

5th N-AERUS annual workshop May 15th-17th 2003, Paris

BEYOND THE NEO-LIBERAL CONSENSUS ON URBAN DEVELOPMENT. OTHER VOICES FROM EUROPE AND THE SOUTH

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Summary Report on Working Group 1

Papers presented in Working Group 1:

- **Amitabh Kundu:** Impact of neo-liberal policies on urban morphology: the Indian case
- **Catherine Baron:** Gouvernance et pauvreté urbaines en Afrique. Concepts polysémiques et débats contradictoires
- **Nicholas Awortwi:** From crisis in urban infrastructure provision to crisis in governance: the management of multiple modalities in delivering public services in Ghanaian cities
- **Katherine Coit:** Methods of resistance
- **Marcello Balbo and Andrea Parisi:** Decision making from Phnom Penh urban development: a peculiar type of good urban governance
- **Alan Gilbert:** How influential is Washington in the housing arena?
- **Ilda Lourenco-Lindell:** Getting rid of "social capital": the politics of support mobilisation in a West African city
- **Marie Huchzermeyer:** From dominance to diversity in international co-operation: a view from South Africa

A contradictory debate on neo-liberal concepts and discourse emerged:

- on the one hand: neo-liberal ideology (privatisation, deregulation, public sector reforms, decentralisation, liberalisation of economies ...) is not intrinsically wrong or good. The discourse on public service failure and private sector success should be abandoned.
- on the other hand: the negative impact and the necessity to examine the morality of privatisation programs were underlined, in particular the privatisation of water provision and sanitation (increased poverty, danger of gentrification etc...)

However the central issue of the debate within the working group was: How are the processes of privatisation, deregulation etc. carried out?

This depends on the capacity of the implementers of reforms to manage the process with regard to technical, political aspects and social impacts as well as impacts on urban structures:

- In particular on the capability of local authorities to formulate contracts, to monitor, to interact with users and corporate bodies
- the performance of the implementing organisations has to be measured during the process, not only before or after the privatisation
- capability of politicians to better counterbalance the professional/technical side

The second topic of discussion can be summarised under:

Roles of actors: State – private companies (market) – civil society

- How do urban societies function? We have to redefine roles and relations. Multiplicity and emergence of new actors (for example the financial intermediary institutions in India)
- What is the role of the state when international agencies deal directly with local authorities?

- What is the civil society? How does it function in different cultural contexts?

The concept of hybridisation of roles and intervention logic was presented, what does it mean when we leave the hierarchic vision of a state imposing rules through its interventions, so that each actor plays in part the role of the others:

- international agencies impose rules on public authorities (state, local authorities ...), see concept of good governance etc.
- private organisations take over tasks of the state or local authorities (for example master planning)
- local civil society organisations supply services which originally fell to the public sector with the support of international donors and the spirit of private enterprises

Furthermore the concept of social networks created through personal relationships that people construct for mutual support.

- different forms/types
- able to resist global actors using forms of subversion or as strong movements able to promote their own interests with municipalities or corporations (e.g. SPARK in Mahila Milan)

It is important that fundamental rights are inscribed in the constitution to oblige the state to respond to basic needs, to have programs, to change policies ...

Questioning the role of power of international agencies (in particular the World Bank) on state policies:

For some of the larger developing countries and under certain circumstances the influence of the World Bank on governments seems to be limited. These governments design their own policies, deciding on their own time schedule. However, there is a convergence of ideas between the World Bank and local officials. The agenda of neo-liberal concepts and ideas does exist, but not in the strictly black-white form of directly imposing rules on governments. The power seems to be more with financial institutions and big corporations in the United States.

The neo-liberal agenda also influences research and the work of Universities. Social critics or critical urban studies are abandoned. National research in the South is driven by Northern programs and interests.

Possible alternatives:

- scaling up positive community experiences
- engagement in networks (researchers, local organisations)

to be added:

- *different aspects of power*
- *critics of social capital*