

C13 - Global Work – Local Lives: Implications For Communities

Presentation title: Global Work/ Local Lives: Implications for Communities

Presenters:

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Abstract

“Global Work/ Local Lives” is a multimedia presentation that investigates the social and spatial implications of global outsourcing of information work (i.e., data processing; systems and software development and maintenance; accounting and financial management; telesales; customer services; training and staff development; and editorial and design functions) and gets beneath the hyperbole surrounding the outsourcing of work to examine what it means in terms of quality of working life and impact on workers and communities. The aim of the video is to encourage informed public debate on the issue, which will, it is hoped, lead to informed policy decisions. The video was produced as part of a research project, EMERGENCE Canada, that conducted case studies to track the trajectory of the work experience in various points in the global supply chain. Canada is in an interesting position because it acts both as a source of outsourcing work within Canada and abroad, and destination for work outsourced by international firms. The employment relocation ranges from outsourcing where a firm or individual provides services to another firm in a separate location, governed by some form of contractual agreement to geographically distant intra-corporate transactions where services are provided to one branch of a firm by another branch of the same firm. Labour practices enabled by telecommunications and information technologies are creating place-based consequences which have not been sufficiently understood to date. The video sheds light on how the increased pace, variety, and extent of new spatially-diffuse production relationships challenge both global and national urban spatial hierarchies. It also examines how such arrangements may change workers’ relationships to, and actions within, their communities. By going beyond the arbitrary discourse around outsourcing and globalization, which assumes a lack of agency and choice by communities, and that cities must follow market dictates without question, it is suggested in the video that there is a need for a range of planning policy approaches which recognize: the increasingly networked aspects of economic production and control; and the need for new ways of anchoring worker relationships to community.

Speaker Biography

Penny Gurstein is a Professor and Director of the School of Community and Regional Planning (SCARP), UBC. She is the Principal Investigator of EMERGENCE Canada which investigates the impact of outsourcing on communities.

Laura Tate is a PhD Candidate at SCARP and the Manager, Growth Strategies, BC Ministry of Community Development