

Urban Governance, diversity and social action in cities of the South

N-Aerus Annual Conference

16 – 17 September 2004

Barcelona, Spain

in the framework of the
World Urban Forum

Call for paper

Cities in the South are crossroads of cultures, where different social groups have to mutually accept each other and share a “common” urban space. In the past fifty years cities have attracted people from the rural areas who had very little or no experience of urban life. Territorial partitions that had accompanied the era of political independence as well as national and international urban migration have given rise to unprecedented diversity of urban cultures and sub-cultures. The very notion of the city as a production and consumption entity, well established in the economy-biased discourse of today, rests upon the division of labour and the creation of multiple – segmented - markets.

However urban planning and management continue to look at the city as an homogeneous entity: even more, the modernization of the city is generally looked at as a drive towards a homogeneous space.

In recent years the growing disparities resulting from globalization among national economies as well as between urban and rural-based economies, together with the weakening of the State, have resulted in the intensification of migration flows.

The cultural and social diversity of cities is potentially a source of vitality and creativity, but also of social tensions and political ferment. Spatial expressions of cultural diversity are looked at more often as potential sources of social disorder and loss of a common urban identity, than as an enriching opportunity for the city social fabric and economy.

With the growing globalization of the economies and State disengagement, most cities in the South are going to face an increasing influx of people with different social and cultural backgrounds, thus increasing the cultural diversity. International migration – especially in cities that are thought to offer employment opportunities will increase the number of low income people, at least initially, and their integration will require specific urban planning and management policies.

The Conference will take place within the framework of the second UN-HABITAT's World Urban Forum which will be held in Barcelona, Spain, 13-17 September 2004

- With the objective of promoting new thinking more than answers, the Conference will address the following issues:
 - a. In a context of increasing urban diversity and growing economic disparities what are the processes involved in the making of new social, cultural and political identities in the city? how are social relationships manifest in the social and geographical spaces of cities and their neighbourhoods?
 - b. how do social and political relationships evolve and manifest themselves in socially and culturally diverse cities?
 - c. What type of access, if any, do the poorest groups have to the local decision making processes and what measures have local governments adopted to foster their participation in urban governance, in particular in the areas of urban planning and management?
 - d. What wider implications do political and social relationships at the urban level have for national political and societal change?
 - e. How are political and social relationships at the urban level in southern cities linked to the emergence of global civil society networks and the role played by diasporas in social and economic change?
 - f. How do the social identities of citizens express themselves in changing built environments and how do land markets and physical living conditions influence the process of locational choice and community formation?
 - g. What lessons can be learnt from historical and contemporary processes of social mixing and identity formation in the cities of Europe for building livable cities and communities in the South, and vice versa?
 - h. Some approaches to urban policy and management have facilitated social cohesion, utilised the creative potential of social and cultural diversity and increased the liveability of cities, while some have failed to deal with inequity, rivalry and violence, exacerbating social tensions. What explains the strengths and weaknesses of different urban policies and management approaches and what are the alternatives?
 - i. The cultural heritage, environmental conditions and social diversity of cities may represent economic resources that can be used for developmental purposes. However, under certain circumstances heritage conservation practices as well as environmental policies may conflict with social diversity and hold back economic and social development, worsening inequality. In what circumstances have they resulted in economic rivalry, socio-economic exclusion and spatial fragmentation, and when has it built the social capital that is said to increase economic prosperity?

- j. The use of public space by different social groups is a distinctive feature of urban life. Squares and streets have always provided for spaces where people of diverse social and cultural origins would meet and share the experience of urban life. With the growing social diversity of urban residents and the increasing urban poverty, many city public spaces are being “privatised” by groups of specific social and cultural origin, or by local gangs. What actions have been taken, by whom, under which policy perspective, to restore the urban function of public spaces?

Abstracts between 150 and 250 words, in .doc, .rtf or .pdf format, should be submitted to call@naerus.net by May 31st, 2004. Abstracts should: a) state the issue to be addressed; b) define the context; c) highlight the final considerations.

The authors of accepted papers will be notified by e-mail by June 27th. Final papers must be submitted by September 4th and will be posted on N-AERUS website.

N-AERUS will try to provide paper copies for distribution at the Conference. However authors, particularly from Europe, are strongly invited to provide their own copies.

N-AERUS

Network-Association of European Researchers on Urbanisation in the South

Network-Association Européenne de Recherches Urbaines pour le Sud

WWW site: <http://www.naerus.net>

e-mail: naerus@naerus.net