

CONFERENCE REPORT

Report on the Conference

Diversity and Local Contexts: Urban Space, Borders and Migration.

Convened by the Commission on Urban Anthropology (IUAES) and the Institute of Ethnology of the Academy of Sciences, v.v.i., Prague, 25-26 May 2012.

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This Conference took place in Prague at Villa Lanna, the conference centre of the Czech Academy of Sciences. The event provided a platform for comparative debate on the effects of diversity generated by migrant groups and minorities with different cultural backgrounds in various parts of the world, social situations and aspects of social life.

The papers emphasized various effects of social diversity:

- Leisure-time activities, people's behaviour in certain types of public space, which they endow with a specific atmosphere (Jerome Krase) or in situations of deep social changes (Giuliana Prato). These papers referred to universal patterns of diffusion, penetration, influence of individual groups and their definition with respect to 'the others'.
- Festive occasions and celebrations where diversity is reflected in its demonstrations through elements of traditional folk culture, which bring out the interests of the social groups involved (Artem Rabogoshvili).
- Perception and interpretations of phenomena and artefacts encountered by groups in cities. Individual aspects of life acquire different meanings among different groups; be they details, as discussed in the Polish milieu by Hana Červinková and in the Czech milieu by Mariana Meszároszová and Petra Ezzedine, or a perception of the urban space by tourists, embassies and travel agencies, which through their recommendations and advice in official statements construct stereotypes on individual towns but also on entire states (Laszlo Kürti).

Migrant groups and minorities are spatially distributed in the urban space, create their own territories, compete or ignore each other. Thus different integration strategies emerge (Zdeněk Uherek). Their integration may be stigmatised, marginalised, segregated and restrictions may be imposed on them from outside (Penny Koutrolidou). They may express their own specific economic behaviour, which may implicitly address integration at the grassroots in a context of failing relationships between citizenship and governance (Italo Pardo), as well educational strategies by institutions (Tomáš Kostecký). We also learned how migrants' specific activities can be subjected to power manipulation and xenophobic reactions (Henk Paw).

Some papers focused on specific groups and space. Others developed a broader analysis. For instance, Slavomíra Ferenčuhová offered a theoretical and methodological assessment that took into account the historical perspective of theoretical reflections on the city; Petr Skalník developed a comparative analysis summarising the themes of urban pathology. Zdenka Mansfeldova illustrated current changes in the UNESCO – MOST programme, which tally with many aspects of the CUA IUAES activities.

Throughout the Conference, participants discussed at length the comparative insights brought out by the individual papers, noting significant analytical connections which will be taken on board in the published versions.