers themselves. It is important to continue the activities of new local volunteering groups evolved in response to the pandemic also beyond the crisis. It is essential to avoid their bureaucratization and excessive verticalization, so that horizontal networks of community volunteers based on the local knowledge and proximity could work in concert with the efforts of government and humanitarian organizations to improve the local resourcing for increased well-being of citizens at the community level.

- **Peter J. Marcotullio** pmarcotu@hunter.cuny.edu (CUNY, US) and Michael Schmeltz (CSU East Bay, US) - *COVID-19 in Global Cities: New York, London, and Tokyo*

ABSTRACT: The first outbreaks of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) occurred between November and December in China. The virus quickly expanded throughout the population of Wuhan city, China. The disease escaped the country and appeared in cities around the world. By 11 March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 outbreak a global pandemic. By 21 August, there are more than 22 million reported cases of COVID-19, and 780,000 deaths globally. The impacts of the virus were unevenly experienced across and within cities of the world. This paper explores the impacts of the disease in three cities in different parts of the world. It has two goals. First, it explores the incidence, spread, impacts of COVID-19 in three global cities, New York City, London and Tokyo. We examine the initial numbers of cases and deaths in each city compared to the emergence of the pandemic in the respective countries and the national share of cases and deaths as the pandemic progressed. We then examine the impacts within each city in terms of numbers, shares and the characteristics of those most affected (age, income, race and ethnicity). We present data that demonstrates both similarities and differences among the cities. The second goal is to use

a variety of theories to help explain the difference and similarities of outcomes in and between these cities. We use theories related to globalization, epidemiology and virology, political economy and culture. The findings suggest that no one theory fully explains the variance of outcomes, but a variety of different lenses are needed to fully understand how this disease impacted these global cities.

- **Vigdis Nygaard** <viny@norceresearch.no> (NORCE Alta), Bård Kårtveit, NORCE Alta; Rita Sørly, NORCE, Tromsø; Larissa Riabova, LEIS; Lyudmila Ivanova, LEIS; Svetlana Britvina (LEIS) - *Lessons from the Covid-19 response in the Norwegian – Russia border-regions. Crisis management, public discourse and the role of non-state actors*

ABSTRACT: In February 2020, we initiated a Norwegian-Russian three-year long research project entitled 'Adapting to a changing society. The social impact of NGOs in the Murmansk region', funded by the Norwegian Research Council. The project's primary objective is to understand how voluntary organizations operating in the border region of Murmansk adapt to changing legal, political and social circumstances. How do voluntary organizations address socio-economic and public health needs in local communities? How do they cooperate with the Norwegian voluntary organizations? We, Norwegian and Russian researchers collaborating in the project, wanted to study this in the context of a tightening grip on political expressions in Russia, and the growing diplomatic tension between Russia and Western nations.

We were planning a start-up meeting in Murmansk in mid-March, but as COVID-19 became a reality both in Norway and Russia, we had to cancel, and rearrange our plans for the rest of the year. This paper is based on our adaptation to a new reality, dominated by the Pandemic. In this paper, we take a broader look at how the ongoing Covid-19 crisis has played out, on the one hand in the Troms and Finnmark, and on the other side of the border, in the Murmansk oblast. Based on analysis of public health reports, media coverage and interviews with key personnel involved in providing health and social services on both sides of the border, we will look at how the spread of Covid-19 has been managed along three lines:

1. How has authorities on different levels responded to the Pandemic, in terms of prevention and containments measures, public messaging, and mobilization of resources to help those infected by the virus?
2. What has been the role of non-state actors in providing health services and addressing social needs, alongside public health services?

- **Alena Myshko** alena.myshko@gssi.it (Gran Sasso Science Institute, Italy) - *Academic mobilities and 'the right to the city' under the pandemic condition*

ABSTRACT: Pandemics as an extraordinary phenomenon has serious consequences on a variety of urban and social practices and experiences. One of important pandemic's measure has been restriction and limitation of mobility, mostly - spatial movements, which, anyway, have impact on other forms of mobility and accessibility. Mobility in more general sense, and more specifically - spatial mobilities, are closely linked with the concept of the 'right to the city'. And while 'the right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city' (Harvey, 2008), mobilities are not just an access or movement; they represent both the right for access, as well as a way or mean to access resources and opportunities.

A conceptual way to link mobilities and the right to the city is through spatial capital (in Levy, 2014), since it analyses place (and space) and mobility together and as being interconnected. In this lens, mobilities incorporate outcomes, which are applied in a local context, or place. In this way, it takes into account not only flows and mobilities, but also their embeddedness in the places they originate from and their properties. In such way, urban place can be (re)claimed.

This research investigates how does one of the most mobile group - academic communities, including academics and students, reproduce and transform urban space and landscape through various mobility forms. Elaborating on the existing research and own PhD work on academic mobilities and spatial capital, it reflects on the recent conditions of pandemics and related restrictions. To specify, different forms of mobility, as well as its outcomes and effects, is one of the capitals developed by students during (higher) education (see: 'mobility capital' in Murphy-Lejeune, 2002). Recent limitations on different forms of mobility have affected student and academic mobility and their appropriation of space, which, in turn, have to be reflected in urban planning.

References

- Harvey, D. (2008). The Right to the City/ 'New Left Review' (online resource)
- Murphy-Lejeune, I. (2002). Student Mobility and Narrative in Europe: The New Strangers. Routledge
- Levy, J. (2014). Inhabiting/ in Lee, R. (ed.) The Sage Handbook of Human Geography. Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications Ltd., pp. 45 – 68