

Introductory Report Workshop I: Socio-economic Implications

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Workshop Focus

Papers presented in this workshop will focus on the effects of integrative and disintegrative forces in urban socio-economic issues. The following questions are of relevance:

1. What are the main causes of socio economic polarisation and which remedies have been successfully applied?
2. Can the effect of the neo liberal agenda on urban structures be mapped?
3. Can planning have a say in market driven development?
4. How can planning reconcile equity, social cohesion and quality of life with the dynamics created through globalisation?
5. How are regional differences reflected in urban disintegration?
6. Which strategies have succeeded in being economically and socially sustainable?
7. Do urban regeneration projects bring about gentrification?

Preliminary Findings

What can we say in general and how can we make specific comparisons in respect of integrative versus disintegrative forces in the different cities and regions of the world after having read all the papers? Are we able to make an analysis and even prescriptions in similar terms from La Plata to Puerto Vallarta, from Ramallah to Calcutta and from Dublin via Gdansk to Istanbul? Is there a common denominator by which we can compare the cases properly? No! There is not. However, with due care and attention, it is possible to draw some conclusions on trends which are occurring and which seem to have some universal validity. What appears to be clear is that disintegrative forces are dominant and growing in importance when we consider what is happening worldwide.

In South and Middle America all the cases show a neo liberal political context which is held responsible, at least for an important share, for disintegrative forces. But, beyond this contextual factor, there are other factors to be considered: e.g. long term military governments, political turmoil and changes and, of course, weak economies. Nevertheless the cases of Lima and Managua show that when we take a closer look we see integrative forces peeping through a globalizing economic situation. Contradictory as it may seem, it looks as if this particular situation is creating fertile conditions for integrative forces!

Africa and the Middle East are showing the most pessimistic perspectives on the integrative role which urban and regional planning can play. In the Middle East, we have two Palestinian cases at hand. They present us with a depressing picture of the impossible structures for proper planning. The exploding metropolises of Africa are similarly placed. It is a paradox! The degree to which these metropolitan areas are in the need of planning is in inverse proportion to the rapidly diminishing competence and power of planning institutions. In the Kazakhstan case we see new geo-political dynamics which seem to bear new possibilities for a balanced development of city and region. Elsewhere in Asia, as in the case of Calcutta, we can observe a more complex picture of disintegrative and integrative forces at work.

The European cases demonstrate a much more varied picture. Unsurprisingly, there are several case studies emanating from Turkey. It is clear that a neo liberal policy in Turkey and globalization have had their effects on metropolises such as Istanbul. New gated communities, however, are not contributing to more integration in these big cities. On the contrary, such developments are fragmenting the city socially as well as spatially. In the Eastern part of Europe there are studies from Serbia Montenegro, Kosovo and Poland. In Mitrovica (Kosovo) an ambitious effort is being made to reconcile different ethnic groups by means of a participatory approach. In Gdansk similar ambition is being put into practice, to facilitate a rejoining of two divided parts of the city. The same optimism characterizes the experiment which is being made in Bar (Serbia Montenegro) where, after many serious problems, efforts are being made to grasp the opportunities which are perhaps all too evident. There are signs of hope for integration.

The case in La Coruna (Galicia, Spain) again shows a paradoxical-absence of spatial guidance in a situation which is strongly in need of spatial coordination. Another example would be in South America where the dominance of the private sector is often too high, or worse, where formal planning is totally absent. In respect of Dublin (Ireland), Stuttgart, Milan and Budapest, a case can be made for a possible stronger role for the private sector on the presumption that it is more innovative. On the other hand, the case of Dublin clearly illustrates the conservative and disintegrating role the powerful private sector can also play in urban planning.

The various papers raise specific questions which can be summarised as follows:

Relevant Questions for this Workshop

Concerning the questions about causes-effects-remedies the following observations can be made. Globalisation is a powerful force which can empower neo liberal agendas in cities and regions. The overall effect of this is mainly of a disintegrative character. In this respect the cases from Turkey are unequivocal. In Central and South America the picture is more ambiguous. A free market can and does occasionally provide new opportunities for small businesses. Better access to public infrastructure can be another beneficial effect of a free market. It seems, however, that this is more coincidental than planned. The question which can be considered is: under what circumstances do these effects occur?

Looking at the variety of remedies proposed, the following tentative conclusions can be drawn. First of all, it is sometimes better to speak of establishing conditions rather than remedies because the latter presupposes a proactive approach by the planning authority. This is only the case in a few instances. In a number of cases it is the power of societal institutions or the relative freedom they have that provides the key for integrative mechanisms. When public transport is abolished, opportunities arise for the private sector to fill the gap. Privatization of the telecommunication industry is enabling lower income groups to access the internet. Empowerment of community groups and associations of residents is able to counterbalance the power of the many vested interests in public planning and can also stimulate integrative tendencies. Paradoxically it can, because the same condition can result in disintegrative tendencies. Last, but not least, occasionally a regional planning approach can give more coherence to planning decisions made on a lower level. This can foster integrative mechanisms and facilitate their functions.

Is planning able to have a say in a market driven development? Yes. From another perspective, one could even say that urban and regional planning, to be effective, must function within a market driven socio economic context.

Do urban regeneration projects bring about gentrification? Yes they do. But a more interesting question is in what way do they contribute to/negate from integrative and/or disintegrative forces? Segregation, however, which is always an offshoot of gentrification, can, on a higher scale, be positive in terms of integrative tendencies.