

N - A E R U S      A  
-                      N - A E R U S  
A                      N - A E R U S  
E                      A                      U  
R                      E                      S  
U    N - A E R U S  
S                      U  
N - A E R U S  
E



FACULTÉ D'ARCHITECTURE

lacambrehorta



ASRO – Department of Architecture,  
Urbanism and Planning

11<sup>th</sup> N-AERUS CONFERENCE, Brussels, 28<sup>th</sup> - 30<sup>th</sup> October, 2010 (tbc)

ASSESSING AND EXPLORING THE STATE OF **URBAN KNOWLEDGE**: ITS PRODUCTION, USE, AND DISSEMINATION IN CITIES OF THE SOUTH

Hosted by the Faculty of Architecture LaCambreHorta of Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB) and by the Department of Architecture, Urbanism and Planning (ASRO) of the Katholieke Universiteit in Leuven (KUL)

Research on urban development in the South has progressively grown in the last decades by addressing the unprecedented urban growth and the resulting urbanisation of poverty and increase of inequalities in the distribution of resources and strategic activities (in the industrial and tertiary sectors). Given that very high urban growth rates are still characterising urban change in the so-called developing world, research and practitioners continue to be confronted with the necessity to find ways to guarantee structural improvements for citizens and especially the urban poor.

A multiplicity of ideas, models, strategies and approaches have been developed since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century aiming at improving both our appreciation and understanding of the complexity of the urban experience as well as related efforts to transform living conditions in the cities of the South. Sustainable urban development, urban management and governance, private sector participation, community-led development, right to the city, strategic planning, spatial planning, city development strategies – just to name some of the recurrent elements – have been progressively introduced and tested in the development and research agendas. At the same time, a variety of debates has characterised recent research on urbanisation in developing countries, such as those on the role of international organisations and collective citizen movements, on the urban-rural articulation and the peri-urban dimension, on glocal dynamics, on tensions arising between efficiency and equity, on the need for differentiated approaches to urban growth when faced with diverse-sized urban centres (megalopolis vs. small-medium towns), on the socio-spatial consequences of development interventions – again, just to mention some of the most relevant.

Knowledge production, use and dissemination are central to urban practitioners' and researchers' progressively improved understanding of the urban domain/realm in the global South. Our diagnosis of the evolving complexity, challenges, opportunities and constraints urban areas are faced with is continuously updated and, indeed, reframed; as a consequence, so are the directions of current research and the solutions suggested in return. Fundamental in this process is the recognition that the way *problems* are being conceptualised and defined very much determine the kind of research undertaken by

scholars and the kind of *solutions* that emerge as a result and the subsequent degree and quality of impact attained. At the same time, the theorisation of the urban realm and development interventions therein has been heavily influenced in recent years by a postmodern turn, calling for the democratisation of planning practice, increased citizenship participation and a growing acknowledgement of the multidimensional social diversity in human societies. As a result, the potency and exclusive role of the experts (expert knowledge) and researchers has been challenged and the equivalent admission of other ('formal' and 'informal') forms of knowledge and actors in this (political) process is being advocated. It is precisely on these premises that the present call is anchored in, inviting scholars and practitioners alike to critically explore the current state of 'urban knowledge' available at several organisational/institutional fronts for cities of the South and to reflect on the following three guiding aspects in the production, use and dissemination of such knowledge:

- **Production of 'urban knowledge':** What different forms of knowledge have emerged over the years and what domination patterns may be observed across these? Questions of structure and agency are naturally central in the process of defining problems and identifying solutions, as are debates arguing for reinforced links between knowledge, consciousness and action (Gaventa and Cornwall, 2009), echoing Foucault's argument that 'knowledge is power and power is knowledge' (Foucault, 1980): are we witnessing new producers and users of knowledge and, as such, new emerging patterns of agency in this process?
- **Application of 'urban knowledge' and its impact:** What knowledge has so far been accumulated out of research and praxis in the urban South? Much research has been carried out about cities in the South; however, there is currently widespread agreement on the need to assess what has been amassed and evaluate the themes and approaches developed so far, in order to redefine and reconceptualise *problems* and renew the directions research has to adopt.
- **Theory-Praxis Loop:** How have research and praxis progressively approximated each other over the years in urban development in the South, if at all? In what (iterative) ways has learning drawn from practice been fed into research and vice versa? What 'reframed diagnosis' (Levy, 2007) of the urban condition has been witnessed so far and what kind of 'public learning' has been attained from the cross-fertilisation between urban research and practice?

N-Aerus is now entering its second decade and it appears timely for the Network to continue its support for research on urbanisation in the South by proposing a substantial review of past and current approaches to urban development, focusing on the state of the art of knowledge underpinning the production of urban space in cities of the South, so as to move forwards to new and innovative ideas and approaches for urban research and praxis. The 11th N-Aerus conference aims to provide an opportunity for both researchers and practitioners to reflect critically on achievements, potentials and limitations of past thinking and ideologies, models, strategies, programmes and approaches to the appreciation and subsequent management of urbanisation in the South and on future perspectives for research and praxis.

The conference calls for contributions on urban knowledge production, use and dissemination on urbanisation in developing countries that can address one of the two following typologies:

1. **ASSESSING STATE OF THE ART OF URBAN KNOWLEDGE PRODUCED AND ITS APPLIED IMPACT:** papers belonging to this type should focus on the review and analysis of the ideas, models, strategies, approaches, concepts, tools and methodologies that have been proposed in the last decades to (a) guarantee improved living conditions, and (b) produce, use and disseminate knowledge on the ways to attain such kind of improvements. Contributions belonging to this typology aim to propose a critical review of the evolutions and changes in the results, uses and processes of urban knowledge production and will be characterised by an historical perspective, preferably through comparative analysis of different geographical contexts.

2. **EXPLORING URBAN KNOWLEDGE:** papers belonging to this type should focus on new and innovative approaches to research that could generate new, original and reframed ways to understand and/or explore solutions for urban development in the South, and to produce, use and disseminate knowledge. Contributions belonging to this second typology will be characterised by an analysis of original research and actions that renew past approaches to research and knowledge production, clearly stating the innovative components with respect to previous approaches, and proposing innovative perspectives for future research and praxis.

To this end, papers are encouraged on (but not limited to) the four following themes, with the aforementioned guiding questions to be addressed in a cross-cutting manner throughout:

#### ***A. Land and Housing***

The housing issue has probably been one of the most discussed, and yet less conclusive, of all the challenges facing developing countries' cities. The importance of this issue is of course related to the speed of urbanisation and urban growth, which had never been as rapid in history. At the same time, the power of public, local authorities, and welfare systems, has weakened, while the number of actors and innovative strategies (mainly linked to the development of strategic, operational planning) in the housing field has risen. What assessment can be done of this evolution, both qualitatively and quantitatively? In many realities, the increasing gap between urban rich and poor is a key element in the last two decades: what about innovative ways of using this differential, this wealth potential, to help create more social equity in housing rights? As for popular housing districts, their role in structuring social networks and solidarities seems threatened by new phenomena of fragmentation: how is this addressed? And with what outcomes? In terms of urban and architectural housing models, the last decades have seen a very interesting movement of criticism, questioning and reconsidering the modernist heritage, which had constituted for decades a very strong referent; the "culturalist" and "local", context-oriented accent, which had seemed to take the lead, now seems overwhelmed by globalising trends, raising the issue of the cultural aspects of the housing question.

#### ***B. Services***

From time to time, different policies and strategies have been proposed in order to guarantee basic services for the urban poor. Generally, they have rested on the public service model, on private interventions and management techniques, and on multiple kinds of public-private partnerships, up to the current focus on, and confidence in, various forms of governance systems that include the variety of urban actors. Ensuring effective urban service provisions in a still urbanising South implies understanding past failures in service delivery in order to guarantee improved access to services and enhanced social and spatial cohesion. What did we learn from past urban service reforms? What are the specific or general trends in urban service delivery in the last decades? Current research on urban services in the South shows that there is a general agreement on the necessity to overcome conventional approaches based on public and/or private sector solutions. What are the new organisational forms for urban services in developing countries? In which way do they move further from

classical private and public sector models to alternative, unorthodox and hybrid arrangements? What are their characteristics and consequences in terms of regulation, financing, institutional reforms, improved and equitable access, urban growth, socio-spatial equilibriums, etc.?

### **C. Rural/urban/peri-urban**

During the last five decades, urban issues have been progressively recognized by many researchers as their priority. Which have been the main steps into this progressive recognition? What links can we observe between this effort when addressing the Global South and the general focus on the “heart of the city” that arose in Europe and other parts of the so-called developed world during the same period? How has this approach addressed the general question of development and territorial building? Which analysis has this research movement proposed for the “developing countries”’s socio-economical conditions and which guidelines in embracing the questions of their physical configuration? And, in particular, how has the relationship between the agricultural and the non agricultural parts of these countries been considered? And, in the future, could this relationship help to build better, more sustainable models of territorial development for countries in the Global South?

### **D. Heritage**

Heritage has constituted a shared, common preoccupation in the last decades, and one could say, for the last century, as a result of the predominance of western culture in “setting the agenda”. This preoccupation seems threatened as well today in developing countries in its theoretical fundamentals, not only by geopolitical factors, but by a change in culture as a whole, in a new, “merchandised”, globalised and competitive market. Yet, the very notion of heritage has also experienced a process of complexification (with its opening to new horizons: i.e. landscape, immaterial heritage), consolidation (international consciousness and laws) and diffusion (world heritage sites, education programmes). The awkward position of heritage issue nowadays can be related to that of “sustainable development”, to which it is conceptually related, as it relies on the need for political objectives that seem difficult to meet, in front of economic, and in a lesser way social, impulses. The main issue regarding urban heritage seems to be that of building local shared consciousnesses of values, mainly flexible and reactive, in a fragmented and conflictual environment. An assessment of the legislative and application tools is needed.

### **References:**

- M Foucault, C Gordon, 1980, *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings, 1972-1977*, Pantheon
- Gaventa, J. and Cornwall, A., 2009, Challenging the Boundaries of the Possible: Participation, Knowledge and Power, *IDS Bulletin*, Volume 37 Issue 6, Pages 122 – 128
- Levy, C., 2007, *Defining Strategic Action Planning led by Civil Society Organisations: The Case of CLIFF, India*, N-Aerus

### **Submission timetable:**

Abstracts of between 150 and 250 words should be submitted in .rtf or .doc by Friday, 16 July 2010, to [calls@n-aerus.net](mailto:calls@n-aerus.net). Abstracts and papers can be written in English, French and Spanish.

### **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, 23 August 2010. Final papers should be submitted by Friday, 17 October 2010 and will be posted on the N-AERUS website. N-AERUS will try to provide some paper copies for distribution at the Conference. However authors, particularly from Europe, are strongly encouraged to bring their own copies.

### **Funding:**

Limited financial support will be available to support the participation of some researchers or practitioners – in particular, young researchers and practitioners – from Africa, Asia and Latin America, whose papers are accepted for presentation at the Conference (deadline for abstract submissions: Friday, 16 July 2010). Candidates are encouraged to indicate their wish to be considered for funding when submitting their abstracts.

### **Accommodation:**

Some low-cost accommodation will be available for participants. Relevant details to apply for low-cost accommodation will be provided on the conference website <http://www.n-aerus.net> along with supplementary information on additional accommodation at special negotiated rates.

### **Costs:**

No registration fee accompanies attendance of the conference. There will be however a charge of 20 Euros for all participants to cover the costs of documentation, lunches and coffee/tea and an optional excursion. The conference proceedings will be published jointly by the two hosting institutions.

### **On the network ...**

N-AERUS (Network-Association of European Researchers on Urbanization in the South) is a pluridisciplinary network of researchers and experts working on urban issues in developing countries and emerging economies. It was created in March 1996 by a group of European researchers. Its objective is to mobilise and develop the European institutional and individual research and training capacities. N-AERUS works in association with researchers and institutions in developing countries and emerging economies. Further information on the network can be found at the webpage: [www.n-aerus.net](http://www.n-aerus.net)