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Abstract:

*A post-colonial and post-structuralist reading of the politics and practices of smart urbanism in Geneva, Switzerland*

This thesis examines the politics of smart urban development in Geneva, Switzerland, through a postcolonial theoretical framework traditionally applied to Global South contexts. Drawing on ethnographic research conducted between 2022-2025, including interviews with policymakers, technocrats, and bureaucrats, along with document analysis, the study investigates how power relations and everyday practices shape smart urbanism processes. The research develops three interconnected case studies: an analysis of policy disruptions using concepts of informality and blurred boundaries, an examination of technology appropriation through the lens of 'inappropriate technologies,' and an investigation of platform-based participation using the 'tyranny of participation' framework. These southern theoretical concepts unpack complex urban politics and uneven urban development patterns within Swiss urban governance, challenging assumptions about smart urban governance in highly institutionalized contexts. The findings demonstrate how informality operates within formal state structures, how technologies are imagined, and introduced and how participatory platforms reshape governance logics. This research contributes to both smart urban studies and decolonial urban theory by illuminating different forms of smart urbanism politics in northern contexts - from policy disruptions and technological appropriations to participatory governance alternatives. Furthermore, this research also provides new pathways for comparative urban studies beyond conventional North-South divides.