



CALL FOR PAPERS

CULTURAL PLURALISM IN CITIES OF THE GLOBAL SOUTH

International Conference, 20-22 March 2019
European University Institute (Global Governance Programme), Florence, Italy

Convenors:

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Rationale

By 2050, more than 6 billion people will live in cities (United Nations, 2012). Most of that growth will take place in countries in Asia and Africa where urbanization is expected to increase to 56% and 64% respectively (UN 2014). One big challenge is how these cities will provide basic services, such as infrastructure, health care, and education. Another is how the different ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups who now share the urban space will get along. These questions have always been at the heart of urban sociology but they need to be asked in new light given the rise in mobility and migration and the fact that so many people are long-term residents in place where they are not full members. They are the permanently impermanent, lacking the basic rights and protections of citizenship. Moreover, an increasingly urbanized and globalized world demands new approaches to defining and understanding cities and their related problems and (possible) solutions.

During the last decade, there has been a vibrant debate regarding a '**southern turn**' in urban studies that has not just been confined to academic research but has also resonated across the agendas of national governments, policy makers, development agencies, non-governmental organizations and social movements. Viewing the city through a 'southern urban lens', it is argued, radically shifts our perspective by bringing into conversation a host of cities with their distinctive contexts and histories that were previously deemed to be marginal or were simply off the map according to an urban sociology that since its origins has been dominated by the industrial and post-industrial cities of the West.

The recent, rich body of research on global south cities has explored an array of issues ranging from informality and the impact of rapid demographic change upon the built environment to local policies and campaigns for greater social and economic justice. While there have been numerous studies that have investigated the rise of cultural industries, especially in Asian cities, the questions of cultural pluralism and urban cultural policy have tended to receive less sustained attention. Because of their capacity to accommodate diverse cultures, all cities are sites for the exchange of ideas and for knowledge creation about economics and technology but also about political and social consciousness

(Amin 2002). They are civic spaces where environmental, cultural and social issues are debated and where new models are proposed and tried out. They are also sites where national identities are (re)shaped and negotiated in response to the changing demography.

Over the last thirty years, a notable strand of research has focused on **global cities**: late-modern versions of city-states that construct global profiles, often bypassing any sense of nationhood, and which are characterized by the contemporaneous presence of local/global elites and a low-paid (and often migrant) service class that is indispensable for the city to function (Sassen 2001).

But major centres of socioeconomic and cultural power are clearly emerging outside the West in our current multi-polar and highly dynamic geopolitical and cultural landscape. New scholarship calls into question the “global cities” model and calls our attention to how cities in Asia and Africa are constructing their own relation to the world (Roy & Ong 2011). This new scholarship emphasises the role of culture, religion, and knowledge circulation rather than focusing primarily on economic and financial life as did earlier approaches (Robinson 2002).

This conference focuses on cities that are emerging (or striving to emerge) as regional centres of power in the Global South. We focus on capital cities and major urban centres in Asian, African, and Latin American countries at different stages of the nation building process. We ask what terms like “urban,” “diversity,” and “cultural pluralism,” actually mean in these contexts. We do so by adopting a **critical approach** that questions official discourse, documents and policy programmes and compares them to how relevant stakeholders understand the ‘city’, the ‘nation’, and ‘the global’. We want to unpack the power relations within the city and the ways in which the city projects itself beyond the national scale and positions itself both at a wider regional level and within global cultural hierarchies.

Key research questions include:

How are culture and cultural policies deployed to help (re)create and (trans)form a sense of belonging to the city and the nation?

What do state and non-state actors, operating at the city, national, regional or transnational levels, do to bring together different groups and to write and rewrite the current, historical and future narratives about particular places and who belongs to them.

What do concepts like nation, community, ethnicity, religion, diversity, heritage and creativity mean and look like in these cities and how do they inform city policies and institutions?

What light do these aspiring regional or global centres of economic and cultural power shed on the emergence of a new, late modern cosmopolitanism or on a ‘new national’ through the global?

Our conference will include panels organized around the following clusters, bearing in mind that the same city may fit into more than one category.

1. Ancient Cities Re-Imagining Themselves – To what extent do some cities view themselves as already past a “golden age”? How might they struggle to embrace, rewrite or erase that history in order to move onto a more modern, diverse future. We could perhaps think of cities where great civilizations once flourished such as Mexico City, Lima, or Cairo that were empires in their day. How is that genealogy or legacy used to create the city of today and the future? What pieces of the past are celebrated and ignored? Why is this the case and what are the consequences?

2. Fractured Cities – Many cities still suffer the wounds of deep division wrought by civil war or ethnic and religious struggles. How do cultural policies aid in the healing process, bridging divides and fostering reconciliation? What actors are involved in making these decisions (national as well as

international) and what experiences get privileged as a result? Cities such as Kigali, Beirut, Phnom Penh, Saigon and Kinshasa might be examples of this.

3. Cities Celebrating (?) Diversity – These are cities that acknowledge and mobilize cultural diversity both as a means to reorient notions of national belonging but also to strategically project themselves as regional (and global) hubs. They are also places where the influx of significant migrant populations may jumpstart a conversation about who belongs and cultural policy can be an important tool in that discussion. The arrival of newcomers sometimes leads to a repositioning of old-timers. These minorities or indigenous groups, who were always there but somehow seen as outsiders, are now included through the renegotiation of the city and its members. Such cities might include Rabat (where linguistic minorities are being included), Lima (where the nation's African and/or indigenous heritage is more willingly recognized) or Accra (where different tribal affiliations mark the landscape).

4. World Claiming Cities – These are cities where culture is being used to create or re-position the nation more prominently. In these contexts, how do cultural actors rescale the city to gain greater recognition and power? How does locating the city within transnational religious, ethnic, or linguistic networks work as a strategy to gain greater importance and what kinds of tensions arise as nationhood is reconstituted? Here we are considering cities like Singapore, Hong Kong or Doha, but perhaps also Seoul or Dakar.

The conference will take place on **20-22 March 2019, at the European University Institute, in Florence, Italy.**

The conference includes selected speakers that will cover some of these cases but we also invite interested researchers **to submit a paper proposal (1000 words)** outlining the scope of the paper, its methodology and its (expected) results, **along with a short biographical note (500 words)** to anna.triandafyllidou@eui.eu and plevitt@wellesley.edu **by 25 September 2018.** We are interested in **papers that explore individual or comparative case studies of cities in the global south and which critically engage with cultural policy and cultural pluralism at the urban scale.**

Selected participants will be notified by mid-late October 2018. We have **a limited number of travel grants to cover for the participation of scholars from countries outside Europe and North America.**

References

Amin, A. (2002). Ethnicity and the multicultural city: living with diversity. *Environment and planning A*, 34(6), 959-980.

Robinson, J. (2002). Global and world cities: a view from off the map. *International journal of urban and regional research*, 26(3), 531-554.

Roy, A., & Ong, A. (2011). *Worlding cities. Asian Experiments and the Art of Being Global*. Malden: Blackwell Publishers.

Sassen, S. (2001). *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*. Princeton University Press