

Living the African City

Thematic conference of the AEGIS network

7–9 October 2010, University of Basel, Switzerland

The Centre for African Studies Basel and its partners in the project Living the City organize a thematic conference of AEGIS, the European network of excellence in African Studies.

Theme:

We live in a rapidly urbanizing world. For the first time in human history, more than half of the world's population lives in cities. We only begin to understand the consequences this upcoming urban age will have, and how the urban experience will shape societies around the globe. Until now, research on cities worldwide is still centred on cities in Europe and the United States which are seen as the standard model. However, cities in the global South are undergoing a much more rapid transformation, and many interlinked transitions, and Africa features the highest urbanization rates worldwide. Cities are almost always major destinations of migration, and African cities serve as the main hub for migration towards Europe. A better understanding of these processes is urgently needed in view of the enormous threats such as global climate change and associated natural and man-made disasters. This is because their impact is particularly high in cities due to the density of population and infrastructure and the concentration of financial, economic and technological resources.

Rapid growth at a time of major transitions and transformations presents challenges as well as opportunities. Scholars call for a new approach to urban studies which examines cities from a more global, comparative perspective. This new approach should also pay more attention to the role societal creativity plays in processes of urbanization instead of concentrating exclusively on expert driven planning and intervention. Especially in fast-growing cities with weaker institutional capacity for interventions, the interplay between intervention and invention, between expert and societal agency not only becomes more tangible but also more crucial. Processes of innovation and transformation touch on all spheres of life, and they will become even more significant in the cities of the future around the world. Transformations, interventions and especially innovations converge in cities because cities produce difference – differences between rich and poor, safe and unsafe, healthy and unhealthy and in many other domains. The conference therefore addresses the general question, how cities in Africa, being among the most dynamic and least regulated cities in the world, produce difference?

- What potential can be created at the interface of intervention and invention for the cities of the future?
- What can we learn from the fast-growing and often institutionally weak African cities?
- How can this new understanding inform policies and interventions which work with – and not against – the inventive potential of urban dwellers?

Call for papers:

Proposals for papers shall address these questions in the framework of one of the following eight fields constituting the possible panels of the conference:

- **Environment and Livelihood:** Analyses the impact of physical factors of global change on the urban environment and how they cause difference in cities.
- **Health and Resilience:** Describes how urban populations cope with risks and how this produces difference in public health and resilience of the urban population.
- **Communication and Education:** Analyses how education, in particular ICT, changes governance practices and patterns of social and spatial mobility.
- **Urban and Strategic Projects:** Maps differences in the morphology of the city space and analyses how strategic plans affect the urban context and public spaces.
- **Knowledge, Science and Technology:** Looks at how cities produce knowledge and how this knowledge differs within a city and from one city to the other.
- **Creativity and Mediality:** Analyses the urban experience and how it is linked with particular forms of creativity, in particular in the arts and media.
- **Governance and Politics:** Looks at how governance affects urban life and how such new forms of governance are linked with the political sphere.
- **Migration and Transnationalism:** Describes the connection of cities in a space of flows and analyses the production of difference and inequality.

Submission of proposals:

Proposals for papers shall be of 500 words' length and address the research questions in one of the interdisciplinary fields indicated above.

The deadline for submission of paper proposals is **1 March 2010**, if accepted the full paper is to be submitted by 1 September 2010.

Participants are expected to cover their own travel and accommodation costs. However, funds will be available to support a small number of invited speakers.

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