

## Conference Outline – July 2010:

### **Adapting to Urban Change and Development: The Role of Self-Organisation in Cities**



The objective of the conference is to bring together empirical and theoretically informed studies on processes of urban self-organisation, and how these can be integrated into participatory and communicative forms of urban governance. In contrast to approaches focusing on the negative side of urban change this conference will focus on solutions found and developed within cities.

We start from the position that a city is always simultaneously a place of innovations and problems; but it is above all a milieu where solutions are found. Due to rapid growth administrative supervision of urban development is limited. As a result, housing, public services etc. cannot be provided to all inhabitants. In such situations self-organisation can provide innovative solutions to such tasks and reduce costs while maximizing benefits. This is especially the case for the poor in slums, where self-organisation is crucial for their livelihood and survival strategies. Consequently, organisations, either formal or informal, can play a major role in providing solutions to the major challenges of cities. Many of these are currently established and utilised by citizens, creating a need to identify and learn from such modes of organisation.

In order to understand these forms of organisation and their approaches to urban challenges comparative case studies of European cities and rapidly growing cities in India, China and Brazil will be discussed in the conference. From this empirical base comparative theoretical conclusions will be drawn that can identify innovative approaches to urban challenges from an actor oriented perspective, and a view of the city less as a problem, but rather as place in which creative solutions to the problems of everyday life are developed. It is thus important to identify and understand where and how in cities solutions are being developed and implemented.

Clearly these issues are highly relevant to cities in developing countries but we also believe that they are relevant to European cities. Like it or not, many, if not all, European cities contain 'run down' areas with severe social, economic and physical problems, and these are not likely to disappear in the foreseeable future. Given this, such areas, whether we choose to refer to them as slums or not, pose a major challenge for the sustainable development of cities both in Europe and the global South. While these areas in European cities may differ, quantitatively and qualitatively, from their counterparts in developing countries they still share many basic factors in common: not least how to provide services that meet the needs of their residents. Interestingly in all cities there has been an increasing emphasis on the role of 'self-organisation' and participation in governance and service delivery. However, much of this activity takes place through 'informal' mechanisms that are often outside, and sometimes in conflict with, the formal institutions and organisations of city governance. We thus wish to focus on what lessons can be learnt from different examples of self-organisation and how they can both inform new innovations in service provision/delivery and enhance participation in city governance. Such lessons will be relevant to cities globally regardless of their particular location.

- The conference will be organized at the University of Passau, Germany by Ruediger Korff and Eberhard Rothfuss in mid-July 2010.
- Funding will be applied for at the VW-Foundation to cover travel expenses and accommodation during the conference, as far as possible. If there are opportunities to receive funding from other sources, these should be explored. We will send an invitation if required. The symposium is scheduled for four days. On the last day perspectives for further collaborative research will be discussed.