

Creation statement of N-AERUS

Made in Brussels,
the 23 of March of 1996

By the end of the century fifty percent of the world population will be living in urban areas and an increasingly high proportion of urban residents will be in developing countries. There is sufficient evidence to consider urbanization one of the major driving forces behind the deep changes Third World countries are experiencing, and to consider the management of urban growth one of the most difficult tasks these countries have to face in coming decades.

Now it is widely acknowledged that not only are cities of the developing countries becoming not only increasingly large in number and population, but they are also the most dynamic concentrations of social and economic development consequently, they can help build more progressive and democratic societies. They can also generate a disproportionate share of national wealth, so that their functions within the national economies should be enhanced by government policies and international aid programmes.

Among the factors that give cities the potential to be dynamic and contribute to general development are the following:

- new forms of social development and more rapid processes of cultural innovation;
- an increasingly large consumer's market and diverse labor markets which offer scope for economic initiative and entrepreneurship;
- the development of community and individual initiatives which help reinforce a more democratic decision-making process.

At the same time urbanization is a complex phenomenon:

- cities are multi-cultural areas containing competition and conflicts which can reinforce democracy but may thwart it as well;
- many cities achieve their economic performances despite, not because of, government policies or development aid programmes;
- government policies and international aid programmes can both hinder and help low-income populations change their various survival strategies into long term development strategies;
- some economic and living patterns found on many cities in the South are resource efficient, consuming less energy and natural resources than various cities from the North. However the uncontrolled pursuit of productivity may increase the number of urban poor and result in the serious deterioration of the urban environment;
- economic constraints, unequal distribution of wealth and inadequate management create major problems with regard to access to land, shelter, infrastructure and services. People's responses can resolve immediate needs but may not induce sustainable urban development;

- though required to assume increasingly important roles in the management of cities, many local governments do not have sufficient human technical and financial resources. They lack experience and training.

Thus, although there is strong evidence that urbanization can induce significant advancements in the social, economic cultural and spatial conditions of cities, actions need to be taken both to hasten these achievements and to cope with the negative consequences of urban growth.

Research is a major instrument for assessing ongoing structural changes and constraints and to identify innovations and improvements in urban management policies and methods. The complex nature of cities demands that research be holistic and multidisciplinary, avoiding exclusively sectorial approaches.

European universities and institutions have been able to carry out a large array of individual and joint research projects and to offer many training programmes on urban problems in developing countries. Not only have most of the government of the European union failed to make good use of this research and training, they have also in recent years been reducing their support for research and aid focusing on the developing countries.

Contrary to these trends, the issue of urban development in the countries of the south must be addressed, if equitable and sustainable world development is to be achieved. The E.U. can play a key role in shaping new approaches and methods to meet this challenge, while recognizing and emphasizing the specific social, cultural and spatial potentialities of the cities in developing countries. To perform this role, the EU must give more attention to urban issues in its programmes, increasing the share of financial aid directed at urban problems and opportunities, and it must relate more closely to research and training institutions in the EU which deal with the urban affairs of the south.