

7th N-AERUS Conference, 2006

7-9 September

Technical University Darmstadt (TU Darmstadt), Germany

International Aid Ideologies and Policies in the Urban Sector

Call for papers

All evidence indicates that the increasing urbanisation taking place throughout the developing world – with more cities and increasing population and area in these – clashes with the stretched capacity of most urban economies. Presently, one third of the world's urban population live in unserviced and overcrowded settlements where they lack access to safe water and sanitation and the needs of large parts of the urban population will remain unmet for many years to come. According to UN-Habitat, in the next decades the number of people who will not have access to adequate housing will increase by approximately 1 billion.

One inevitable consequence of this phenomenon, in the face of poor or poorly enforced planning, is that cities are made up largely, and increasingly so, of so-called chaotic irregular settlements, often built on marginal locations that are dangerous to those who live there and to the environment. Those who live in such conditions are usually the poorest households who therefore also have the poorest housing and living conditions and are exposed to considerably higher risk and vulnerability levels than the rest of the urban population. Often, these households have no choice but to live in such precarious conditions, but even if they do, in the trade-off between risk and cost, cost wins out and risk is suppressed or treated fatalistically.

The situation is often compounded by the authorities that cannot or will not introduce risk-mitigating measures or at least not for those households in illegal settlements. Under such living conditions, therefore, any activity or event (natural or man-made), of a magnitude larger than the “norm” is likely to, and does, become a disaster with considerable loss of lives and livelihoods, therein highlighting the vicious and reinforcing relationship between deep structural inequalities characterising most urban centres of the South and disasters.

After adopting it for many years, governments in the cities of developing countries have become aware of the ineffectiveness of the western approach based on land use control and master plan provisions. Under conditions of high population growth rates, lack of financial, human and

technical means, growing poverty and deepening differences between an affluent minority and a majority of have-nots, the objective of implementing well planned cities has turned out to be largely incongruous with the actual capacity of most local administrations.

Since the seventies, essentially since the World Bank pushed hard for substituting the master planning with a more management oriented approach to urban development, settlements planning and management have been strongly influenced, if not decided, by international aid agencies.

Though donors are still rather reluctant to get involved in urban areas, all evidence indicates that they have the power to define the policy agenda in the cities of developing countries and do so, as it emerges from the current jargon used in urban development issues: strategic planning, urban poverty reduction, public/private partnership, sustainability, good urban governance are all deep-seated concepts in all international donors financed urban projects. Unless they follow such set paths, governments from developing countries have little chance to get any aid to cope with the urban growth of their cities. Urban policy being increasingly the matter of local governments, the shift from 'planning the city' to 'a city that manages' is all the more evident.

The urban management paradigm has gone through various steps, from the enabling approach, aiming to provide the inhabitants with the capacity to take effective action to improve their own environment, to the increasing emphasis on participatory tools and methods to involve directly the people in the assessment of their own needs and the identification of priorities, to the current relevance of good urban governance as a way to guarantee the urban population's access to the benefits of urban citizenship.

The management perspective implied by the new orthodoxy was first born out of the structural adjustment programmes of the 80s. It eventually grew to its current articulation following the neoliberal outburst of the 90s. Thus, though their conceptual roots are seldom recognized, urban aid programmes based on the new orthodoxy are inevitably tainted with the principles of the explicit liberalisation policies implemented in the last fifteen years.

Instruments such as, among others, poverty reduction programmes, strategic planning, SWOT analyses, good urban governance and its corollaries of accountability, legality, transparency, are not merely methodological or operational approaches to urban management. In fact they have to be looked at as tools that are inherent to the emerging politics of the new world order, whose main objective is primarily to increase urban productivity and efficiency and to open up urban economies and societies to market forces.

The 7th N-Aerus Conference calls for contributions on aid ideologies and policies in the urban sector of developing countries, with the aim to provide conceptual and political perspectives on the issues based on the analysis of programmes and projects implemented or proposed through international financial support.

Focusing on the urban sector, papers will address primarily, though not exclusively:

A. The political economy of aid in the urban sector

Papers addressing this issue will evaluate the results of internationally funded projects, highlighting under what conditions they can actually achieve their objectives, or the dynamics that make them fail. It is also expected that papers will assess how international projects actually promote social inclusion or result in increasing the current trend towards exclusion of the most vulnerable population.

B. The international planning paradigm and local societies

The use of – or support to – urban management related concepts such as governance, sustainability, partnership and competitiveness has become widespread. In addition, strategic planning, enabling practices, and public/ private partnerships have become standard planning tools or objectives within international funded urban projects. Yet few studies have explored the relationship between the assumptions underlying such concepts and tools, and the actual social, institutional and political conditions in the cities where they are to be implemented.

C. International aid, through whom and to whom?

Though it is increasingly clear that urban problems and potential need be dealt with mainly at the local level, international aid is largely channeled through central governments or state agencies. A central issue facing international aid is if and how it can link directly with the local level, governments as well as NGOs and communities, helping them develop responses better fitting with the specific social, economic and political local conditions.

Abstracts of between 150 and 250 words should be submitted in .rtf or .doc by Monday, Jul 3^d, 2006, to call@naerus.net. Abstracts should:

- a) state the issue to be addressed
- b) define the context
- c) highlight the main arguments

Authors of the selected papers will be notified by e-mail by Monday, Jul 10.

Final papers should be submitted by Monday, July 31st and will be posted on the N-AERUS website.

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