



2025 JOINT INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP IHC, NOVA UNIVERSITY OF LISBON - UNIVERSITY OF BOLOGNA

Infrastructures of Rent Extraction

27th of November, 2025

[University of Bologna, Sala Rossa, Via Azzo Giardino 23]

According to a number of prominent analyses, the contemporary world-market is characterised by “a full-fledged comeback and proliferation of forms of rent” (Vercellone 2010; see also: Harvey 2015, Mezzadra & Neilson 2017, Purcell 2018, Christophers 2020, Standing 2020). This political and economic shift demands granular reflections, and it has stimulated widespread theoretical and political debates.

Moving away from “presentism” may help us to properly contextualize and historicize this contemporary conjuncture. Current analyses of Big Tech ‘rentierism’, for instance, has pushed many to turn back to classic studies on “rentier states” and “imperialist rent”. Samir Amin, for instance, focusing on the impact of colonial control over extractive and logistical infrastructures, stressed that “to the extent that monopolies operate in the peripheries of the globalized system, monopoly rent becomes an imperialist rent” (Amin 2019). Similarly, Hazem Beblawi’s classic “The Rentier State in the Arab World” (1987: 383) stressed the emergence of “extraverted states”, whose main lever of power is the control over infrastructures enabling the extraction of rents. In particular, according to Beblawi, “transit countries” such as Egypt have long relied on their control over key global infrastructures - such as ports, railways, oil pipelines, and the Suez Canal - to extract and distribute “external location rent”.

This analysis may provide a point of entry to reflect upon the growing competition to control key “global infrastructures” such as pipelines and ports, power cables and fiber optic networks, transcontinental railways and highways. For instance, Loftus, March and Purcell (2019, 2020) have shown how processes of financialization have enabled “apparently fixed and stable forms such as pipes, water treatment plants, and sewers to be transformed into liquid assets”, opening up new opportunities for rent-extraction. More generally, Ranabir Samaddar (2018: 110) suggests that “the logistical expansion of the city [...] resurrects the rent factor from oblivion in a capitalist economy”; and urgently asks: “What does the revival of the rent question mean for postcolonial accumulation?” These analyses emphasize that global infrastructures play a fundamental role in planetary processes of value-capture and rent-extraction.

Expanding on these debates, this workshop investigates the relation between “global infrastructures” and “practices of rent-extraction”, both historically and in the global present. We welcome contributions that investigate the relation between historical processes of infrastructuralisation, financialisation, and rentierisation of the economy. We are particularly interested in furthering a collective reflection on the ways in which rent relations extend well beyond land markets and shape the global circulation and capture of value across logistical, extractive and digital infrastructures.

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PROGRAM
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13-13.30

Introduction

Rethinking Imperialist Rent through the Politics of Global Infrastructures

Amedeo Policante (Nova University of Lisbon) & Mattia Frapporti (Bologna University)

13.30-15

Digital Infrastructures, Technoscience Rents, and Artistic Resistance

Technocapitalism: The Political of the Interface

Guillermo García Santos (Universidad Carlos III de Madrid&Università di Bologna)

A new System? Crisis, capital and the State in the Italian digital sovereignty

Davide Blotta (University of Urbino)

Obstructing the flow: Artistic form of resistance in the age of Rentier Capitalism

Sara Marhuenda Barberà (Universitat Politècnica de València)

Discussants

Maurilio Pirone (University of Bologna) & Mattia Frapporti (University of Bologna)

15.30-17

Speculative Infrastructures and Financial Rents

A Submarine Extractive Enclave: Deep-Sea Mining and Rent Extraction in the Clarion-Clipperton Zone

Erica Borg (University College London)

Building Clouds: Investigating Google's Submarine Cable Infrastructure from Praia California to the Hyperscale

Amedeo Policante (IHC, Nova University of Lisbon)

Projects and Opposition

Evelina Gambino (University of Cambridge)

Discussants

Sandro Mezzadra (University of Bologna), Niccolò Cuppini (University of Southern Switzerland), Amedeo
Policante (Nova University of Lisbon)

17-17.30

Roundtable