“THE WORLD SOCIAL FORUM AND THE LESSONS FOR ECONOMIC GEOGRAPHY,”


This article examines the development of the World Social Forum (WSF) using theoretical arguments that have emerged from the new economic geography. In particular, it draws on the critique of economistic accounts of globalization by Richa Nagar, Victoria Lawson, Linda McDowell, and Susan Hanson to evaluate how far the WSF serves to move beyond institutional, spatial, and personal barriers that often limit academic debate over neoliberalism and global economic change. Following this critique, the authors evaluate how far the criticisms of neoliberalism that have been articulated at the WSF transcend traditional barriers to inclusion in debates and struggles over globalization. As such, the article examines the degree to which the WSF allows for (1) informal economic spheres to be considered and connected to formal economic developments, such as the Free Trade Area of the Americas; (2) excluded spaces and places to be discussed and involved; and (3) excluded actors and subjects to be both represented and included in the debates. The conclusions point to the limits of what has been accomplished at the WSF, but also underline the progress that it represents toward modeling a more socially, culturally, and internationally inclusive critique of neoliberal globalization for economic geographers.