

CALL FOR PAPERS

BRICS: Unpacking land-use transformations

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University of Oxford

Nearly 20 years have passed since the acronym BRICs¹ (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) was brought into our popular vernacular by Jim O'Neill, an economist at Goldman Sachs. Much anticipation was placed on this emerging bloc of nation-states and its potential future impact on the global economy, hopes even going so far as to predict that these countries would overtake the six largest industrialised western economies by 2041. In the years since, these countries have undergone dramatic land-use transformations in the name of economic 'growth' and 'development.' China's attempts at reestablishing the Silk Road Economic Belt across Europe, Asia and Africa; in India, the Modi Administration's plan to develop 100 smart cities connected by bullet trains; Moscow's aspiration to build the Russian Far East into a 'new economic bridge' between Europe and Asia through the development of Advanced Special Economic Zones; the expansion of industrial large-scale farming in Brazil and South Africa, are all in many ways manifestations of the BRICS visions for 'sustainable' and 'smart' development.'

These dramatic land transformations are also spaces of contestation: between the planned and unplanned, formal and informal; the rural and urban; of shifting economic interests and priorities; of imaginations about futures and understandings of the present and past. The negotiations within these contested spaces merit our attention. It is here, in these 'in-betweens,' that contemporary social, political and economic trajectories begin to materialize, drawn out, unevenly and piecemeal.

This one-day workshop seeks to bring together early-career academics and doctoral students in the social sciences to engage in an interdisciplinary discussion reflecting on these large-scale transformations of land and space in the BRICS. To this effect, three broad themes are of interest to the workshop: **1) Belts, Corridors, Zones 1) Trading Floor, Real Estate, the City 3) Farms, Forests, Commons.** Papers should examine the contestations and negotiations that undergird these spaces in one of the BRICS nations.

Papers are expected to respond to **one of the broad themes:**

1) Belts, Corridors, Zones: From national highways and ports to industrial zones and trade corridors, large-scale infrastructure projects have come to be the mainstay of the development agenda in the BRICS. Orthodox development ideologies of industrialization and modernization drive these land transformations for infrastructure in some cases, more contemporary visions of connectivity and smart governance propelling others. Still, these spaces are beset by politics at multiple micro to macro scales, reconfiguring relationships between governing and the governed,

¹ When initially coined the bloc only included Brazil, Russia, India and China; however in 2015, South Africa was also inducted into the bloc, adjusting the acronym to BRICS.

citizenship rights and their benefits, and sovereignty and territoriality. Critical scholarship has studied these spaces through the theoretical lenses of ‘neoliberal exceptions’ (Ong 2011), ‘accumulation by dispossession’ (Harvey 2004) and ‘dispossession without development’ (Levien 2018). This session expands on these foundations, exploring the economic and socio-political ‘frictions’ that emerge in the implementation of these projects.

2) Trading Floor, Real Estate, the City: The increasing securitization of real estate as an asset class has given rise to a plethora of financial instruments that have significantly changed the dynamics of urban development. This session seeks to interrogate this increasingly empowered real estate sector, engaging in larger theoretical discussions regarding the commoditization of urban space and its circulation now in different ‘cultures of circulation’ (Arjun Appadurai, Michael Goldman, Edward LiPuma and Benjamin Lee). Broadening the conversation even further, this session also tackles larger questions of ‘value,’ within a market increasingly burdened with financial claims deemed to be ‘fictitious.’

3) Farms, Forests, Commons: Policy concerns over food and energy security have accelerated industrial farming, global agro-commodity chains and biofuel production regimes through massive conversions of farmland and commons. Conjointly, environmental concerns have legitimated the privatization of forest and other ‘empty’ lands into ‘reserves,’ ‘nature parks’ and enclosures for ‘ecotourism’ (Zoomers 2010). As processes that ultimately represent a ‘crisis of accumulation’ (McMichael 2012), they have been met with intense violence and resistance in BRICS. Contestations in these spaces exist not just around livelihoods and food sovereignty, but equally around political claims and rights, opening up larger questions of how to reimagine our relationship with the natural world (Anna Tsing 2015).

The workshop is intended to be a space to receive detailed and constructive feedback from senior academics and colleagues. Select papers from the workshop will be invited to contribute to a peer-reviewed Special Issue of the *Oxford Development Studies*.

Guideline for Submission:

Papers for the workshop should be an original piece that has not been published or submitted for publication elsewhere. Please send an **abstract** of 500 words or less by **12pm (noon), 15 March 2019** to **landbrics@gmail.com** and a **short bio**. Limited funds will be available to cover travel expenses. Please add a budget if you require assistance funding your trip to Oxford along with the relevant quotes.

Once accepted, the full drafts will be due to discussant(s) by 17 May 2019.