

CONFERENCE REPORTS

The Global Financial Crisis and the Moral Economy: Local Impacts and Opportunities

Brooklyn College of The City University of New York (CUNY), U.S.A., 18-20 June 2015

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The Commission on Urban Anthropology's Annual Conference, 'The Global Financial Crisis and the Moral Economy: Local Impacts and Opportunities', was held at Brooklyn College of The City University of New York (CUNY) on June 18 through 20, 2015 on its historic and verdant campus in Flatbush, Brooklyn. The meeting was sponsored by Brooklyn College (CUNY), especially its International Education Program of The City University of New York led by Senior Director of International Education & Global Engagement Alice Gail Beir, St. John's University, and the CUNY Academy of Humanities and Sciences' Feliks Gross Seminar on Visual and Urban Ethnography. The conference was most ably co-chaired by Judith N. DeSena, Sociology Department, St. John's University, Patricia Antonello, Anthropology Department, Brooklyn College CUNY, and Jerome Krase, Sociology Department, Brooklyn College CUNY. The Commission on Urban Anthropology is indebted to the generous support of William A. Tramontano, Brooklyn College Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Brooklyn College Matthew E. Moore, Associate Provost for Faculty and Administration.

The challenging theme and Call for Papers (below) for the 2015 meeting, 'The Global Financial Crisis and the Moral Economy: Local Impacts and Opportunities', was carefully composed by Italo Pardo of the University of Kent. The CFP for what was billed as a compact meeting in order to allow for intense and fruitful deliberations, attracted over forty submissions, which were reduced to less than thirty for the final program.

In today's increasingly competitive global economic scenario, urban settings encapsulate the socio-economic impact of increasingly significant international processes, regulations and flows of capital and people. Since 2008, the global financial and economic crisis has brought dramatically ahead issues that bear directly on urban research and theory. For example, in Europe, the effects of the crisis have been exacerbated by the imposition of the Maastricht parameters among most of the countries that have adopted the Euro. There and elsewhere, such as in the US, the crisis has dramatically impacted on neighborhoods, provoking catastrophic housing closures and dynamic urban movements (like Occupy Wall Street and the bloody street demonstrations in Greece).

By and large, governance has generally failed to meet constructively the challenge posed by the complexities and implications of this worldwide phenomenon, thus raising a critical problematic of both legitimacy and legitimation. The current crisis has apparently established the supremacy of economics over politics. However, while it has become

gradually clear that, cross-culturally, such supremacy and acceleration are not overarching phenomena and that their predominance cannot be taken for granted, it has also become clear that in the present climate national policies struggle to address individual and corporate interests. To complicate matters further, all too often international regulations that have a heavy impact on local communities have proved to be inspired by concepts that are ambiguous, elusive, badly defined or impossible to apply, thus compounding on the perceived weak legitimacy of governance and the law in the broader society.

On the one hand, comparative ethnographic analysis has documented in detail both how this crisis has boosted unemployment, informal employment, inequality, poverty (e.g. residential and business foreclosures, vacant unsold or unsalable real estate, homelessness, bankruptcy of individuals and businesses, the spread of suicide among private individuals and entrepreneurs, and so on)¹ and crime. On the other hand, it has brought to light how strong entrepreneurial cultures firmly rooted in the morality, and ramifications in practical life, of a strong continuous interaction between the material and the non-material are coping with this situation.²

Eschewing confusion between individuality and individualism, urban ethnographers have demonstrated the moral and cultural complexity of individual action, bringing out the social value of individual action and entrepreneurialism. More precisely, the empirical investigation of ordinary people strategies and of small- and micro-scale business initiative in different ethnographic settings has repeatedly shown that they are informed by a culture that, underreported and often officially frustrated, enjoys legitimacy at the grassroots, playing a major role beyond official employment and unemployment. Misplaced or instrumentally selective policies both encourage exclusion and are key in the widening gap between governance and the governed across the world.

Through ethnographically-based analyses, this Conference brought together between 20 and 30 scholars in order to explore these complex issues in Western and non-Western settings. Specifically, the Conference aimed to:

Discuss how legal, semi-legal and illegal activities in the field of entrepreneurialism and individual action at once draw on access to community resources, including access to credit, beyond official allocation and defy attempts of the state to monitor, regulate and extract revenue from the production, circulation and consumption of goods.

Reflect on how the difficulty in the access to credit, which affects ordinary people, individual entrepreneurs, companies and entire countries.

Ethnographically-based analysis has amply shed light on the moral set up that informs the choices of those involved in such enterprises. It has also suggested that in many cases we are not faced simply with a dual economy where the informal is complementary to the formal,

¹ See Krase and T. Shortell, 2013. Seeing New York City's Financial Crisis in the Vernacular Landscape. In Kuniko Fujita, 2013, *Cities and Crisis: New Critical Urban Theory*. London: Sage.

² On the concept of *strong continuous interaction* see Pardo, I. 1996. *Managing Existence in Naples: Morality, Action and Structure*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press; especially Ch. 1.

but rather with complex interlinking and interacting sectors of one economy. In the present context it is imperative for the state to come to terms with such a reality, well beyond prohibition and repression, for criminalization has largely proved to be counterproductive and ineffectual. Credible ways must, instead, be found to encourage those who operate outside the law to bring their businesses in the realm of legality. New, simplified legislation is badly needed. It is equally imperative for political and financial institutions to develop an approach that is sophisticated and enlightened enough to match the sophistication and diversity of what goes on the ground. Empirically-based analysis has an important contribution to make to our understanding of how urban neighborhoods and micro- to small- and medium- businesses are changing as a result of the global financial crisis and that these transformations demonstrate the complex effects of economic decline.

At the opening session in Brooklyn College's Boylan Hall on Thursday, June 18, 2015 Giuliana B. Prato, University of Kent, Chair, Commission on Urban Anthropology gave the official Welcome. Representatives of the Brooklyn College Administration, William A. Tramontano, Matthew E. Moore, and Alice Gail Beir also offered their greetings to the assembled scholars. This was followed by the Keynote Presentation, 'Brooklyn Revisited: An Illustrated View from the Street 1970 to the Present', given by Judith N. DeSena, St. John's University and Jerome Krase, Brooklyn College CUNY. After the luncheon for panelists and guests the afternoon session began with the following presentations.

Panel 1: Social Action, Governance, and Capitalism

Italo Pardo, University of Kent, *'Why Can't I Sell My Wares but They Can Sell My Rubbish?': Neapolitans Coping with Economic Difficulty in a Context of Mis-governance.*

Nurdan Z. Atalay-Güneş, Mardin Artuklu University, *Outlining Economic Fields in Turkey: Financialization and Actors.*

Boonlert Visetpricha, University of Wisconsin- Madison, *"Homeless People in Manila: Their Rationality of Living on the Street and the Moral Economy of Street Life."*

Panel 2: Reflections on Locales

Kelly McNeal, William Paterson University, *Painting a Portrait of Segregated High Schools with 4.5 Kilometer Brushstrokes.*

Michel Rautenberg, Université Jean Monnet Saint-Etienne, *Local Heritage and Capitalism: Resistance or 'Small Arrangements between Friends'?*

Talbot Rogers, and Judith Arnold Rogers, Lincoln Memorial University, *In the Labyrinth of Mediocrity: The Perceptions of Urban International Students on the Nature of their Education in a Rural White University in the United States.*

Sarah Grace Rogers, University of Tennessee and Small Girls on 10th Street, *Perspectives on Gender Equity in the Public Relations Field.*

On the evening first day of the conference a Business Meeting was held for CUA Members in the conference space. After the meeting, panelists and their guests were treated to a reception and light supper in the State Lounge of the Brooklyn College Student Union Building.

As on the opening day of the meeting on Day two, a coffee service was provided to panelists and guests and then followed by paper presentations and lively discussions in Boylan Hall.

Panel 3: In and Out Migration

Robyn Andrews, Massey University, *Anglo-Indian Returnees: Financially Driven Reverse Migration to Goa.*

Zdeněk Uherek, and Veronika Beranská, Institute of Ethnology, Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, *Prague and Migration Groups: The Global Financial Crisis in the Czech Republic.*

Patricia Mata-Benito, Spanish University of Distance Education, Carmen Osuna, Spanish University of Distance Education, and Margarita del Olmo, Center of the National Council for Scientific Research, *Eating Pizza with my Feet on the Table: Dropping Out of School in Spain in the Context of Financial Crisis.*

Following the luncheon for panelists and guests in the Georgian Room the final panels took place.

Panel 4: Mirrors of the Global Crisis

Convenors: Carmen Rial and Alex Vailati, Federal University at Santa Catarina.

Moises Kopper, Princeton University, *The Rising Middle Classes in Developing Countries: Globalizing Science, Performing Statistics and Humanizing Numbers.*

Ana Luiza Carvalho da Rocha, and Cornelia Eckert, UFRGS, Brazil, *The Crisis in Industrial Work and Arrangements in Urban Everyday Life: Ethnography in Porto Alegre, Brazil.*

Andrea Ceriana Mayneri, Institut des Mondes Africains, Paris, *Central African and Refugee Narratives in Times of War: Beyond the 'Failed' and the 'Criminal' State.*

Comments: Setha Low, Graduate and University Center CUNY

Panel 5: Informal to Formal Economies

Roumi Deb, Amlan Kanti Ray, and Divya Avasthy, Amity University, *Legitimacy of Women Entrepreneurship: Socio-Spatial Access in the Delhi Metropolis.*

Marcello Mollica, University of Pisa, *How the Crisis Helped Informality to Re-enter the Temple: a New Sicilian Custom.*

Carolyn E. Vick, Banking and Financial Consultant, *The Post Crisis Banking Legislation/Regulation: The Impact on Access to Banking Services for the Ordinary Person.*

Nicha Tovankasame, Hiroshima University, *Negotiation for Informal Tourist-Related Businesses on the Coastal Public Space in Newly-Military Government Epoch: The Case of Phuket, Thailand.*

Following the last session, concluding remarks were made by the conference co-chairs, Judith N. DeSena, St. John's University, Patricia Antonello, and Jerome Krase, Brooklyn College, as well as by Commission on Urban Anthropology officers Giuliana Prato and Italo Pardo. It was decided at the meeting by those assembled that presenters could submit their final papers for possible inclusion in either a special issue of the CUA journal *Urbanities* or a volume of the Palgrave Urban Anthropology Series edited by Giuliana Prato and Italo Pardo. Otherwise, individual papers could be submitted as unique articles with reference to the detail of having been presented at CUA's annual meeting 'The Global Financial Crisis and the Moral Economy: Local Impacts and Opportunities' held at Brooklyn College (CUNY) June 18-20, 2015.

Following the Business Meeting, a Farewell Wine and Cheese Reception for panelists and guests was held in the Georgian Room in Boylan Hall. On the morning of Day 3, Saturday June 20, 2015, many of the conference panelists and guests were treated to a walking tour of one of Brooklyn's iconic neighborhoods. St. John's University professor, and conference co-chair, Judith N. DeSena guided the academic tourists through the still ethnically diverse but rapidly gentrifying area. DeSena has written several books on the area. She was assisted in her efforts by conference co-chair Jerome Krase who has also written extensively on Brooklyn's fascinating urban landscapes. The tour ended with a wonderful luncheon at a sidewalk café in the busy commercial center of Williamsburg's hipster culture.

Sustainable Urbanization in India: Challenges and Opportunities

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A two-day conference on *Sustainable urbanization in India: Challenges and opportunities* was organized by the Institute of Development Studies Kolkata (IDSK) and held between January 15 and 16, 2015 in collaboration with the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Bombay. The conference was funded by the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR).

Concept note and Rationale

Within the Indian context, the conference intended to debate and discuss the effectiveness of recent urban programmes ('smart city' designs, 'rurbanization,' etc.) that are being prescribed

³ Conference Coordinator.

and recommended within the umbrella of ‘sustainable urbanization’, the post-2015 development agenda of the United Nations. Within a broad space-time scale and considering the exploration of historical trajectories for particular Indian cities as an important methodology, the conference aimed to identify problems and possible measures to be followed as policy and programmatic actions that can be the guidelines for future research.

Since 2007, urban centres have become the dominant habitat for human beings making the process of urbanization one of the most significant global trends of the twenty-first century. Sustainable Urbanization is the post-2015 development agenda of the United Nations. It unfurls optimistic designs where cities are considered the axes for the new global change, economic forces to entire nations and central players on the world stage. With global environmental change on the planetary scale on one hand and rapid urbanization on the other, cities are recognized as seedbeds of solutions; flurry of recommendations, designs and innovations are being thought upon with sustainability as the nucleus. Since the 1990s, cities came to be looked at through the sustainability lens. The concept of ‘sustainable cities’ emerged, being derived from ‘sustainable development’ which was popularized in the Brundtland Report (1987) of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), the United Nations (UN) and Agenda 21 (United Nations Conference on Environment and Development [UNESCO], 1992). The UN Sustainable City Programme in the South was launched as a vehicle for implementing Agenda 21 at the city level in order to incorporate environmental management into urban development decision-making, where the economic and environmental costs of urbanization and urban development were to be taken into account and cities were to be designed as compact, energy efficient cities, and should be self-reliant in terms of resource production and waste absorption.

There are critical perspectives questioning the effectiveness of these programmes in the global South with the central argument that sustainability is seen from a Northern viewpoint that ignores critical issues, such as the unavailability, or lack of access to infrastructures and resources. Critics include Mike Davis, Joseph Gugler, David Harvey and others who have pointed to the contradictions associated with rapid and rampant urbanization in the poorest quarters of the developing nations.

The aim of this conference was to move beyond the bi-centric approach (looking only at the differences between the ‘developed’ and the ‘developing’ world) and reflect on cities across India using polycentric methods and approaches. In spite of some common components, each and every city has its own trajectories of growth and development, vulnerability and resilience. The Indian scenario is extremely diverse and only broadly can cities be classified according to historical, geographical and demographic conjectures. Solutions laid out in official and non-official documents tend to miss out these diversities. Within this broad framework, the conference invited innovative researches across different parts of India identifying city-specific sources of unsustainability and challenges, strategies and potentials that would make the process of urban transition both sustainable and equitable.

Programme and Participation

Around 38 senior professors, faculty members and research scholars from various universities and research institutes from every part of the country (north, south, east and west) presented papers touching upon almost every component of urban sustainability. There were case studies across Indian megacities and small towns covering a wide spatial scale. Nine technical sessions (Urban Planning and Governance, Gentrification, Civic Infrastructures, Urban Inequity, Disasters and Resilience, Waste Management, Emissions and Energy Use, Urban-rural linkages and Urban Ecology and Environmentalism) were conducted by eminent chairpersons with expertise in various disciplines of social sciences including economics, sociology, urban planning, history, and so on. Professor Darshini Mahadevia, Dean of the Centre for Environmental Planning and Technology University, Ahmedabad, gave the keynote address focusing on cities as epicentres of violence in recent times, drawing on evidence from contemporary events. The keynote address was followed by a thematic panel chaired by Professor Adriana Allen of the Development and Planning Unit (DPU), University College London (UCL). The panel speakers were Professor O.P. Mathur, distinguished professor of urban economics, National Institute of Urban Affairs, Professor Achin Chakraborty, Director of the Institute of Development Studies Kolkata and Professor Annapurna Shaw, Public Policy and Management, Indian Institute of Management Calcutta. Professor Mathur addressed the complex question of how India's urbanization and urban system are unfolding. Professor Chakraborty gave a meticulous presentation on the structural limits to equitable urbanization. Professor Shaw examined urban sustainability as policy in the Indian context and brought out the implications of the proposed policies in the context of land availability and sustainability. The session ended with the chair's comment and reflections on a wide spectrum of emerging urban policies and urbanisms — including splintering urbanism, slum urbanism and green urbanism — and their conceptual and contextual challenges, which can be addressed by an alternative narrative of untamed urbanism to some extent.

On the evening of day one, a special panel was organized on the newly published book entitled *Governance of Megacities: Fractured Thinking, Fragmented Setup* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2015) by K.C. Sivaramakrishnan. The special lecture on the book by the author was followed by a discussion conducted by Professor Mahalaya Chatterjee, Director, Centre for Urban Economics, Calcutta University.

The conference ended with a discussion on further plans and next steps, followed by a vote of thanks delivered by the coordinator Jenia Mukherjee, Assistant Professor of History of Ecology and Environment at IDSK. The event received coverage in the microsite (<https://www.bartlett.ucl.ac.uk/dpu/news/peri-urban-pathways-water-justice> date of access: Sept. 1. 2015) of the Bartlett Development Planning Unit, University College London.

Contribution and Significance

Recent patterns and processes of urbanization have been studied by economists and experts from other disciplines of social sciences (Ahluwalia, Kanbur and Mohanty 2014). The exchanges and encounters between urbanization and environment in Indian cities have been

explored in recent times (Rademacher and Sivaramakrishnan 2013). Yet, the discussion still remains very much restricted within the boundaries of megacities and metropolitan areas, and not much is done beyond that. The conference at IDSK greatly contributed to the existing body of research on contemporary urbanization and the interactions between urbanization and environment in Indian cities, addressing the context of current formulation, popularization and debates on the theory and practice of 'sustainable urbanization' on a global scale. It also addressed debates relating to the effectiveness of recent urban programmes ('smart city' designs, 'rurbanization,' etc.) that are being prescribed and recommended under the umbrella of 'sustainable urbanization'. Faculty members and research scholars presented papers touching upon almost every issue relating to urban sustainability. Disseminating unexplored facts and findings, case studies across Indian megacities and small towns exposed the need of micro researches within macro contexts in order to come up with specific challenges and potentials in specific geographical-historical-demographic contexts.

Two publication projects are being planned including selected papers of the conference. One aims to shed light on different aspects of challenges and potentials of urban sustainability in Indian cities and towns, including availability or lack of civic infrastructures, emissions, waste, varieties of environmentalisms among multiple social actors, and so on. The other aims to read and decipher urban palimpsests to remain informed about future oriented processes and multiple urban transformations, while remaining aware of different and distinct (urban) trajectories embodied by each city across temporal scales; an entry point, that is, for an understanding the complex urban transition of India.

References

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- Rademacher, A. and Sivaramakrishnan K. (eds) (2013). *Ecologies of Urbanism in India Metropolitan Civility and Sustainability*. Hong Kong: The Hong Kong University Press.