



Cities of the South Caucasus: a view from Georgia

Edited by David Gogishvili & Alessandro Coppola

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Researching Georgian Cities

Structural Changes, Emerging Issues and Promising Paths of Enquiry*

David Gogishvili & Alessandro Coppola

Georgia
Transition
Post-Soviet Cities

After the collapse of the USSR and the regaining of independence, Georgia has experienced a dramatic set of political, economic and social changes which have had marked impacts on Georgian cities that further intensified with the early 2000s, political and economic stabilization and the greater role assumed by the state in leading urban restructuring initiatives. While similar developments in some other parts of the former Socialist Bloc have attracted much interest among urban scholars, the attention towards Georgian cities has been limited. With this special issue we make a step towards bridging this knowledge gap by providing contributions on topics such as spatial hierarchies and restructuring, urban regeneration, tourism, urban memories and lifestyles. The editorial that follows introduces the reader to the broader transformations in Georgia and its cities since 1991, an overview of the topics treated by the authors and some conclusive points on further research on Georgian and South Caucasian cities.

Introduction

Since the dissolution of the Socialist Bloc, the transformation processes that took place in former socialist cities have attracted increasing interest in the areas of human geography, urban studies and planning. A number of networks or projects – such as the “Cities After Transition”¹ and *ira.urban*² – edited books and special issues have extensively addressed it variably focusing in recent years on topics such as the metropolitan restructuring processes in former East European socialist countries (Borén and Gentile, 2007), the politics of urban collective memory and the construction of new urban landscapes (Diener and Hagen, 2013, Medvedkov and Salukvadze, 2016), the spread of mega events-centred urban development models (Müller and Pickles, 2015), the dynamics of change affecting neighbourhoods (Ouředníček and Pospíšilová, 2015) and the theoretical implications and potentials of research on post-socialist cities (Ferenčuhová and Gentile, 2016). More recently, after a first main publication focusing solely on the capital city of Georgia (Van Assche et al., 2009), some of these research streams and networks have more widely Southern Caucasian cities with enquires regarding public spaces’ erosion and reconstruction processes (Neugebauer and Rekhviashvili, 2015) and the evolutions in housing and urban

**_The editorial was not included in the peer-review process.*

1_The network of scholars interested in the cities and urban spaces of Central and Eastern Europe.

2_ira.urban was a collaborative research project with multiple activities targeting processes of urban reconfigurations in post-Soviet space from a comparative perspective.

development systems in the three cities of Baku, Tbilisi and Yerevan (Sichinava, ed., 2016). However, despite these latest publications, research on South Caucasian post-socialist- and more in particular on Georgian – cities is, although promising, still limited both in its quantitative relevance and in the variety of the topics treated.

The aim of the special issue of *Quaderni* is, therefore, to contribute to the filling of this gap by presenting a selection of both empirical and discussion papers³ - that, as we will see, address a variety of issues- and to stimulate further research both on Georgian as well as on other cities and urban areas of South Caucasus. With this short editorial, we aim to introduce the five contributions of the issue by setting an essential framework for the understanding of larger political and societal changes that involved Georgia since 1991 and by identifying a series of cross-cutting topics that, emerging from the issue, we have found to be relevant for further research development.

Post-Socialist transformation and cities in Georgia: from collapse to stabilization

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the three new independent states of the South Caucasus region- Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia – have experienced a set of dramatic political, economic and social changes going through violent armed conflicts, population displacements, authoritarian political regimes and the destabilization of state and economic structures. These changes have had significant impacts on the region’s urban areas and more in general on the forms and dimensions of wider urbanization processes.

Georgia, in particular, went through a peculiarly challenging period of post-Soviet social, economic and political transformations since regaining independence in 1991. With the dissolution of the USSR, the planning ideals, regulations and systems that were in place in the Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia quickly collapsed and society stepped into the long process and routine of post-Soviet urban transition. The social and economic effects of the end of the Soviet Union were further exacerbated by political turmoil that led, throughout the 1990s, to civil and ethnic wars – such as the ones that involved the two breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia – whose effects were coupled with the ones of higher scale conflicts that generated in the whole regions large waves of internal displacement and of refugees (Kabachnik et al., 2014, Salukvadze et al., 2014).

The Georgian economy, one of the most prosperous among the ones of the 15 Soviet republics, collapsed with the dissolution of the USSR and, differently from Armenia and Azerbaijan, made also the experience of a longer and more difficult path to the return of economic growth. By 1994 Georgia’s real GDP was less than a quarter of its value five years earlier (De Waal, 2010) while per capita income, that reached almost 6000 USD in 1989, had an almost threefold drop by the early 1990s. Political turmoil and instability were therefore accompanied by increasing unemployment rates that largely resulted from the restructuring of the state economy and the decommissioning of heavy industries in major cities as Tbilisi, Kutaisi, Rustavi, Zestaponi and Chiatura. These dramatic

³ The call “Cities of the South Caucasus” was published in March 2017 and received nine proposals showing a clear focus on Georgian Cities that pushed the editors to consider the possibility of an issue entirely dedicated to Georgian Cities. Out of the eight paper sent to the peer reviewing process, six were accepted for publication with requests of revision and five were finally published.

socio-economic changes led to visible impacts in both rural and urban areas. Particularly, the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people from Abkhazia and South Ossetia impacted cities leading to the formation of new forms of collective housing known as the “collective centres”, i.e. former non-residential buildings such as hotels, administrative buildings, factories and schools in various urban areas occupied by IDP⁴ families.

In general, as in many other post-soviet urban societies, the transition from centrally planned to market economies and the privatization of a large part of state-owned assets was produced in a context of weak institutional and planning frameworks, widespread corruption and spreading informality leading to both radical changes in existing urban environment and to the emergence of new structures and urban actors. This process of change has been hegemonized, since 1991, by actors and forces emerging in the realm of the now deregulated land and real estate markets (Ziegler, 2010), a private interests’ hegemony that was coupled with the almost full withdrawal of the public authorities’ from the regulation of urban development and planning. This new reality characterized by the absence of local structural plans, planning laws and regulations was referred locally as a “wild market” (Van Assche et al., 2010, p. 384), a definition that clearly outlined and stigmatized the power and violence-based nature of the new situation as it was perceived by large swathes of the Georgian society. In this context, newly formed real-estate development actors moved to realize in particular the economic extraction potential of formerly protected, yet attractive urban public spaces and holdings by promoting their, partial or complete, privatization and redevelopment into residential, office and commercial complexes and facilities (Salukvadze, 2009).

In this context, coping strategies and tactics to overcome or reduce the negative effects and the social costs of the political and economic crisis of the 1990s were designed by the people themselves. The increasing scarcity of affordable housing and the deregulation of the urban planning system compelled disadvantaged households to find an alternative, often informal, strategies to satisfy their housing needs (Sichinava et al., 2016). One of the most visible, and relevant of these strategies in terms of its effect on the housing system has been the emergence of so-called “vertical building extensions”. Initiated in the late years of the socialist rule and aimed at improving the residential qualities and available living space, these practices ended-up in challenging the overall quality of residential buildings and of the urban built environment (Bouzarovski et al., 2011). At the same time, small-scale often informal trade and household subsistence agriculture on urban fringes spread in urban areas becoming, during the 1990s, of crucial importance (Rekhviashvili, 2015). Most urban trades happened in “Kiosks” used by small-scale vendors that were either concentrated in specially organised open markets or more chaotically in any available attractive location such as metro stops’ surroundings or other busy areas (Salukvadze, 2009, p. 176).

In the early years of the new millennium, together with the crumbling economy and high levels of unemployment, the Republic of Georgia was also known for the devastating incidence of corruption at all level of government, dysfunctional

⁴ Internally displaced person.

public services, high rates of violence (Kukhianidze, 2009, De Waal, 2010). Growing popular unease with such a situation and the re-orientation of political and economic elites led to the so-called Rose Revolution, the “pro-Western” peaceful regime-change that occurred in November 2003. Ignited by protests over disputed parliamentary elections’ results, the “revolution” culminated in the ousting of President Eduard Shevardnadze, which arguably marked the real end of the Soviet-era of leadership in the country. A group of mostly Western-educated young and ambitious politicians replaced the incumbent government that largely relied on the former Soviet political elite. This process culminated in the election of Mikheil Saakashvili as President in January 2004 and the formation of a United National Movement (UNM)-led coalition majority which ushered the establishment of a new neoliberal development policy regime in Georgia.

The long series of reforms that followed the “revolution” led to an overall stabilization of the country and to improvements in certain indicators of social, economic and political life. The radical free-market approach of the new government led to the slashing and simplification of taxes, the downsizing of the public sectors and the deregulation of a wealth of policy areas. This was also followed by the liberalization of trade and the launch of a program of further, so-called, “aggressive privatization” (Rekhviashvili and Polese, 2017, p. 9) of almost 4000 state assets that generated around 1.4 billion USD of additional revenues for the state (Gugushvili, 2014). These reforms produced a marked shift from the conditions of the first decade of the post-Soviet transition generating, despite growing inequality and social disequilibria, an accrued sense of confidence reflected in an increasing popular trust in the police and public services, a fall in crime rates and an expansion of the state’s fiscal capacity (De Waal, 2010, Light, 2014, Rekhviashvili and Polese, 2017).

In this context of relative political stabilization, the state significantly expanded its involvement in urban affairs and development also by taking the lead of some wide spatial restructuring initiatives generally produced in close partnership with emerging economic elites and interests. In particular, the national government promoted the set-up of an urban development agenda for Tbilisi, as well as for several other major Georgian cities such as Batumi and Kutaisi, that, while circumscribing the autonomy of local institutions, also implied the full implementation of its strong free-market orientation. Such ambitious and often large-scale state-led urban development and regeneration projects aimed at rebranding a number of Georgian cities through the revitalization, and beautification of central urban cores, the taming and repression of informal urban practices, the expansion of real estate markets and the restructuring – mainly through privatization and outsourcing- of certain municipal services.

These projects were an important feature of the UNM’s period of political hegemony, a period in which in quite a few cases the president himself, along with other key political figures, were seen as the primary decision-makers on urban affairs, with decisions as important as the inclusion of cities in state initiatives (Manning, 2007), or their same main goals and rationales, being taken without any form of public consultation. These projects mostly included historic

quarters' regeneration and upgrading initiatives that had a potential to attract tourists and new capital investments, as increasing tourism was considered one of the main ways to insure the country's economic growth (see Salukvadze and Gugushvili in this issue). However, these initiatives led to new forms of socio-spatial polarization by often resulting in the displacement of the local population through the rise of rents and the further shrinkage of the affordable housing stock, the overall steady gentrification of certain neighborhoods with the deterioration of traditional public spaces and of urban heritage and the change of the involved areas' functional features. Such an urban revanchist approach (Smith, 1996), that seemed to sustain the whole urban regeneration strategy, also led to the displacement of illicit and informal activities from prominent urban public spaces (Costanza, 2015). Despite the contestations and mobilizations activated by emerging urban social movements, such projects have rarely been stopped and often succeeded in reshaping the reality and imaginary of some of Georgia's major cities.

The first important wave of this kind of top-down urban transformations promoted by the UNM-led government occurred in 2005 as Tbilisi was involved in the preparations for the visit of the then US president George W. Bush. This process mostly implied the renovation of the buildings of the areas that were included in Bush's visit itinerary. However, as the US President was not going to enter in most of the buildings involved, renovations were mostly superficial and normally did not affect anything besides the façades igniting critiques on the purely scenic nature of these interventions in some parts of the society (Frederiksen and Gotfredsen, 2017, p. 58). Façades' improvements were later followed by larger scale urban regeneration projects in Tbilisi and several other cities and towns such as Batumi, Kutaisi, Telavi, Akhaltsikhe, Mestia or Signaghi with the aim of increasing land prices and attract further investments as well as to expand urban infrastructure to accommodate the expected, suited surge in the numbers of tourists. The top-down, fast and "window-dressing" character of such renovation projects, whose first occurrence took place in Signaghi- a small but picturesque hilly town located in the eastern part of the country- even led to the coining of a new Georgian term- "Signaghization" (Frederiksen and Gotfredsen, 2017, p. 59)- aimed at designating (and stigmatizing) such projects.

As in 2012 the post-UNM era slowly took roots⁵ and the "Georgian Dream" political coalition started to take power on all administrative levels, urban regeneration projects were affected too, by being paused at first to be soon taking-off again. While it could be argued that the overall quality of the regeneration process had somewhat improved and that also its pace slightly slowed down, its final outcomes and impacts on the local residents looked almost always the same – displacement, commercialization and gentrification – in a wider context in which tourism and its impact on cities were rapidly expanding. Furthermore, beyond and within the large state-led urban development projects, the role of private actors also further emerged as an important driver of urban transformations as made visible, especially in the 2010s (Salukvadze and Golubchikov, 2016), by projects as the *Hualing Special Economic Zone* and *Panorama Tbilisi* in the capital (Gogishvili, 2017).

⁵The word "slow" refers to the fact that from 2012 to 2014 the United National Movement party lost first the parliamentary, then presidential and later local elections. This led to the beginning of the Georgian Dream political coalition reign.

Overall, the post-Rose Revolution context characterized by the deregulation of urban planning, the lack of government control on real estate development or its extreme liberalization, the growing availability of credit for both large projects and individual mortgages fuelled a true construction boom. While contributing to economic growth, such a boom often resulted in chaotic, low quality and sometimes exclusionary forms of urban development that multiplied large residential, office and commercial complexes at the expense of public and green space and damaging the quality of the built environment. However, it must be noted that the consequences of 25 years of (variably) chaotic and deregulated urban environment have slowly brought both public and social actors to a new consensus on the need for strategic, plan-based thinking and regulation. In this new climate, Tbilisi, Batumi and Gori have been among the first cities that started to work on the design of new structural, master and strategic plans or on the revision of their previous highly deregulative versions. However, up to now, none of the plans under discussion has been finally approved by the respective city governments, as discussions negotiations and, at times, conflicts on various aspects has been protracted.

The five contributions of the issue

The five contributions that make this special issue take in full account the context of transition and consolidation that we have just outlined. More in particular, while some authors discuss and detail part of the large societal and territorial trends that we mentioned, others present the results of sensitive empirical studies that describe and explain how the mediation and negotiation between such trends and individual and community agency is actually produced on the ground of cities and neighborhoods.

The first two articles by Salukvadze and Salukvadze and Gugushvili offer a comprehensive overview of a number of processes that developed in Georgian cities since 1991. The introductory article by **Salukvadze** "*Urbanization trends and development of cities in Georgia*" presents a broad summary of the changes occurred in cities' role and hierarchies in Georgia since the collapse of the Soviet Union and discusses the contribution of the national government in urban restructuring and development. The article outlines the core demographic changes occurring as a result of mass out-migration of population and decrease of natural growth rates. Salukvadze emphasizes that the shrinkage of cities all across Georgia further increased the role and un-proportioned dominance of Tbilisi over the urban system, in a context in which all other major cities are striving but struggling to find a viable and sustainable economic basis able to enhance their local competitiveness.

Focusing on one of the main drivers of such changes, the article by **Salukvadze and Gugushvili** "*Geographic Patterns of Tourism in Urban Settlements of Georgia*" touches upon the spatial outcome of the recent prioritization of tourism in urban development initiatives and more at large of the wider branding strategies of Georgia. Based on the analysis of quantitative data for the period 2006-2016, the authors focus on the spatial patterning trends of tourism in three cities – Batumi, Kutaisi and Tbilisi – by examining the role of public infrastructure projects and transportation networks in the distribution of its socio-economic

gains. The role played by the development of particular infrastructure projects - such as the reactivation and upgrading of airports in Kutaisi and Batumi- in the productions of such gains makes itself evident when the performance of these cities is compared to other cities, underlining the emergence and consolidation of new uneven development trends that are co-produced by such state initiatives.

Differently, the articles of Harris-Brandts, Pilz and Sparsbord approach the issue of large state-led urban redevelopment and regeneration projects, their impact on local populations and economies from various perspectives and – especially in the case of the last two contributions- the variegated tactical responses tailored by communities in order to adjust to this new environment.

The contribution by **Harris-Brandts** “*Building Vacancies: Tourism and Empty Real Estate in Batumi*” studies the increasing growth of tourism-related construction in the capital of the Autonomous Republic of Adjara with buildings that often remain unoccupied or in a protracted state of construction due to a variety of factors. Enquiring the primary causes, driving forces and geographies of a vacancy in Batumi, the author puts light on the heavy influence of the political and economic elites’ nexus on the reshaping of urban environments and of local identities through its urban branding strategies. In this context, vacancy is not just the outcome of “rampant speculation” – as shown by the international literature on global super-riches and absentee ownership- but also of a sustained search for visible and rapid construction “as a means of displaying government legitimacy and state building progress”.

The article by **Sparsbrod** “*There was communality.*” *Narrating Transformations in Old Tbilisi*”, while concentrating also on the post-Rose revolution years, moves the locus of the attention to Georgia’s capital city where the author explores, through the deployment of ethnographic technics, the collective memory of the residents of the rapidly changing historical centre of “Old Tbilisi”. Presenting local dwellers’ spatial representations, images and narratives, Sparsbrod discusses the cultural construction of a romanticized past of Old Tbilisi’s social life revolving around the themes of the traditional “Tbilisi courtyard” and the spirit of “communality” that was supposedly associated to it. Such construct, that somehow implies the removal of the difficult living conditions that the residents had to put up with, in reality, seems to play a key role in the residents’ coping strategies in face of the massive changes occurred in the post-Socialist era. Changes that have been accelerating and intensified in the context of the intense process of urban regeneration and subsequent touristification of the old city that was unleashed after the Rose Revolution.

Finally, the article by **Pilz** “*Speaking, building, shopping: A social-anthropological approach to the post-socialist condition of Tbilisi*” discusses, by equally presenting materials collected through ethnographic fieldwork conducted in three distinct areas in Tbilisi, how emerging symbolical landscapes and patterns of social differentiation are experienced in residents’ daily lives. The empirical material presented in the article is discussed in the perspective of a particular post-Socialist pattern of urban reconstruction that the author puts in tension with widely

addressed modernisation discourses in postcolonial contexts. Drawing in particular from the critical examining of the evolving materiality of domestic life, it is argued that official discourse's construction of the "socialist" past as the "un-modern" is far from effectively succeeding in "colonizing" people daily lives. And that the cultural reality of post-socialist Georgian cities is better understood instead in the terms of a "nested pattern encompassing the coexistence of socialist, Georgian, and new forms and styles".

Conclusions: cross-cutting issues and potential research paths

The aim of this special issue was the critical analysis of Georgia's urban transformations from the 1991 independence with a particular focus on the urban impacts of the nation-wide neoliberal state policies promoted after the 2003 "Rose Revolution". The five articles offer a valuable contribution in this regard, also by better articulating and situating in actual local contexts, processes and issues that have already been discussed by wider, international debates on the post-socialist city. Despite some variety of topics and approaches, they also clearly point to the identification of some cross-cutting themes that are, in the perspective of the editors, of particular relevance.

First, the role of large urban regeneration projects orchestrated by national and local governments clearly emerges as a paramount, largely recognized, object of research for contemporary Georgian cities. While conditions of implementation and final results can vary, it is clear how authors share some critical points about their overall effects on urban environments that are the ones – gentrification and housing unaffordability, increased socio-spatial polarization, urban refunctionalization- that were also raised in the first paragraph of this introduction. More in general, the consolidating nexus between political stabilization, state-led urban regeneration projects, tourism, and real estate investments is clearly leading towards a wider commodification and formalization of the built environment.

Second, the inflation of the built environment and of physical capital has been scrutinized in some contributions, not only as a key indicator of the just mentioned deeper and structural changes affecting the political economy of the country, but also of the strong political incentives that have pushed to the increasingly greater centrality of real-estate investments in the overall economic growth and state-building strategy (and narrative) promoted by the ruling elites. In the case of Batumi, we have seen how the strong twist of its local development towards the attraction of international tourism through real estate investments has been key in the production of a high rate of vacancy that also seems justified by "political reasons". In other areas, high levels of investment have been produced in the form of "urban regeneration" – as in the cases of the many projects involving urban cores and historical centers – but in many other cases – especially in Tbilisi – in the form of outright expansion for new residential and commercial uses that have boosted confidence and optimism in a prospective of growth and expansion.

Third, the impact of the branding practices of the Georgian government and the manipulation of the built environment of a number of Georgian cities in the

pursue of international tourism, has also been an object of particular attention in this issue. In this perspective, it is relevant to critically trace the trajectory of Georgian cities' cosmopolitanism and, more specifically, the evolution from its previous highly localized variety – with cities being the locus of historically rooted, culturally diverse assemblages that stratified across centuries- characteristic of both the pre-socialist and Socialist eras to its contemporary touristified forms. In a sense, the process of local and urban ethnic homogenization that has been produced in the context of post-Soviet era processes of South-Caucasus national states and identities' restructuring appears to be at least partially challenged by the increasing flows of tourists to Georgian cities – and the related production of a “cosmopolitan legacy” ready for consumption – and by the very liberal immigration and capital circulation and investment regimes implemented in the post-Rose Revolution period.

Fourth, a very wide space of tensions and adjustments between changing lifestyles and material cultures, forms of use and understandings of public and private spaces, constructions and reconstructions of memories and experiences of the past and, finally, strategic discourses promoted by political powers and economic elites is one more very important field of attention that emerges from several of the contributions. Tbilisi case studies illustrate the role that *bricolage* tactics – from vertical building extensions to eclectic, economizing combinations of the old and the new in apartment renovations – still, play in the making of important components of the urban middle classes. This proves to be an area of great critical relevance also in the analysis of actual processes of class structuration and differentiation in a new urban context that, all though characterized by economic growth, still comprises relevant informal economies and networks of exchange involving the large bulks of Georgians who have left the countries after independence.

Of course, and expectedly so, these four topics – as long as others that were discussed in the five contributions- are just some of the issues that are currently at stake in Georgian cities. Crucial areas of interest that have been seldom addressed and that a more sustained stream of researches on Georgian – and, more at large, on South Caucasian- cities are yet to be addressed.

First, further research *on* and discussion *of* the various forms, strategies and outcomes of processes of neoliberal erosion and/or restructuring of urban public spaces in Georgian cities would be of great value. It would be relevant both for the significance of such trends in cities around the world- and in post-Socialist cities in particular – and for the contribution that studies in this area could actually make to a better understanding of the highly localized, path dependency factors that co-preside at the production (and erosion) of public spaces.

Following this last issue, a focus on the impact of religious practices and the role of strong religious actors such as the Georgian Orthodox Church – that has been important in post-independence state-building strategies and narratives – have on urban built environments would be of great interest as well. Signature projects as the construction of the Holy Trinity Cathedral of Tbilisi are just the most visible occurrences of a more generalized process that, although in a context

of increasing cultural secularism, has seen religion regaining some space in the making of Georgian cities.

While the contributions have addressed issues related to urban housing and overall real estate construction process a further research on housing problems appears to be essential, as Georgian cities are going through the processes of gentrification, car-driven steady suburbanization and new phenomena of residential segregation in post-Soviet housing environments. A focus on state policies and on the link between housing carriers and pathways and the already mentioned processes of class differentiation and structuration would be also of great support in the understanding of the user and demand side of the sustained real estate investments made after the “Rose Revolution”.

As it has been outlined in the earlier parts of this editorial, great importance in the processes of spatial restructuring that have involved Georgia has been played by the series of violent armed conflicts that developed by the early 1990s with impacts that are still being produced today. The scholarly attention of the impacts of war, displacement and memory politics of war-affected regions in urban areas has been lacking despite this evident relevance. The unfortunate global relevance of such issues, and even more in recent years of their urban impact, would largely justify a more consistent attention.

Finally, if it is true that a new consensus on the need of a new planning and policy framework for the governing of spatial development of Georgian cities is coming more and more to center of the national policy agenda a research focus on the actual, hopefully consistent, outcomes of this re-centering would be of great importance as well. If proper empirical evidence seem to be still limited as of now, researchers can be ready to critically examine final results – and governance and organizational characters – of the planning process of varied nature. In conclusion, we do hope that this special issue will have contributed to the further strengthening of what seems to be a growing international interest for a region – the South Caucasus – and a country – Georgia – that as will be clearer by the end of the reading of this issue are objects of great interest for anyone who is involved in urban affairs.

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Cities of the South Caucasus: a view from Georgia

After the collapse of the USSR and the regaining of independence, Georgia has experienced a dramatic set of political, economic and social changes which have had marked impacts on Georgian cities that further intensified with the early 2000s, political and economic stabilization and the greater role assumed by the state in leading urban restructuring initiatives. While similar developments in some other parts of the former Socialist Bloc have attracted much interest among urban scholars, the attention towards Georgian cities has been limited. With this special issue we make a step towards bridging this knowledge gap by providing contributions on topics such as spatial hierarchies and restructuring, urban regeneration, tourism, urban memories and lifestyles. But first, the editorial text by the editors of this special issue first introduces the reader to the broader transformations in Georgia and its cities since 1991, an overview of the topics treated by the authors and some conclusive points on further research on Georgian and South Caucasian cities.

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